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ABSTRACT
        This document presents outcomes of the Social
Competency Program: Reach Out to Schools Project, a program designed
to help elementary students learn and practice interpersonal and
problem-solving skills. It is based on the understanding that
positive peer relationships and a supportive, caring classroom
community are essential to students' social and academic development.
Data were collected from questionnaires administered to 35 first-year
and 30 second-year teachers, and 561 students, and from interviews
conducted with 4 principals. Teachers believed that the program would
help them with an increasing array of classroom-management issues.
They reported the following positive changes in student behaviors:
less time spent on conflict resolution; fewer distracting behaviors
and more listening behaviors; greater tolerance for all students;
carryover of curriculum concepts into other academic areas; more
developed discussions and expressions of feelings, ideas, and
multiple perspectives; and increased shared decision making. The
findings point to the central role of positive relationships in
social and cognitive growth, the expansion of shared decision making,
and the encouragement of idea-sharing and listening. (LMI)

Project Report
1991 - 1992

The Social Competency Program
of the
Reach Out to Schools Project

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Pamela J. Seigle
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The Stone Center
for Developmental
Services and Studies

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Social Competency Program: Reach Out to Schools Project

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About the Authors

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Abstract

This report reviews the data collected during the 1991-1992 school year from self-reports by teachers, students, and principals in schools using the Reach Out to Schools program. The program is designed to help elementary school children learn and practice interpersonal and problem solving skills. It is based on the understanding that positive peer relationships and a supportive, caring classroom community are essential to students' social and academic development. The significance of the improved classroom relationships to children's academic and social success is discussed.

Introduction

In September 1991, 35 teachers began their training in the Reach Out to Schools: Social Competency Program curriculum supported by the Stone Center at Wellesley College. These teachers were the newest group in an outreach program begun by the Stone Center in 1987. Between 1987 and 1991, nine towns in the greater Boston area began their participation in the program. To date, the program has trained over 100 teachers and 2400 students. During the 1991-1992 school year, a total of 65 teachers (30 in their second year; 35 in their first year) were directly involved in the training, consultation, and teacher research elements of the program. The Social Competency Program provides a structured format to help elementary school children learn and practice interpersonal and problem solving skills. (See Project Report 1990-1991 for a complete discussion of the program.)

As one of their initial activities, teachers were asked what questions they had concerning the impact of the curriculum on their students and their teaching styles. Several of those questions have helped guide the research on the project this year and have been useful in generating additional questions for future investigation. By encouraging teachers to generate questions of interest to them and combining those questions with others initiated by the program staff, a collaborative research effort was begun. Hopefully as a result, the information reported here is of interest and relevance to both groups.

For the 1990-91 Project Report, 15 of the 18 teachers new to the program were interviewed to determine their perception of the impact of the program on their classrooms and personal teaching style. Several themes emerged from those interviews. Teachers reported improved classroom management; fewer discipline problems and more group problem solving; increased student participation in all classroom discussions; and the smoother inclusion of special education students into regular education classes. Teachers often described the development of a common language or a greater sense of community in their classroom.

During the 1991-92 school year, 65 teachers, 561 students, and 4 principals participated directly in the research and evaluation efforts. This is a significant increase over 1990-91, yet many of the same themes emerged from the 1991-92 interviews, surveys, and case studies.

Program Overview

The Reach Out to Schools: Social Competency Program is an action project of the Stone Center which combines a theoretical basis that emphasizes the central role that relationships play in development; a commitment to year-long instruction within the classroom setting; and an experiential training model which encourages changes in teacher behavior by increasing facilitation skills.

The entire format of this program recognizes the critical role that relationships play in the social development and academic success of children. Peer interactions and classroom discourse between children act as "scaffolding" to bring them to new levels of thinking and perspective taking. Thus, the entire social environment of a classroom critically influences children's growth as it may encourage or discourage

the risk-taking necessary for learning. It is not sufficient to teach individual children particular social skills; to create growth-enhancing relationships, the entire classroom ecology must shift to a supportive, collaborative environment. As children learn the social competencies to make and maintain new and diverse relationships with classmates, they create new avenues for their own and others' growth.

The Reach Out to Schools curriculum contains 50 lessons in three competency areas:
- creating a cooperative classroom environment
- building self esteem and positive relationships
- solving interpersonal problems

The curriculum is taught in an open circle format which emphasizes inclusiveness; there is always an extra chair. It is presented two times a week during the entire school year. And, unlike other programs which target only certain grades, the entire set of skills is introduced in every grade. This facilitates reinforcement of skills and eliminates the often remedial aspect of some interventions.

Teachers in the program are supported by experiential based training in which they learn and practice the skills of the curriculum. The program is designed so that the teachers first learn the competencies themselves, then teach them to the children, and model these skills in all classroom activities. The Reach Out to Schools program gives special attention to teachers and to their training and personal development. Teachers are not asked to teach a series of lessons; rather, they are supported as they make a fundamental shift in role from "teller/expert" to "facilitator" of a learning environment. Initial feedback from the teachers has confirmed that they too are learning new social competencies and applying them to their personal as well as classroom lives. In the second year of the program, experienced teachers coach teachers in their school who are new to the program, and some participate in a teacher research project to document the impact of the curriculum on their classrooms and personal teaching style. These activities address the concern frequently mentioned in the research literature on the limited nature of carryover in social competency interventions. The Reach Out to Schools program helps teachers change behaviors and then makes them coaches to help others do the same.

Methodology for Data Collection
Sample
Thirty-five (35) first-year and 30 second-year teachers, 561 students, and 4 principals participated in this year's data collection efforts.

The 35 teachers who began the program in the 1991-1992 school year averaged 16 years of teaching. There were 2 males and 33 females in the group. Thirty (30) are Caucasion; 5 are African-American. Twenty-two (22) teach grades K-3, 7 teach 4th-6th grades, and 6 have other school assignments (guidance, resource room specialists, etc.).

