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ABSTRACT

This action research project sought to improve the social skills of targeted third-, fourth-, fifth-, and seventh-grade students in order to improve their classroom performance. The students' lack of social skills was documented by means of teacher observation checklists, teacher and student surveys, and past disciplinary records. Objectives of the intervention were to: increase positive behavior in students, strengthen their confidence in social situations, and develop behaviors that were physically and verbally age appropriate. The intervention was implemented using role playing, cooperative grouping, direct teaching, and activities related to social skills. Post-intervention data indicated improvement in social skills, including four targeted behaviors that had the largest deficit: saying "please" and "thank-you," raising hands, lack of encouraging words, and interrupting others. (Twenty appendices include project handouts and checklists. Contains 18 references.) (EV)

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IMPROVING SOCIAL SKILLS THROUGH THE USE OF
DIRECT TEACHING AND COOPERATIVE LEARNING

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An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
the School of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

Saint Xavier University
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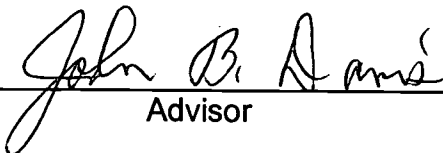
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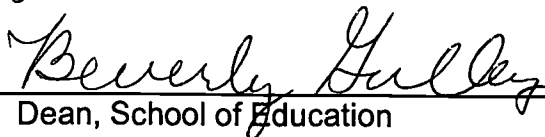
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Improving Social Skills Through the Use of Direct Teaching and Cooperative Learning

Laureen Dawczak, Laura Hawk, Julie Kolenda, Janeen Nye

May, 2000

Abstract

The action research project showed that students exhibited a lack of social skills that affected their classroom performance. Participants were third, fourth, fifth, and seventh grade students for the targeted schools. The lack of social skills was documented by teacher observation checklists, teacher and student surveys, and past disciplinary records.

In our own targeted schools the issues of over-crowding, lack of parent involvement, and the acceptable use of violence and inappropriate language were causes that affected social skills among students. Evidence suggested that programs in schools did not meet the demands of teaching children character development. Violence in society desensitized children's feelings towards themselves and others. Children internalized their problems instead of communicating in appropriate ways. Lack of parent supervision and involvement had a direct impact on their children's behavior.

The objective of the research project was to increase positive behavior in students, strengthen their confidence in social situations, and to develop behaviors that were physical and verbally age appropriate. This was accomplished through role playing, cooperative grouping, direct teaching, and activities related to social skills.

In conclusion, four targeted behaviors that had the largest deficit were saying please and thank you, raising hands, lack of encouraging words, and interrupting others. Upon completion of this action plan, all four targeted areas were addressed. This produced an improvement in the appropriate social skills among the students.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of Problem

Students of the targeted grade levels lacked appropriate social skills that affected their classroom performance. Evidence for the existence of the problem included teacher observation, parent and student surveys, and anecdotal records.

Immediate Problem Context - School A

School A had a total enrollment of 736 students. This school provided two regular education classes for the following grade levels, kindergarten, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth. The first and second grades had three regular education classes. There were four self-contained classes, which included cross-categorical special education students, with 15 students each. Grade levels for these classes were organized by age.

School A had early childhood special education classes, and state pre-kindergarten classes for community

children ages three to four. There were two speech and language resource classes and one speech center. Sixty students were pulled out of the regular education classes for special education services. Thirty students received speech services and 35 received pullout bilingual Polish or Spanish services. In addition to the kindergarten through eighth grade teachers, there were two pre-kindergarten teachers, nine special education teachers, one speech pathologist, four speech teachers, nine school assistants, one counselor, one psychologist, one social worker, one nurse, two secretaries, an assistant principal, and a principal.

Of the total enrollment at School A, 65.7% of the students were White, 25.5% were Hispanic, and 5.2% were Black, 2.3% were Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1.2% was Native American. Low-income students at school A were 50.8% of the total enrollment and 7.8% were listed as having limited English proficiency.

School A's attendance rate was 93.8%, with 16.8% student mobility, 0.1 chronic truancy, and one chronic truant. This school also had option students, or students who were bused in from other areas in the city. The number of option students was 52.

School A's mission was to put "Children First." To achieve this goal teachers were expected to provide the highest quality of education in order to facilitate acquisition of knowledge, basic skills, critical thinking analysis, and problem solving skills.

School A prepared students for the future through the use of hands on experiences and multimedia technology. A computer lab linked to the Internet and full multimedia center allowed students to communicate with others through the web. The school newspaper and yearbook were created in the computer lab.

School A viewed students as unique individuals with talents, needs and concerns. This school offered programs such as Rainbows, band, dance, choir, art, and intramural sports. Tutoring classes and the homework room provided assistance for those students who needed extra help.

Increasing class size was of great concern to School A because of their limited amount of space. The third and fourth grade classrooms had very high numbers with approximately thirty-six students per grade. The administration anticipated that future enrollment would increase because a new development in the neighborhood constructed approximately 40 new single family homes. School A was slotted for a new addition in the year 2,000.