Of the 35 new teachers using the curriculum for the first time in 1991-1992, 31 classrooms were in suburban school systems in the greater Boston area (Medway, Millis, Dover, and Wayland). Four classrooms were in Boston Public Schools. The 30 classrooms using the curriculum for the second year were in suburban schools (Medfield and Needham). The students in the program come from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds.

Two male and two female principals were interviewed, one from an urban and three from suburban schools. They averaged 18 years in the position; one had been principal for 6 years, one for 15 years, and two for more than 25 years. All were Caucasian.

Procedure
During the 1991-1992 year, several different strategies for the collection of data were used. However, all employed qualitative techniques to gain an "insider's perspective" on the program. Teachers, students, and principals were asked to contribute to the evaluation effort.

Teachers
In September, teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire which, in addition to providing basic demographic data, also asked them to briefly discuss their current practices in the areas of classroom management, problem solving, and conflict resolution. Throughout the year teachers were asked at their monthly meetings to describe how the curriculum was evolving in their classrooms. These writings took several forms. Teachers wrote in a journal about each of the first 18 lessons in the curriculum. This provided helpful information concerning adaptations needed for primary grade students and sequencing of the lessons

in the curriculum. Eighteen teachers (those in towns just beginning the program) identified one student in their class about whom they had some concern. They wrote about this same student all year. Thus, we have 18 short case studies which provide a window on how individual students responded to the curriculum. The teachers in towns where the program was already in place wrote about their classes as a whole or described critical incidents that seemed to reflect the impact of the curriculum in their classrooms both on students and on their individual teaching styles. At the conclusion of this year's program, teachers completed a second questionnaire which addressed the time required for the program, changes in classroom behavior that they had observed, and any concerns or suggestions they had about program implementation.

At the conclusion of each training session, the participants were given an opportunity to evaluate that day's training. A final training evaluation was offered in May. Each of the teachers receiving direct classroom consultation (teachers in towns just beginning the program) completed a questionnaire in May. And those teachers who participated in the peer coaching (beginning teachers in towns where the program was already in place) were asked to evaluate the peer coaching strategy.

Students
In January, 279 students who had been in the program since September were asked to evaluate changes in their behavior since the previous school year that they perceived were the result of the activities and discussions in the first 18 lessons of the curriculum. Table 1 summarizes their responses. A smaller sample of 66 students questioned in March indicated very similar responses. These are reported in Table 2. In May, a total of 338 students in grades 1-3 and 123 students in grades 4-6 were asked to complete a questionnaire evaluating the program as they experienced it in their classrooms. They were asked to give the program an overall rating and to indicate their level of participation, the extent to which they found the instruction useful to them and saw others using the skills, and if they perceived a connection between the skills learned in the curriculum and success in other, more traditionally academic areas. The teachers led the evaluation discussion and recorded the student responses in grade 1-3, which the students completed a written questionnaire in grades 4-6. Both surveys provided an opportunity for

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students' comments and suggestions.

Principals

In May of 1992, the 4 principals were interviewed by the program evaluator to gain their perspective on the impact of the program in individual classrooms throughout their school. The transcripts of the interviews were reviewed for common themes.

Teachers' Perspective

Why Teachers Choose to Participate

Teachers gave six reasons for their participation in the Reach Out to Schools: Social Competency Program:

- an increasing apprehension concerning the level and complexity of the problems children bring to the classroom.
- a belief in the long-term value to children of learning social competency skills.
- a desire to find a structured way to deal with issues of classroom management and behavior.
- cutbacks in school-based support personnel such as guidance counselors and a concern that classroom teachers will be asked to provide more in the area of social and emotional support for children.
- a need to find successful strategies to integrate students, particularly special education and bilingual students, into regular education classrooms.
- the positive responses of their colleagues to the program.

Regarding previous training and current strategies for managing behavior in their classes, 40% of the teachers previously had some coursework in cooperative learning, and 31% had coursework in problem solving. Only 20% of the teachers had training in the areas of social skills or social competency. The majority of their training had taken place during in-service courses.

Prior to participation in the program, teachers were given hypothetical classroom situations and asked how they would address the issues raised. Based on the responses given, it is clear that while teachers certainly do not ignore social issues in their classrooms, they often choose solution strategies that are highly teacher-centered and teacher-directed.

When asked about the significance of certain activities related to establishing classroom norms, 81%

said it is extremely important to develop a sense of community with a classroom; 62% indicated it is extremely important to teach problem solving to students. Thus teachers indicated a high value on both community building and problem solving activities but had the least training in these fields.

Changes in Student Behaviors Reported by Teachers

In a questionnaire completed by 29 teachers in May of 1992, 12 teachers said they spent 30 minutes per week using the curriculum; 13 spent one hour per week; and only 4 spent more than one hour of classtime per week using the curriculum.

Thirteen (13) teachers described their classrooms as "caring communities." Another 13 reported that students use the "common language" of the curriculum to solve problems they faced. Nineteen (19) teachers reported positive changes in the relationships between special education students and regular education students in the classes. As evidence, they said students are more aware of each other, work together in groups more easily, are more accepting of each other, and that special education students participate in the open circle activities more often than they do in other classroom tasks. Four teachers indicated that they thought the open circle activities helped to focus students' attention, improve their listening skills, and reduce hyperactive behaviors.

Teachers also reported changes in their own behaviors. Twelve (12) teachers reported they were adopting facilitator skills and mentioned specifically being calmer, speaking less, listening better, and working to "accentuate and reward positive behaviors." Although the time applied to social competency instruction in their classes is quite limited, 12 teachers indicated time as a "concern." Perhaps this reflects the increased pressure that all teachers seem to feel as academic and social demands on their teaching increase.

Teachers wrote their reflections on the curriculum as it developed in their classrooms, and these reflections were collected at the monthly training/ support meetings. Several themes emerged from these writings. They are briefly highlighted below.

- A new language for the classroom:

    "A constant positive of this whole process is the feeling of inclusion of all the children. They feel as

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though, because of our specific code words from the curriculum (listening look, cheerleading, Double D), they are all part of the group. They all have the same basis to work from and own the language they use. This really gives a feeling of belonging, power, and control to each individual. It's sort of like a secret code, except that everyone knows it."