The average teaching experience for school A's district was 14.8 years. Teachers with a bachelor's degree made up 54.7% of the district and 44.4% had a master's degree or above. On average, there were 22.2 students per teacher for the district.

Of the more than 23,000 teachers in this district, 45% were White, 41.7% were Black, 10.5% were Hispanic, 2.0% Asian/Pacific Islander and 0.3% Native American. Gender percentages indicated 23.5% were male and 76.5% female.

The average district teacher salary was \$47,304 annually. Administrators' salaries averaged \$79,231 yearly. The average operating expenditure per pupil for the district was \$6,630.

The Surrounding Community - School A

Community A was a growing community of a large metropolitan area. The west border was a railroad called the Belt Line. This railroad had various sets of tracks running down most of the community's major cross streets. The community was 96% White and 4% minority. Major businesses and industries surrounded the community. The community was 97% residential and it was approximately one and a half miles west of a major airport. A newly constructed elevated train had contributed to this community's growth. Single family homes, townhouses,

condominiums, and apartment buildings were being constructed. The average 1997 price of a single family home was 122,000, according to the Association of Realtors. Two main busy streets provided the major businesses in the area. These businesses included restaurants, nightclubs, grocery stores, beauty salons, clothing stores, privately owned businesses, banks, and a local post office. Medical and dental offices provided medical care in the area. There also was a neighborhood library. Worshippers could choose from seven churches in the area of the Catholic, Baptist, and Lutheran denominations. There were four local park districts, which provided sports and social activities for community residents.

Immediate Problem Context - School B

The targeted middle school was part of a suburban school district located 27 miles southwest of a major metropolitan city. This middle school included grades six, seven, and eight. The total enrollment of the targeted school was 645 students and 70 staff members. The student body was 94.9% White, 0.3% Black, and 4.8% other. Four percent of the students at the targeted school were from low-income homes and less than 1% of the students were limited English proficient. The school had a 96% attendance rate. The average class size in sixth grade and eighth

grade was 27 students. The academic performance of the students on the 1997-98 Illinois Goal Assessment Program (IGAP) was higher than the state averages in reading, mathematics, writing, science, and social sciences.

In addition to the 56 certified staff members in the targeted school there were four special education aides, two administrators, two secretaries, two librarians, one school psychologist, two technology facilitators, and one school nurse. In the district there were 154 teachers and administrators; all of whom were White, with 84% female and 16% male. The average years of experience teachers possessed in the district was 12; 49% of the teachers have bachelor's degrees and 51% of the teachers possessed a master's degree or higher. The average teacher's salary for the district was about \$36,200 with an average administrator earning about \$61,900. The average operating expenditure per pupil was about \$4,400.

The building's physical structure consisted of one level that was separated into two wings. The main office, two computer labs, and the learning center separated the wings. The academic wing consisted of eight sixth grade classrooms, nine seventh grade classrooms, and eight eighth grade classrooms. Among these rooms included classrooms for additional teachers involved with the special education

program and the gifted program. The exploratory wing served one band room, one health room, one foreign language room, one cafetorium, combination cafeteria and auditorium, two gymnasiums, two technology labs, and one life skill lab. The outside facilities were shared with the neighboring park district. The facilities consisted of four baseball fields, three soccer fields, two basketball courts, and a mile jog/walk path.

The students in the targeted school received five 41-minute academic classes per day: language arts, literature, mathematics, science, and social studies. They also received 41 minutes of physical education and 41 minutes of an assigned exploratory elective. The exploratory program consisted of health, Spanish, French, multi-cultural studies, family and consumer science, keyboarding, technology lab, life skill lab, art, and music. Students spent six weeks in an exploratory class. By the end of eighth grade the students will have participated in an exploratory class at least once. The technology lab had 14 computer-driven modules and two machine centers. The purpose of the technology lab was to allow students to experience different occupations by using a computer as a tool. The life skills lab included eight modules, four worktables, and one storage room. The purpose of the life

skills lab was to expose students to different methods of home repair and construction.

The Surrounding Community - School B

The targeted school district had a population of about 2,100 students. The district consisted of three elementary schools and one middle school. The student population's racial/ethnic background was 96% White, 0.5% Black, and 4.5% other. In the targeted district 3.5% of the students were from low-income families and 1.2 % were a limited English proficient student.

The targeted community experienced tremendous growth. Due to the increasing population the community passed a referendum authorizing the construction of a new building structured around the middle school concept. The school opened to students in the fall of 1997. According to a 1996 demographic report, the population of the community consisted of about 15,400 people residing in around 6,000 households. The median housing income was \$68,458, the median housing cost was \$134,400, and the median age of the citizens in this community was about 35 years.

Within the district many parents have mixed views about the superintendent and school board members. In addition to parental disapproval, there was great dissension among the school board members. This dissension

was due to differences of opinion on the management of the school district. This caused a communication problem among board members and community members.