"Children on the whole are more conscious of each other's feelings. They verbalize how actions could make a child feel and offer frequent suggestions for changing and improving situations."

• Students support each other and work together better:

"In academic situations children have done a lot of complimenting of each other and people raising. For example, there is a child in a particular reading group who never finishes his work. One day last week he did finish, and all the kids gave him a round of applause. This was totally spontaneous."

• Shared classroom management:

"Social Competency has enabled me to help the children become more independent and responsible for their own behavior and their behavior toward others. These have been goals of mine for a long time, but now the children themselves have become 'teaching partners' with me."

"I have felt a very calming effect on my classroom. The children look forward to circle, and they try to solve problems themselves. There is a lot less tattling. Children seem to get along better with each other."

"Perhaps the best benefit is that the children learn to manage the classroom somewhat indepedently; they make decisions at circle time that involve classroom management."

"The program has helped me to solve things that come up each day in my classroom. Before, I would not be as consistent on how I solved discipline problems and social problems. Now I can use the ideas that the children have; it really does work much better than anything I could ever come up with."

• Benefits of learning problem solving at an early age:

"I think the program is unique in that it offers problem solving strategies at an early age. I've had parents come into conferences and see problem

solving steps up on the chart, and they've said, 'Oh, I've been doing that in business.' These are business executives who have been through problem solving and strategy courses, and they have said it's wonderful that the children are learning it at such a young age."

• Greater inclusion of special education students:

"I have a very unique classroom in that there is one child who has very special needs, and in the past she's been very aggressive. The children have traveled with this child for the past four years of their education. My children, at the beginning of circle, had a bit of a problem including this particular little girl. As our time went on in circle, they have verbalized that this particular child has settled down. She is much more pleasant to be around; she is a willing group participant. And this came totally from the children. It was nothing that I offered them. I truly think it's the result of circle."

• Changes in teachers' classroom style:

"I have found that many of the strategies in the Reach Out to Schools program have become important methods in my everyday teaching. I find I personally have a greater degree of confidence when dealing with large groups of children and with issues that can be very sensitive."

"Problems solving steps have helped me in my own family situation. I have taught my three children these techniques."

"I think the most dramatic change in myself this year has been my ability to keep calm and systematically work things out. What amazes me is that these techniques are not just helpful in school — it works at home also. It is not something I consciously have to think about anymore. It has become part of myself."

Case Studies

Eighteen (18) teachers who were using the Reach Out to Schools: Social Competency Program curriculum for the first time identified one student in each of their classes to follow throughout the year. Teachers were asked to chose a student about whom they had some initial worry or concern. Twelve (12) males and 6 females were chosen. Six (6) special education students were chosen (1 female, 5 males). Several students had distracting behaviors which

made it difficult for them to focus on their work or for others to work with them. Three boys who were chosen were described as bright but overly aggressive or nonproductive. Seven others were chosen because teachers felt these students were not accepted by their peers because of poor social skills. Another one of the students chosen had limited English-speaking ability, and one was new to the school. At their meetings in October, November, January, and May, the teachers were asked to write about the behavior of the student they had selected. These brief case studies provide several interesting observations concerning the impact of the curriculum on individual students.

The students who were chosen exhibited behaviors that were disturbing and disruptive to others. In their initial descriptions of the children, teachers mentioned pushing, biting, hitting, shoving, and knocking papers off others' desks as behaviors that were causing concern. They also described some of the children as wanderers, nonfocused, easily distracted, and frequently moving purposelessly about the room. Finally they mentioned the inability to work cooperatively with others either in play or work situations. These were students that other students complained about constantly. Often they were also the children that others teased and picked on.

Between September and May, some students changed dramatically:

In September: "I have a boy in my classroom, one of many I recognize as a bright boy but nonproductive. He was annoying others — he got out of his seat often to go to another's desk to cause problems. He was often singled out in the lunchroom and missed art, music, and gym, which he loves, because of his behavior."

In May: "Tom continues to be successful in his dealings with his feelings and relationships with others. His attitude has improved; I see less and less of the times when his anger gets the best of him. He is more apt to go off by himself and settle his problems rather than strike out with punches or words. He has openly discussed his attitude and written about it. He has told me how much more pleasant life is. 'School is better' since he has been able to calm down. He says, 'When I wake up in a snit (his word), I don't have to spend the whole day in it.' Tom has missed only one recess because of his temper since January. He is able to sit with classmates and be sent on errands. The kids choose

him more readily to be part of their groups."

Other students made less dramatic changes but progressed, nonetheless.

In May: "Danny, who was very inattentive because of his inability to focus and sit quietly, has made quite a bit of progress. He is now able to focus, listen for 20-25 minutes in the open circle, and share his ideas. Other students have complimented him about his changes and have commented to me about it. I think he feels more a part of the group."

This description points out a critical theme that emerges from the case studies and is reinforced in the other writings by the teachers. Individual students do learn and practice new behaviors that help them build more positive interpersonal relationships in the classroom. But equally important, the entire group learns how to more positively interact and support the changed behaviors of individuals. Thus the group changes its patterns of interaction with students who, in the past, had great difficultly being in a group. The combination is apparently an important source of the program's success. For example:

"Paul is still having a very difficult time controlling his anger and his feelings. It takes very little to set him off, and finally his parents have consented to allow Paul to be serviced by guidance. He knows what his body signals are and can very easily verbalize how he feels, but we still are trying to work on how he can control his anger without exploding. He can't 'calm down,' and this is being worked on outside of the classroom. He is a challenge because his outbursts affect the entire class. Now the other students will say, 'Paul, calm down!' They can read his 'flags' and stay away from him, giving him some space. I believe they are more tolerant of him and understand better the difficult time he has controlling his feelings."

There appears to be a pattern within the behavioral changes that occur: first, students begin to calm down and focus; then they begin to relate more positively to other students. For example:

"At the beginning of the year, this child talked out, refused to do his work, threw his papers on the floor, and never listened when a teacher-directed lesson was given. Since we began the open circle, his behavior has improved. Out of the seven lessons, he has been asked to leave only once. I have noticed that because he is in a small confined area, he now

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models the behavior of the group. He doesn't want to leave the circle, and he was upset when he was put out. When I say, 'listening look,' and everyone responds, he will also stop what he is doing and will sit up."

Teachers often mentioned the difficulty the children had returning after weekends and especially after long vacations:

"When we returned from a two-week break at Christmas, it was like starting all over again with this child. The good listening behaviors and the controlling of outbursts had vanished. He is just now (late Janaury) starting to use the skills that were taught. I have found the breathing and calming down technique very helpful with him. He is more rational and is ready to discuss the issue once he has had an opportunity to relax and to get a hold on himself. This is the last lesson I have done, and I am looking forward to using the other self-control and problem solving lessons with him."

There are, of course, some family situations that are simply too overwhelming for children, despite the classroom-based work of the project:

"I would like to report major breakthrough steps in Isaac's behavior. However, at this time, he continues to be a difficult student who can't participate academically or socially in the classroom. He is very individually motivated and needs to be first always. Issac is in a foster family with six other foster children; obviously 'me first' is important to get what you want. Isaac's birth mother, absent for seven years, has re-entered his life (drug detox) and is initiating taking him away from his foster family (where he has been for seven years) and back with her."

"I'm perplexed by Jeff. I thought by now he'd be better able to control his own behaviors, but it hasn't happened. Jeff has been in therapy for two years prior to entering my room but was pulled out of therapy last June. He was supposed to be in family therapy, but the father refused to go. Jeff's dad is completely opposed to the process. Jeff has a negative opinion about the open circle."

For the majority of students who were observed this year, whether special education or regular education students, teachers saw specific behavioral changes which fostered greatly improved personal and work relationships within the classroom. In cases like the ones mentioned above, the classroom environment encouraged by the Reach Out To Schools: Social Competency curriculum serves as a reinforcement to the additional, more individual services that children often are receiving.

Students' Evaluations of the Curriculum

Students were asked to add their perspective to the research and ongoing curriculum improvement process. In January, 279 students who had been in the program since September were asked to evaluate changes in their behavior since the previous school year that they perceived were the result of the activities and discussions in the first 18 lessons of the curriculum. Table 1 (see next page) summarizes their responses.

A smaller sample of 66 students questioned in March indicated very similar responses. Their responses are reported in Table 2 (see next page).

In general, these numbers reflect the establishment of positive classroom norms. The structured lessons help students learn how to listen, compliment, and encourage others; students report doing so. The numbers show a striking reduction in tattling, a problem that is frequently mentioned by teachers as absorbing an inordinate amount of class time. The tattling response is also interesting because it requires a nonpatterned response by the children. Even given the limits of self-reporting, the numbers indicate that students are learning a new vocabulary and that many believe they are practicing the skills taught. The March numbers reflect a similar pattern. There is an increase in perceived ability to recognize and understand another's feelings, to listen to others, and to practice self-talk. While understanding another is a difficult item to substantiate beyond self-reporting, the behaviors of listening and self-talk are visible to the teacher and students.

In May, a total of 338 students in grades 1-3 and 123 students in grades 4-6 were asked to complete a questionnaire evaluating the program as they experienced it in their classrooms. The teachers led the evaluation discussion and recorded the student responses in grade 1-3, while the students completed a written questionnaire in grades 4-6. Both surveys provided an opportunity for students' comments and suggestions.

Tables 3 to 8 on pages 9 and 10 summarize the evaluations made by students in grades 1-6. For each question, students were given a choice of five

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responses that ranged from a strong negative to a strong positive. The data is reported in three different forms: first the percentage of students who answered in the three most positive categories; then the percentage of students who answered in the two most positive categories; and finally the percentage of males and females answering in the two most positive categories.

In these reports from the primary grades, the children gave the program very high ratings and indicated they participated in circle very often. What is interesting is that while girls give the program higher ratings than boys, the boys claim to participate more than the girls do. Also girls indicate that the program is helpful to them and to others while boys indicate the program is especially good for other students. These trends appear again in the data from grades 4-6 as indicated in Tables 6, 7, and 8 on page 10.

Table 1. Student Self-Evaluation #1

Lessons 1-18 (January 1992, 279 students)

| Skill | Students using the skill | | | % using |
	less	same	more	more
Giving compliments	23	93	164	59%
Encouraging others	11	107	150	54%
Cheerleading	15	105	183	66%
Including others	6	97	174	62%
Cooperating	22	112	151	54%
Tattling	(73%) 204	62	11	3%
Dealing w/situation myself	22	118	140	50%
Showing respect for others	8	106	150	53%
Showing leadership	27	121	124	51%

Table 2. Student Self-Evalulation #2

Lessons 19-35 (March 1992, 66 students)

| Skill | Students using the skill | | | % using |
	less	same	more	more
Identify own feelings	1	26	38	58%
Identify teacher's feelings	0	15	50	76%
Identify parents' feelings	2	16	47	71%
Identify best friends' feelings	2	19	44	67%
Use calm down	4	23	38	58%
Asking a student how he/she feels	10	24	31	47%
Listen to others	1	14	50	76%
Express own feelings	7	14	44	67%
See others' point of view	3	22	40	61%
Practice self-talk	2	16	47	71%

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Table 3. Grade 1 - Student Evaluations
(87 students)

	Overall rating	Participation	Helpful to you	Helpful to others	Helpful with schoolwork
Total class (3 most positive responses)	89%	83%	91%	92%	50% yes, 50% no
Total class (2 most positive responses)	68%	55%	62%	74%	
Males (2 most positive responses)	57%	57%	49%	77%	
Females (2 most positive responses)	80%	70%	62%	¬4%	

Table 4. Grade 2 - Student Evaluations
(160 students)

	Overall rating	Participation	Helpful to you	Helpful to others	Helpful with schoolwork
Total class (3 most positive responses)	83%	72%	98%	64%	68% yes, 32% no
Total class (2 most positive responses)	47%	39%	45%	41%	
Males (2 most positive responses)	51%	41%	37%	30%	
Females (2 most positive responses)	51%	29%	45%	36%	