Immediate Problem Context - School C

School C enrolled 956 students ranging in grades pre-school through eighth. This school was the largest in the Archdiocese of Chicago. The building opened its doors in September 1949 with an enrollment of 250 students. Based on the 1998 - 1999 school year figures, the average class size for each grade level was as follows: Pre-school - 91, Kindergarten - 90, first grade - 113, second grade - 86, third grade - 113, fourth grade - 101, fifth grade - 106, sixth grade - 91, seventh grade - 81, eighth grade - 91. There were two pre-school classes, three classes each of grade kindergarten, second, sixth and seventh and four classes each first, third, fourth, fifth and eighth. The racial/ ethnic makeup for school C students was 90% White, 10% Hispanic, .2% African American.

The school consisted of thirty-four female teachers and two male teachers. There were three teacher aides, one physical education teacher, one computer teacher, two music teachers, two counselors, and one librarian. There were 11 teachers with their masters and all teachers have bachelors

degrees. The average teaching experience in the school was 14 years. The student teacher ratio was 26.5:1.

School C offered programs such as Rainbows, Peer Leaders, Wings, Take 10 Mediation, retreats (Snowflake and Snowflurry), sports and enrichment. Band was an option available to students in grades 4-8 one day a week during the school day.

The Terra Nova Test in reading, math, science and social studies assessed students in third, fifth and seventh grades. Students in grades 1-8 received letter grades consisted of A (93-100), B (85-92), C (76-84), D (70-75), and U (60-69). The Curriculum consisted of the six core areas: language arts, reading math, religion, social studies, and science.

School C had very strong parent involvement. This included School Board, Holy Name, Women's Guild and, the Boosters Club, which runs the athletic program. There was also strong communication between parents and teachers. This included weekly newsletters, parents receive 8 progress reports and there was also an open door policy.

Some concerns for school C are enrollment was declining causing there to be less funds for the school. Also, the school was in need of many structural renovations such as a new roof and windows.

The Surrounding Community - School C

School C was located southwest side of Chicago. The Population of the area was 37,092. The area was comprised of 10% African American, 7% Hispanic and 83% Caucasian. It was a lower middle/ middle class community with a median family income of \$39,189. There were 4% below poverty level and 6% unemployment. Employment consisted largely of city workers, policemen, firemen and teachers. There was 58.8% of the population employed, 3.4% are unemployed and 37.8 are not in labor force. As of 1999, the average home value was \$105,259. Housing consisted of 91.2% single-family units and 8.8% multifamily units.

The median age of the population was 38.9 years. Of the population, less than 8% have completed the ninth grade, 14.9 % completed 9 - 12, 39.4% were high school graduates, 20.8% had some college education, 4.6% received and associates degree, 9.1% had a bachelor's degree and 3.2% had a graduate degree.

Of the population, 27.1% had never been married, 56.1% are married with spouse present, 2.4% and were married with spouse absent, 9.2% were widowed and 5.1% were divorced.

National Context of the Problem

Social skills have been recognized as an essential factor to students' classroom development. However, many

students lack the appropriate social skills needed to have positive educational experiences.

Educators need to be aware that school is a child's job and their identity. The school needs to recognize that children's social development must be identified and enhanced. If children have a positive attitude about school, they are most likely to exhibit positive social relationships (Lavoie, 1994).

A frustrating issue that most parents and teachers encounter is not students who show inappropriate classroom behavior, but rather students that unknowingly and unintentionally exhibit inappropriate behavior in a classroom setting. This is considered a social skill deficit (Smith, 1995). Students learn social skills by a combination of modeling, role playing, and feedback. If they are not exposed to an environment that promotes positive social interaction, the students will most likely exhibit social skill deficits.

Children who possess social skill deficits have been shown to be at risk for future social and psychological maladjustment including substance abuse and depressive disorders (Rothenberg, 1999). Therefore, it is essential for students to be exposed to social situations in their everyday environment.

In summary, school climate is critical in fostering a positive social environment. The more comfortable children feel in school will determine the strength of future relationships. To create a positive social climate students need to be exposed to proper modeling of social skills. Therefore, appropriate teaching and modeling of social skills may prove a requirement for the future.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM EVIDENCE

The students at the targeted schools exhibited a lack of social skills that adversely affected their classroom performance. Evidence for the existence of the problem included teacher observation checklists and teacher and student surveys.

The sources of evidence were teacher observation checklists and teacher and student surveys. The teacher observation checklists were used to monitor specific behaviors such as: students raise their hands to speak, students say please and thank you when asking questions, students do not interrupt when others are talking, and students use 'happy talk' when interacting with others.

Table 1 displays a teacher observation checklist in which teachers observed targeted behaviors over a forty-minute class period. The behaviors were averaged among the four targeted classrooms. The students failed to say please and thank you on an average of five times. The

students did not raise their hands to speak on an average of 10 times. The students interrupted when others were talking on an average of eight times. The students did not use encouraging words on an average of three times (Appendix B).

Table 1

Targeted Behaviors Observed Before Intervention

Behavior	September
Students do not say please and thank you.	5
Students do not raise their hands to speak.	10
Students interrupt when others are talking.	8
Students did not encourage each other with words.	3

Teacher and student surveys were created to gain insight on the students' opinions about the application of positive social skills in the classroom. These assessment techniques were created to measure the levels of the students' social skills (Appendix C, D, and E).

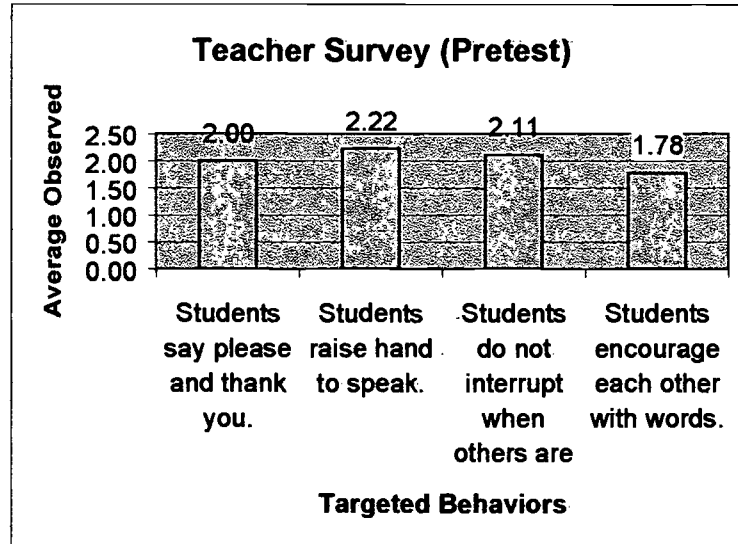


Figure 1. Teacher survey of targeted areas before intervention

Figure 1 shows the pretest data from the survey given to selected teachers. From the survey four targeted behaviors were chosen to be documented. These include: students say please and thank you, students raise hand to speak, and students do not interrupt when others are talking, and students encourage others with words. The scale used was based on a 3-point system; 3=always exhibited behavior, 2=sometimes exhibited behavior, and 1=never exhibited behavior. In the pre-test, the students said please and thank you on an average of 2.00. The students raised their hands to speak on an average of 2.22. The students did not interrupt when others were talking on

an average of 2.11. The students encouraged others with words on an average 1.78.

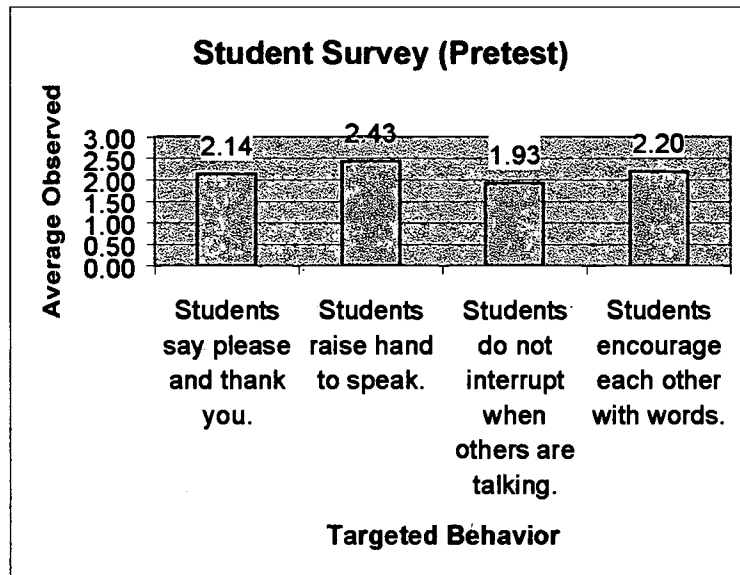


Figure 2. Student survey of targeted areas before intervention

Figure 2 shows the pretest data from the survey given to the targeted students. From the survey four targeted behaviors were chosen to be documented. These included: students say please and thank you, students raise hand to speak, students do not interrupt when others are talking, and students encourage others with words. The scale used was based on a 3-point system; 3=always exhibited behavior, 2=sometimes exhibited behavior, and 1=never exhibited behavior. In the pre-test, the students felt that they

said please and thank you on an average of 2.14. The students felt that they raised their hands to speak on an average of 2.43. The students felt that they did not interrupt when others were talking on an average of 1.93. The students felt that they encouraged others with words on an average 2.20.

Many factors in each targeted school contributed to the lack of appropriate social skills in students. However, each school was different. This research project indicated that some factors were more prevalent than others. One site-based cause was a high student-teacher ratio in the classroom, which two of the three targeted schools experienced. This ratio was caused by the recent development of new housing units and subdivision in the areas of the targeted schools. Due to the lack of funds, the school districts were unable to hire enough new teachers to compensate for the higher enrollment.

Another site-based cause was the lack of parent involvement in the students' everyday lives, which was found in all three targeted schools. Society today has many different types of family structures including single-parent homes or homes with two working parents. There are also some children left in the care of a guardian/caretaker because their parents are unable to care for them.

The third cause was more tolerance toward the use of violence and inappropriate language that contributed to the lack of social skills in the classroom. The media and the society as a whole have desensitized children and parents' views on violence and inappropriate language.