Table 5. Grade 3 - Student Evaluations
(87 students)

	Overall rating	Participation	Helpful to you	Helpful to others	Helpful with schoolwork
Total class (3 most positive responses)	83%	78%	79%	77%	52% yes, 40% no
Total class (2 most positive responses)	54%	48%	57%	62%	
Males (2 most positive responses)	42%	53%	51%	61%	
Females (2 most positive responses)	65%	42%	64%	62%	

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Table 6. Grade 4 - Student Evaluations

(46 students)

	Overall rating	Participation	Helpful to you	Helpful to others	Helpful with schoolwork
Total class (3 most positive responses)	95%	61%	87%	83%	43% yes, 47% no
Total class (2 most positive responses)	35%	28%	35%	39%	
Males (2 most positive responses)	32%	36%	32%	45%	
Females (2 most positive responses)	38%	45%	38%	33%	

Table 7. Grade 5 - Student Evaluations

(44 students)

	Overall rating	Participation	Helpful to you	Helpful to others	Helpful with schoolwork
Total class (3 most positive responses)	86%	98%	66%	61%	48% yes, 52% no
Total class (2 most positive responses)	43%	52%	32%	18%	
Males (2 most positive responses)	40%	60%	40%	52%	
Females (2 most positive responses)	50%	42%	21%	26%	

Table 8. Grade 6 - Student Evaluations

(33 students)

	Overall rating	Participation	Helpful to you	Helpful to others	Helpful with schoolwork
Total class (3 most positive responses)	67%	78%	58%	55%	37% yes, 63% no
Total class (2 most positive responses)	18%	33%	6%	9%	
Males (2 most positive responses)	0%	17%	8%	17%	
Females (2 most positive responses)	29%	38%	5%	5%	

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The student comments from grades 4-6 were categorized by gender and by age group. When the responses are categorized by gender, it appears that the males make comments about how useful the circle is for learning to "cool off," "keep calm," and avoid fights:

"Some of my classmates are mean and get into fights at other schools; the kids (in this class) aren't as ruff."(sic)

"It helps me calm down."

"It can cool off other students' tempers."

"I think at recess it plays a part in the fact that there haven't been as many fights between people."

A second theme in the males' response was simply feeling better after talking:

"I could talk about stuff I couldn't talk about at home."

"It can make me feel better."

"It helps me with my work so I can concentrate on other things than things that I worry about."

"I'm not as mean as I was."

The girls also mention calming down, but more often they commented about the greater ability to listen, to be heard by others, and to participate in problem solving generally. For example:

"The kids in this class understand each others' problems; in other classes I sometimes see kids laughing at some people."

"It helps people who feel left out join in."

"I don't think that is true for me, but I do think some of my classmates have their hand up more because of open circle discussions."

When the respones are categorized by age group, it appears that the 4th graders, like the students in grades 1-3, find the open circle an important learning experience, while the 5th and 6th graders would prefer more opportunity to discuss problems they are encountering rather than follow the activities suggested in the current curriculum:

"I think you might want to talk about more serious problems and things like that."

"Make more situations to solve; talk about real life more."

"I feel that discussing these topics is sometimes uncomfortable but helpful."

"Talk about things that might really happen."

"Sometimes I wish we would discuss more stuff."

This point was reinforced by the principals who would like to see the instruction be explicit in K-3 classrooms and more embedded in the curriculum in the upper grades. In these upper grades, the open circle might be less structured and more available for students to raise issues of concern to them and, in the course of their discussions, practice the skills learned in the earlier grades. If this change were to occur, it might require somewhat differentiated training for the 5th- and 6th-grade teachers.

Finally, in response to the question of whether the open circle activities have any effect on success in other, more academic subjects, some 5th graders commented that the activities did have a positive impact, but most agreed that the greatest apparent benefit was in relationships. Comments from some of the students were positive about carry-over into academic areas:

"It's helped in social studies. I really think hard."

"My work habits have improved 100% since open circle."

"I'm not such a take-charge person in a group anymore."

"Sometimes they (the activities) help me have a more open mind in social studies and language arts."

"Before I take tests I use the calming down activity."

"The listening skills help me listen better in class."

"I know how to act better and be more disciplined."

"It helps me answer questions more positively."

The majority of students felt that open circle was not primarily about academics but had more to do with getting to know and work with others. More typical comments were:

"Mostly it relates to recess and playing with your friends."

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"We have not done much about school work."

Although the students did not make the direct connection between the social competency curriculum and academic achievement, positive peer relationships and a strong sense of the classroom as a supportive community are often described as a critical condition for enhanced cognitive development. So when a student says, "I have found that open circle makes my peers more fun to be around," or "I really think hard," these comments certainly raise the possiblity of such a connection. Further research to clarify these linkages is needed.

Teachers' Evaluations of the Curriculum, Training, Consultation, and Peer Coaching

Curriculum

After every lesson, teachers were asked to complete a journal entry indicating how useful the lesson seemed and the students' reaction to it. These journal entries were complied in late December; the summary of this feedback is given in Table 9 below.

In the written comments provided by teachers, there was general agreement that the format of the curriculum made it easy to use and relatively simple to incorporate into the school schedule. Teachers did indicate some organizational changes they would like, such as primary and intermediate lessons distinquished more clearly, problem solving introduced earlier, more visual aids, and some additional simplification of the terminology. Many second-year teachers said they felt comfortable adapting some lessons and combining others.

Several teachers reported that they heard stories from the children and some parents about how the students were using the skills learned in class in other areas of their lives. Another form of carry-over mentioned by teachers took place within the classrooms as students began to analyze the stories they were reading in language arts using terms and ideas from the curriculum. Although this varied among grades and teachers, problem solving in science, self-talk before math tests, and greater discussion of characters and their feelings in literature were mentioned as examples of carry-over into academic areas.

One teacher described what she saw as the connection between the activities in open circle and language development. Her understanding was that the frequent discussions in open circle provided a vehicle for students to develop their vocabulary and communication skills. She also saw carry-over in their written work, as their writing often described and expanded on these discussions and problem solving efforts. The positive impact on writing skills that results from encouraging students to talk about their feelings and their own experiences is well supported in the work on whole language instruction. It may be that the open circle activities further reinforce that development.