There are many aspects that lead to the lack of social skills in the classroom. Berreth and Berman (1997) believed that school programs were deficient in teaching character development that led to a lack of empathy and self-discipline among students. Schools need to examine their existing programs and determine if they provide foundations for moral behavior. They also believed that the prevalence of violence in society today desensitized a child's perception of another person's feelings such as hurt or anger. This research corroborated the findings in one of the targeted school's causes.

Many children in society today do not know an effective way to communicate what they are feeling. Rimm (1997) stated that when children internalized their problems, instead of communicating, this caused them to display inappropriate social skills. Teachers and parents must accept their leadership roles by modeling appropriate communication skills for their children.

Supporting the site-based cause of lack of parent involvement, Garbarino (1997) reported that there was a 50% decrease over the last 30 years in the amount of quality time spent between parents and their children. Children who are left alone at home and who do not interact constructively with their parents are more vulnerable to the negative influences in today's society.

In summary, poor social skills of students were prevalent for many reasons. In the targeted schools the issues of over-crowding, lack of parent involvement, and the increasing tolerance toward the use of violence and inappropriate language were all key factors that affected social skills among students. Evidence suggested that programs in schools did not meet the demands of teaching children character development. Violence in society desensitized children's feelings towards themselves and others. Children internalized their problems instead of communicating in appropriate ways. Lack of parent supervision and involvement had a direct impact on their children's behavior. These children were exposed to the toxins in society.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

Site-based causes for lack of social skills included overcrowding in the classroom, lack of parent involvement, and more tolerance toward the use of violence and inappropriate language in society. Additionally, literature-based research indicated that schools were deficient in teaching character development and the lack of communication between children and parents. In support of the site-based causes, researchers found that the lack of parent involvement and the occurrence of violence in society were causes for deficient social skills.

Teachers, students, and parents are all equal partners in contributing to the development of social skills. Warger and Rutherford (1993) defined social skills as learned behaviors that are specific, discrete, and observable, and that produce positive consequences in social situations. Elksnin and Elksnin (1998) similarly

defined social skills as the complex ability to perform observable behaviors and to possess unobservable problem-solving skills. Their research identified six types of social skills: interpersonal behaviors, peer-related social skills, teacher-pleasing social skills, self-related behaviors, assertiveness skills, and communication skills. Social skills are also described as the cognitive, behavioral, and communication skills necessary to have successful interpersonal interactions. They can be broken down into input, organization, output, and self-monitoring skills (Rothenberg, 1999).

As with any process, there are fundamental steps that need to be completed to achieve success. The basic building blocks to develop positive social skills include listening, asking questions, and communicating information to others (Warger and Rutherford, Jr., 1996). Specific activities within these building blocks include waiting one's turn, requesting help, seeking attention appropriately, and using basic manners.

When a social skill is not evident it may be that students were never taught the social skill or how to use it appropriately. This does not mean that students are blatantly disregarding that skill. Smith (1995) stated that a skills-based deficit occurs when a student has not yet

learned how to perform a specific behavior. The teacher needs to respond by creating activities that enrich the missing skills.

Not only do schools need to teach academics but also they need to be able to define and develop social competence in their students. One of the school's roles is teaching social skills, a prerequisite to achieving academic success. Teachers need to integrate social skills training into their curriculum and activities. Maag and Webber (1995) agreed that teaching social behavior has the same importance as teaching academic behavior. They stated:

Educators do several things to promote student's social development: (a) set clear expectations for student behavior, (b) provide consistent reinforcement of social behavior, (c) provide good social models and prompts so that social interactions will be successful, (d) provide structured and successful opportunities to interact, and (e) facilitate student's social problem solving abilities (p. 16).

The most attractive feature of using the above tactics is that they have minimal interference with the core academic content.

The missing piece in school programs today is the development of skills of empathy and self-discipline. The school needs to provide character education to develop a sense of social responsibility, which will help students understand through experience that what they value really matters (Berreth & Berman, 1997). This also allows students to empathize and appreciate the feelings of others. Another role of the school is to establish an alliance among students, parents, and the community.

Smith (1995) stated that when a student possesses a skill but does not perform it under the appropriate circumstances it can be defined as a skill-based deficit. It is the school's role to provide social skill training and behavioral intervention. Hazel, Schumaker, Sherman, and Sheldon-Wildgen stated seven essential social skills that need to be taught by the teacher. These included giving positive and negative feedback, accepting negative feedback appropriately, resisting peer pressure, solving personal problems, negotiating solutions, following instructions, and initiating and maintaining a conversation. The above skills can be taught through demonstration, modeling, and guided practice (as cited in Smith, 1995).

Teachers play a critical role in students' social development and self-concept. Some methods included assigning a socially competent student to work with a student lacking social skills and avoiding humiliating situations by pre-selecting groups (Lavoie, 1994). The teacher should also provide board or card games that promote positive social interactions. These techniques can help the teacher provide an atmosphere that makes the student feel comfortable, welcome, and accepted.

Parents play a crucial role in the development of social skills. Lawhon (1997) stated that parents need to provide activities to develop basic social skills that form friendships. Adults need to be protective, gentle, fair, consistent, and reasonable. They need to provide information through literature, stories, and dramatic play while encouraging mutual respect, being positive models, using honest, sincere, and positive statements. Adults must also provide opportunities for a child to be heard, use calm words, express joy, and respond to other children's cues. A healthy environment that allows students to meet and play with children from a wide age range is also necessary for social development.

In support of Lawhon, Rothenberg (1999) suggested ways that parents can reinforce social skills in the home: (a)

arrange for successful social encounters with peers, (b) set up successful play time at home with a parent, (c) model positive inner dialogue verbally, (d) use dinner time to work on conversation skills, and (e) watch TV with the child and ask evaluative questions.

A parent should avoid the use of informal labeling; such as the smart one, the jock, the creative one, or the social one, which can cause competitive pressure. Parents should not send contradictory messages because that may confuse children. They also need to show support for the schools and their teachers. Disrespect for education by parents undermines the educator's power to teach (Rimm, 1997).

Mize and Abell (1996) believe that students' everyday experiences with parents are essential to developing social skills. Parents need to play with children in a peer-like way for the sake of having fun. They also need to talk with children about social relationships and values and take a problem solving approach. Finally they can reflect a positive, resilient attitude towards social set backs and intervening only when necessary. In addition to the interactions between parent and child, adults need to exhibit and model positive moral values, and not confuse the children by displaying bad examples (Berreth & Berman,

1997). Children whose parents frequently interact with them have more advanced social skills and better relationships with peers.

Although parents and teachers are essential in the development of social skills, it is imperative that the students take an active role in their development. Students need to identify the behavior they want to change, to identify the consequences connected to the behavior, and to develop an intervention to maintain the desired behavior. Students can also keep records of progress towards a reward of their choice.

Mize and Abell (1996) stated that a student can maintain social interaction by providing an alternative suggestion through play or conversation, such as selecting another approach when one is rejected. Children should try and solve problems by negotiation rather than tattling. Lawhon (1997) concurred with the above by stating that play enhances social skills essential in leading to reliable friendships in life.

Throughout the years many interventions and strategies have been created to enhance social skill development. Different avenues that stimulated the growth of social skills included using children's literature and games centered around daily life skills. Brown, McEvoy, and

Bishop (1991) developed three strategies to increase positive social interaction. These included teacher prompting, reinforcement of social responses and social initiations, and rearranging the classroom environment to encourage social behavior. In the classroom, these strategies assist students' social interaction with peers in a natural setting.

The Raising Healthy Children Program listed interventions to connect students to their family and their school (Cummings and Haggerty, 1997). These interventions were developed through the use of staff development, parent workshops, home based services, and students activities. Some positive results of this intervention were increased positive attachment to family and school, decreased aggression in boys, decreased suspensions and expulsions, decreased drug use and delinquency, and increased scores on standardized achievement tests.

Huml (1994) offered positive approaches to alleviate disruptive and antisocial behavior in the classroom. This list contained law-related education that provided students with an understanding of the functions of our laws and legal systems. It also included "shadowing" in vocational and other career areas that gave students an exposure to what is necessary to succeed in the real world. Cross-age

level tutoring was used to allow students to perform productive social roles by working with younger students who are experiencing difficulty.

It is also necessary to include moral education within the social skill curriculum. Solomon's Moral Education Plan focused on the improvement of student's responsibilities for their actions (Solomon, 1997). This plan was comprised of three main factors that helped promote the development of social skills. First, students must be offered the opportunity for self-direction. Second, students must perceive required tasks as meaningful. Finally, students must feel that they are valued members of their classroom community.

Walberg, Anderson, Schmuck and Schmuck, research demonstrated that when there is an interest in academic tasks, increased friendships, and group pride, that students enjoy school, produced better school performance and highly cooperative groups. Students are aware of their growing social interaction and want to maintain these positive relationships (as cited in McCafferty, 1990).

Many interventions and strategies have been created to promote positive social interactions. Teachers may select methods or ideas to create a plan that will be suitable in their individual classrooms. Once the plan has been

established and the students feel comfortable, they will develop a positive outlook towards themselves, their peers, and their studies. These increased social skills will aid in their academic achievement.

In summary, social skills instruction may have a long-term positive effect on students' interactions with others, their attitude towards school, and their academic achievement. Social skills are defined as learned behaviors that are observable, specific, and discrete. They require collaboration between parents, teachers, and students to promote and model appropriate social skills. Many interventions and strategies have been created to promote positive situations that provide students the opportunities to build self-esteem and to develop appropriate behaviors.

Project Objective & Outcome

As a result of increased instructional emphasis on social skills during the period of September 1999-January 2000, students in the targeted classes will increase their positive behaviors, strengthen their confidence in social situations, and develop behaviors that are physically and verbally age-appropriate as measured by teacher surveys, student surveys, and observation checklists.