Table 9. Teacher Evaluations

(Lessons 1-18)

Grade	Teachers' assessment of lessons as enjoyed teaching or helpful to the class	% of all responses	Teachers' assessment of students' response as good participation or enjoyed lesson	% of all responses
First-year teachers:				
K-3	270 / 300 *	89.9%	295 / 331	89.0%
4-5	45 / 52	86.5%	45 / 52	86.5%
Second-year teachers:				
K-3	132 / 152	86.0%	148 / 159	93.0%
4-5	77 / 84	93.0%	78 / 84	93.0%

* = 270 of 300 responses

Training

Teacher satisfaction with the way the training workshops were conducted was uniformly high. On a scale of 10, 87% of the teachers rate workshops at either 9 or 10, and 90% of the teachers rate the usefulness of the material covered as either 9 or 10.

When asked what they liked most about the training, teachers emphasized the feeling of support for their professional growth, the interaction and exchange with other teachers, and the nonthreatening, low-keyed atmosphere of the program. They found the training days well paced with varied activities and frequent active participation. They appreciated the materials which they could bring back to school with them. One teacher remarked, "I liked the fact that we had all-day training sessions and were treated with respect and professionally. I liked the activities because they made you feel the way the children would with similar aspects of the program. They made us learn more about ourselves."

In response to a question about what might be added to the training, teachers made several suggestions, including more time to visit other classrooms, additional video tapes of open circles to review prior to teaching the lessons, and more parental and principal awareness of the importance and actual operation of the open circle program.

Teachers were asked to reflect on the impact of the training on their teaching styles. Their responses are quite dramatic, indicating both professional and personal changes. In the professional area they commented:

"It has made me much more aware of importance of complimenting, cheering for or uplifting kids rather than negative discipline. I am more aware of the importance of listening. Kids seem more able to talk and discuss things with me. The classroom atmosphere has improved."

"The program has changed my teaching style and the way I handle conflicts within the school day. The structure of the program served as a wonderful framework for these changes."

"The training has made me realize the impact that modeling and discussing social issues can have on students...that they can relate to and understand what is problematic and can internalize and change how they relate to others."

"I really do look at students in a different light."

"I have become more tolerant of my students' ways. I have learned to listen to them and accept their views on some things. I spend less time on discipline and more classwork is being accomplished."

And in the area of personal growth, teachers commented:

"The training has made me look deeper into myself and reflect on my strengths, reaffirm my knowledge, and recognize what I need to work on as a person and an educator."

"I feel I have become much more in tune to social situations both in and out of the classroom. These are necessary skills that many adults are lacking. It's wonderful to have a tangible language to use with the children."

"It has made me much more aware of group situations and group dynamics and more comfortable in dealing with working with groups. I honestly feel that I could handle any group situation now, and that my class works much better in group work than it did in September."

"I am able to see things in a different perspective."

"This training has made me realize that what we experience as children stays with us as adults."

"I liked everything. I just wish I had some training like this when I started out teaching many years ago."

The training was designed according to the principles of experiential learning and specifically avoided the more traditional "expert visitor" model characteristic of many staff development efforts. This training format offers teachers a forum for discussion and learning which values their previous experiences and provides time for self-reflection, a critical component in behavioral change. Personal as well as professional change is reflected in these teacher comments. The opportunity to learn and reflect was used well, even within the short span of a four-day training program and two 15-minute circles each week. The comments are extraordinarily self-reflective, even critical, but not discouraged. Clearly this training process encourages and supports both professional and personal growth.

Consulting

Eighteen (18) first-year teachers received direct

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consultation in their classrooms throughout the year. Others, new to the program, were coached by experienced teachers in their schools (see "Peer Coaching" below). Teachers met with consultants in their schools an average of six times during the year. Three teachers mentioned meeting 10 times. During a visit, the consultant either modeled an open circle lesson or observed a teacher teaching a lesson. After the lesson, time was set aside for discussion. Often the consultants both modeled and observed .

Teachers were extremely positive about the role the consultants played in supporting them and the program generally. Of the 17 teachers surveyed, 16 teachers said they tried the various strategies suggested by the consultants; 14 said they worked well. The suggestions tended to reinforced the goals of the program: increased use of facilitation skills, avoidance of judgemental words, greater student input into discussion, enhanced listening skills, and the involvement of all students.

These suggestions and the consulting process generally provide reassurance and support for teachers' efforts to change behaviors within the classroom. They felt the suggestons were constructive and the opportunity to observe the consultant teach a class was critical. Several teachers mentioned the value of an opportunity to discuss lessons in a nonthreatening, nonevaluative way. The immediacy of the feedback and the knowledge that they could request additional consulting time if they wished were both mentioned as positives.

The consultants play an extremely valuable role as a link between the training and the actual implementation of the curriculum in the classroom. Teachers were quite candid; the frequent visits kept them on track using the curriculum. But the consultants did much more than monitor the program. Both of the consultants have expertise in the field of social competency instruction. Their work with the teachers mirrors the teachers' work with the students: listening, encouraging, and problem solving. As the consultants worked with the teachers, the teachers could see the benefits of the skills they were developing for use with children. The lesson of the curriculum — the importance of support and encouragement for change and growth to occur — was reinfoced.

Peer Coaching

Peer observation and coaching was a second strategy adopted to provide support for teachers using the Reach Out to Schools curriculum. In towns where a second group of teachers was beginning the program, teachers who had used the program first in 1990-1991 acted as coaches for the new teachers. They were available for help on an informal basis, met once each month after school with the training consultant from the Stone Center, and observed each other's classes at least twice during the year. The feedback from the coaching experience was mixed. Clearly, asking teachers to squeeze yet another activity into a crowded school day was somewhat burdensome. Yet for those teachers who did manage to observe and discuss with others, seeing another classroom of children working in the social competency curriculum was a positive experience. In those schools where the principal provided some support for teachers, the coaching and peer observation experience was much more successful. Typical comments were:

"Peer observation is a fascinating way to get a chance to watch a colleague in action and to see students using social skills at various age groups. It's very helpful to watch someone else work with children and notice what strategies are similar and what ones are dissimilar to mine. The students enjoy having other teachers come in; it makes them feel they are liked and motivates them to put extra effort in the circle."