In order to accomplish the above objective the following processes are necessary.

1. Develop instructional materials and learning activities that model appropriate social skills.
2. Plan a series of lesson plans using direct instruction of social skills.
3. Design activities that demonstrate appropriate social skills.

Project Action Plan

This action plan is designed to increase appropriate social skills in the targeted classroom. By implementing the activities of this action plan, students will develop a better understanding of themselves and others in social situations. The major objective of this plan is for

students to increase their positive behaviors, strengthen their confidence in social situations, and develop behaviors that are physically and verbally age-appropriate.

1. Project Preparation (prior to implementation)
 - a. Develop surveys
 - b. Produce checklist
 - c. Cultivate lessons
 - d. Create activities
 - e. Prepare materials needed for lessons

2. Action Plan Calendar
 - a. Week 1&2-Introduction
 1. Send home parent letter (Appendix A)
 2. Collect baseline data through observation checklist (Appendix B)
 3. Complete teacher and student survey (Appendix C, D, E)
 4. Develop classroom rules and consequences

 - b. Week 3&4-Getting to know you
 1. Introductory Activity
 2. 'Meeting others' activity

3. 'Making Conversation' activity
 4. 'What happens if...?' activity
 5. 'Handshakes' activity
 6. 'First Impressions' activity
 7. 'Last Impressions' activity
 8. 'Making and Keeping Friends' activity
- c. Week 5&6-Manners
1. Role playing activity
 2. 'My Good Character' Activity
 3. 'How do you measure up?' activity
 4. 'Manners in the classroom' activity
 5. 'Manners on the job' activity
- d. Week 7&8-Listening
1. Listening Activities
 2. One way communication activity
 3. Two way communication activity
 4. 'Telephone' game
 5. The 'Name' Game
 6. T-chart-the attentive listening looks like/sounds like activity
- e. Week 9&10-Asking Questions

1. Questioning activity
 2. Instruction on the appropriate questioning techniques
 3. Role Playing Activities
- f. Week 11&12-Communicating Information
1. Communication Activity
 2. Who am I game
 3. Body Language happy, sad, mad, angry, frustrated, confused
- g. Week 13&14 - Cooperation and teamwork
1. Strong as your weak link
 2. Teambuilding activities
 3. Partnership puzzle
- h. Week 15&16-Responsibility
1. Activities promoting sensible behavior
 2. 'Honestly Max' activity
 3. Role playing activity
 4. 'Personal and Group Responsibility' activity
 5. 'Honest to Goodness' activity

- i. Week 17&18-Wrap up
 1. Post evaluation
 - a. Teacher survey
 - b. Student Survey
 2. Social Skills Party
 3. Awards and certificates

3. In order to determine the effects of the planned intervention, four assessment techniques were used. These included teacher surveys, student surveys, anecdotal records, and observation checklists.

(Appendixes B, C, D, E)

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of this project was to improve student social skills in a classroom setting. The implementation of direct teaching and cooperative learning activities were selected to effect the desired changes.

Direct teaching techniques were used to teach desired social skills to the students. Cooperative learning activities were used to model and practice the previously demonstrated social skills.

Original plans were altered due to time restraints. The amount of activities for each topic was decreased although each topic was addressed sufficiently. Special emphasis was placed on the four targeted behaviors that needed the most attention according to pretest data. These were saying please and thank you, students raise their hand to speak, students do not interrupt when others are talking, and students encourage each other with words.

Skills taught in depth were manners, listening, and communication. Other areas addressed were responsibility, teamwork, how to ask appropriate questions, and introduction skills. Activities devoted to each of these skills can be found in the Appendices F-S.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

In order to assess the effects of direct instruction and cooperative learning activities on student behavior, an observation checklist was tallied prior to the intervention and after the intervention.

Table 2

Comparison of Targeted Behaviors Observed Before and After Intervention

Behavior	September	January
Students do not say please and thank you.	5	4
Students do not raise their hands to speak.	10	6
Students interrupt when others are talking.	8	4
Students did not encourage each other with words.	3	2

The above table displays pre and post-data tallied during the same forty-minute class period, one in the month of September and one in the month of January. The occurrences of the negative behaviors decreased after the intervention.

The same teachers were surveyed after the intervention process. Figure 3 showed an increase in positive behavior in all of the targeted areas. Figure 3 is an average of the behaviors observed by the teachers in the four targeted classrooms.