"I thought the second peer observation was very interesting as I observed a higher grade than my own. One of the most interesting things I noticed was, while I was observing the group, one of my former students (a behavioral disordered student) was engaged in the discussion. She had settled down so that I was unaware that she was in the group. I guess she learned something very positive from participating in this open circle, as she was now one of the kids. It was encouraging to see this growth."

"Peer observation was great. This second time I again saw a circle lesson I was about to do. Children were one year ahead of my class, so I felt encouraged and reassured that I was on the right track. I was able to see changes in children I had worked with for a year and see them interacting with new peers."

"It gave me the confidence I needed. The way the

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circle was run in grade 5 fascinated me. But it also made me realize that my kids were making excellent progress but on a different level. It also helped to chat and exchange ideas with the fifth-grade teacher. This program has really helped me teach social skills in an organized fashion, and it really works."

Principals' Commentary on the Program

In May of 1992, four principals (two males, two females) from schools using the Social Competency Program were interviewed to gain an administrative perspective on the impact of the curriculum. One urban and three suburban schools were chosen. The principals all agreed that the program changed the behaviors of students and teachers and, in addition, influenced behaviors throughout the schools.

One principal reported how helpful the open circle format was for crisis management. One mentioned an increase in time available for academics. Another connected the goals of the program to his agenda for building a feeling of community within the school. All the principals wanted more parental involvement.

"It's really helped us in some very serious difficulties that we have had. That's when I have been involved with the curriculum; when I've had to go into the classroom and explain what has happened and why. Then I spend time and answer their questions. It's been a wonderful format for the children. I talk with the teacher first and then we do the circle together."

"Teachers tell me they have fewer complaints from kids that used to take a lot of their time. In some cases teachers have more time on task because the circles keep the interruptions to a minimum. Certainly I see fewer childen for discipline problems from the classes using the curriculum."

"The Social Competency Program is so important to everything we are trying to do, especially as I'm trying to build a concept, an attitude, an atmosphere of community in the school. I felt there was a real link between it and what I was trying to do as an administrator."

"I haven't given a workshop for parents because parents whose kids are not in the program will want it. But when I meet with children and parents around discipline issues, I have used the examples from the curriculum to suggest how they could deal with issues. Parents always want to hear more."

Principal's felt the proactive nature of the program was important. Using the curriculum, teachers could really do something about the emotional and behavior problems students bring with them to school:

"We have tried to get everyone, not just the teachers who were trained, to understand the notion of social competency and that it can be taught. So many people assume that all behavior that deals with social issues is just assimilated — all people get it or they don't. But I really believe that a lot of behaviors are learned through modeling. There are alot of behaviors which we don't want modeled, that we don't want children to possess. But those behaviors are learned if we don't teach alternative, appropriate behaviors."

One principal saw the Social Competency Program and training as an excellent model of staff development, particularly for experienced teachers:

"I'm not sure that a regeneration of senior staff can happen internally. I think teachers need to go somewhere else, hear stories, and discuss issues with other teachers. That's how staff development works best."

"As much as I value it for kids, it really changes the thinking of adults."

"I think it really forces an adult to think about what they are saying and how they are saying it. Much of what we do involves process. Sometimes we react and then we regret it. I really feel that this kind of program forces you to focus on what you say and how you say it. You start to hear an inner voice; you pay attention to the audience much more. It forces a certain kind of deliberacy in thinking, reasoning, and speaking. And that's good teaching behavior for all of us."

Several suggestions were made for adaptations in the curriculum for upper-elementary-aged children (10-12 years old). There is some concern about the use of the curriculum in the upper grades in its current form. Principals seem to feel that the skills should be taught explicitly in the earlier years and embedded in the curriculum in the later years. This would allow open circle in the upper grades to be more flexible and responsive to the developmental issues of that age group.

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"I would like to see the early grades teach the skills and the older grades incorporate the skills into the curriculum and really adapt the curriculum process. Teachers who have been trained in these skills could begin to embed the skills into everything they do."

"I am concerned that at the fourth- and fifth-grade levels, girls particularly are not bringing up in circle the issues they are dealing with: friends, shifting friendships, etc. They know they are not supposed to bring up names in circle, but they say the planned activities get in the way of their bringing up the issues they need to talk about."

All the principals reported an enthusiastic response among teachers, wanted to have more teachers trained, and if possible have materials and workshops for parents included in the program.

"I sent a note around asking which teachers wanted to participate in the training next year. Every teacher except one signed up. That one is retiring."

"So we have shared the ideas of the program with parents, other staff, and now we have a large number of people begging me to find a way for them to be involved next year."

Summary and Reflections

This year's research has provided a wealth of information about the Reach Out to Schools: Social Competency Program from an insider's perspective. Questionnaires directed to teachers and students, writings from teachers, and interviews with principals have provided an opportunity to hear the voices of the participants. Almost everyone we talked to said the program "really works." But the questions remain: why does it work and how does it work? What do we already know that can help us understand the apparent success of this intervention?

Teachers who participated in the program believed it would help them with an increasing array of classroom management issues. They described their current students as less socially ready for school and more emotional needy than students in past years. Also, faced with increasing cutbacks in areas of support services, the teachers anticipated a greater role for the classroom teacher in resolving social and behavioral issues. Thus, program participants had a clearly identified need which they believed the program would address.

In terms of program implementation, the training component is unique. It is well conceptualized, well developed, and well executed. The design adherred to the model of the experiential learning cycle. As a result, it provided a supportive and professional environment for self-reflection and changed behavior for teachers as they redefined their role in the classroom.

Teachers reported extremely positive changes in student behaviors in their classrooms as a result of the open circle activities: less time spent on conflict and more time on academics; fewer distracting behaviors by students and an increase in listening behaviors; greater tolerance and encouragement by all students for students of varying abilities; carry-over of the terms and concepts introduced in the curriculum into other academic areas; more developed discussions and expressions of feelings, ideas, and multiple perspectives; and shared decision making within the classroom.

These behavioral changes cluster around three important concepts related to learning. Taken together, these concepts may help us to understand the sources of the program's success. The first concept is the central role that positive relationships can play in social and cognitive growth. The Reach Out to Schools: Social Competency Program provides a structured format to help elementary school children learn and practice interpersonal and problem solving skills. By teaching students these skills, teachers are giving students the tools to make and maintain friendships with other students in their classrooms. These improved relationships have enormous power. Peer interaction and classroom discourse between children act as "scaffolding" to bring students to new levels of thinking and perspective taking. The Reach Out to Schools Program actualizes the theoretical positions developed at the Stone Center and articulated by Jean Baker Miler (1986) and her colleagues (Jordan, J.V., Kaplan, A.G., Miller, J.B., Stiver, I.P., Surrey, J.L., 1991). A supportive classroom community emerges, and students have the confidence and encouragement to take the risks necessary for social and academic learning to occur. As students learn to make and maintain positive relationships with classmates, they create new avenues for their own and others' growth.

The second theme that emerges from the data is the expansion of shared decison making that occurs

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within classrooms using the curriculum. Teachers say they have become partners with their students, and that given the chance, students often come up with excellent solutions to classroom issues. Instead of feeling out of control, teachers indicate that sharing power with their students has produced a more manageable and productive environment. There are fewer power struggles and more problem solving.

The third concept is that the curriculum encourages students to speak out in the open circle, share their ideas, and listen to what others have to say. In one respect the curriculum is both preventive and growth-enhancing. By helping students learn to problem solve, future problems may be more manageable and negative behaviors reduced. In another respect, the development of communication skills enhances academic achievement. Research has demonstrated that children from homes or classrooms affording greater opportunitiy for communication and decision making not only exhibited greater initiative and independence but also received higher grades (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

The Reach Out to Schools curriculum, although simple in format and relatively easy to include in the current school day, is driven by powerful concepts related to primary prevention in the field of mental health and experiential learning in education. The critical role of peer relationships to learning is acknowledged, and the development of positive relationships is encouraged. The activities in the curriculum are age appropriate and sensitive to multicultural and gender-related issues. Ongoing, personal, nonjudgemental consultation in the schools supports the teachers in their first year. Peer support is integrated in the second year of the program.

In addition to the training and the curriculum, the choice of participatory evaluation strategies enhances the overall program. Teachers and students are encouraged to reflect on the impact of the curriculum in their classrooms and to contribute their suggestions for program development. This model of collaborative research again recognizes the value of an individual's experience and attempts to share power and build relationships among all participants in the program.

Finally, the partnership between a small, family-owned corporation, a college, and the public schools that has created the project provides another form of collaboration with each institution adding its perspective, goals, and methods. The result is a unique blend of theory and practice, a proactive program for school change deeply connected to a long-standing research base.

Plans for 1992-1993

Plans for the 1992-1993 year include the expansion of existing programs and several new beginnings.

In the Fall of 1992, 142 teachers will receive training in the Reach Out to Schools curriculum. As in the past, those teachers who have completed one year of the program will serve as peer coaches for those teachers in their schools who will begin using the curriculum in the Fall of 1992. In addition, the curriculum, training, and consulting package is being offered on an open enrollment basis for any teachers who wish to participate on an individual fee basis. These teachers (approximately 60) will also be supported with consulting and monthly meetings at Wellesley College. A small group of teachers will continue to conduct research in their classrooms on various aspects of the curriculum and meet monthly at the Stone Center to discuss their findings.

Entirely new efforts for 1992-1993 include a principal training course that has been offered to eight principals whose schools have used the Reach Out to Schools program for two or more years and who have expressed an interest in incorporating the principles of the curriculum schoolwide. The course will begin in August and continue with eight half-day sessions throughout the year. This course is designed to provide time for principals to discuss management issues they face, review problem solving strategies, and reflect on the change process.

Throughout the 1991-1992 year, we relied almost entirely on self-reporting techniques for data collection. As a result, we have a wealth of information on how the program is perceived by those most closely involved in it. This feedback has been extremely helpful in the development and implementation of the curriculum and training aspects of the program as well as in the identification of areas of student behavioral change that warrant further study. For 1992-1993, while maintaining the case study method for approximately 15-20 teachers, we will add a more quantitative segment to the research on the program. Videos of classes using the curriculum and of control classes will be studied to identify patterns of both teacher and student behaviors. Students will complete

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a standardized test designed to measure perceived self-competency before and after the program. The behavioral and academic records of students using the program will be compared with those not using it. Also, focus groups of students who have used the curriculum will be organized in March.

We have been encouraged to expand the parental component of the program. While specific curriculum efforts in that area may not be possible until the summer of 1993, we do plan to run focus groups this year for parents whose children have been involved in the program for two or more years.

The goal in all of these efforts is to gather a balance of participants' and outsiders' viewpoints and to include both in the overall evaluation of the Reach Out to Schools program. By encouraging teachers and students to contribute directly to the program evaluation process, we are encouraging increased reflection on all classroom and schoolwide practices. We have tried to demystify data collection and will continue to do so in an effort to bring the teachers, students, principals, and parents more fully into the program evaluation process and to encourage the development of new competencies and relationships between practitioners and the program staff at the Stone Center.

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The Stone Center for Developmental Services and Studies

The Stone Center is dedicated to the prevention of psychological problems, the enhancement of psychological well-being, and the search for a more comprehensive understanding of human development. Particular attention is paid to the experience of women, children, and families across culturally diverse populations.

The mission is carried out through development of theory, research, education, consultation, action programs, and counseling, in collaboration with the Wellesley College community and other institutions and individuals.

The Stone Center was created in 1981 by a generous gift to Wellesley College from Robert S. and Grace W. Stone, parents of a Wellesley graduate. The Center's programs reflect the Stone family's interest in preventing psychological distress.

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