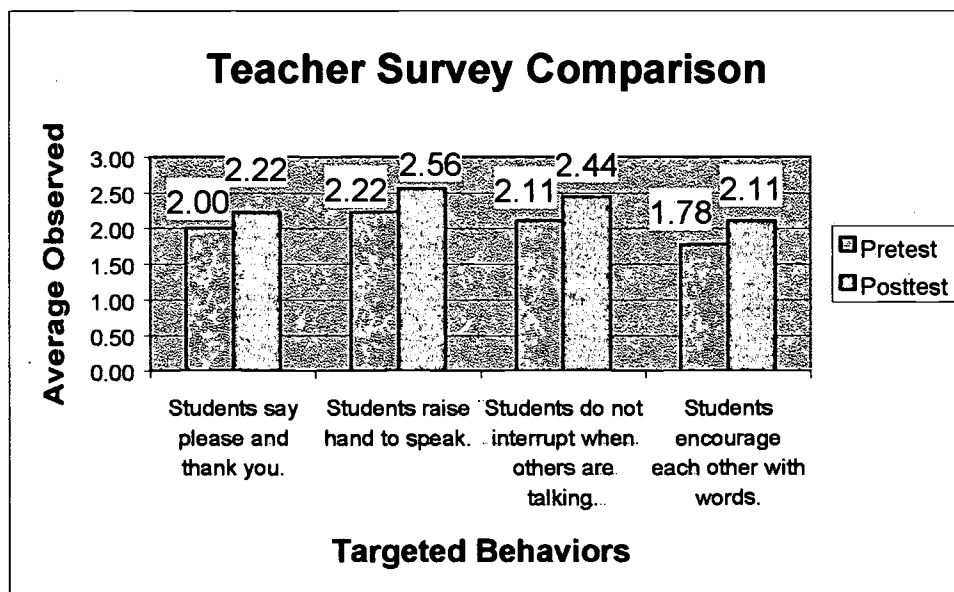


Figure 3. Average of the behaviors observed by the teachers in the four targeted classrooms.

The students in the targeted classrooms were also surveyed after the intervention. Figure 4 shows an improvement in all of the targeted areas... This figure is

an average of the behaviors observed by the students in the four targeted classrooms.

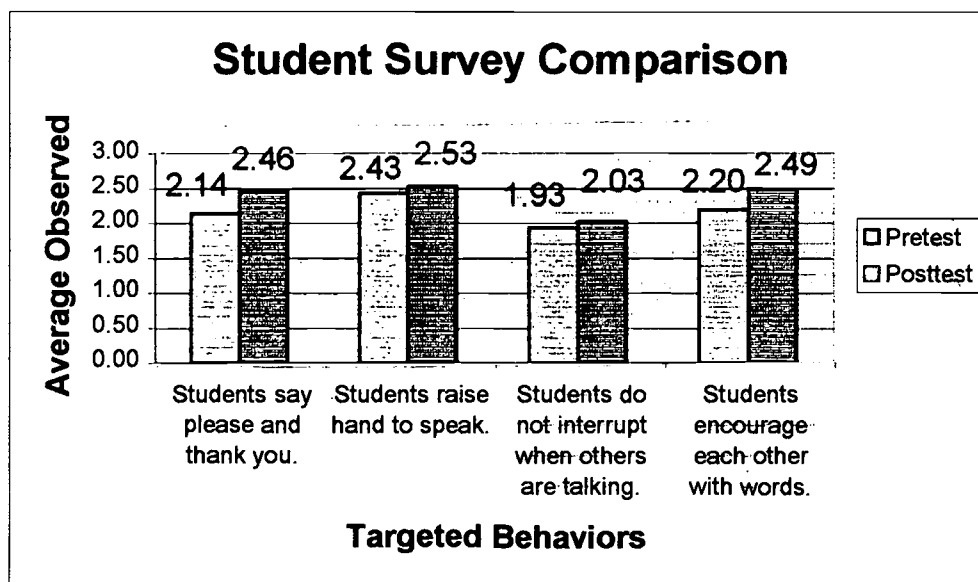


Figure 4. Average of the behaviors observed the students in the four targeted classrooms.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the presentation and analysis of the data, the students showed a consistent growth in positive behaviors. The concepts learned during the intervention transferred into the students' daily interactions with others. For example, cooperative learning became a more effective tool in the classrooms due to increased positive interaction. Overall, the classrooms seemed to exhibit a symbiotic atmosphere with a stronger bond among students.

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In order to improve targeted social skills, there needs to be a constant reinforcement between the school and home. Parents are an essential aspect in modeling appropriate social skills in everyday life. In order to achieve this goal, one recommendation is for teachers and parents to work collaboratively. Teachers could provide information through newsletters, parent in-service activities, and conferences on targeted skills that were introduced in the classroom.

When developing an action plan, it is important to offer a variety of possible targeted social skills that may need to be improved. One recommendation is to develop a project action plan based on the pretest data. These data would show the students' strengths and weaknesses in their social behavior. The action plan should be narrowed to focus on the extremely deficient social skills and less emphasis should be placed on the other social behaviors.

In conclusion, many factors such as high student-teacher ratio, lack of parent involvement, and more tolerance toward violence in society contributed to the lack of social skills in the targeted classrooms. Upon completion of this action plan, the targeted social skills were improved regardless of the factors listed above.

Through the use of role playing, cooperative learning, modeling, direct teaching, and activities that address social skills, the students improved in the four targeted areas. These areas included saying please and thank you, raising their hands to speak, not interrupting when others were talking, and using encouraging words with others. The first few months required constant reinforcement of the appropriate social skills. As the year progressed, the students became more familiar and confident using the appropriate social skills. The teachers' prompting decreased as the students realized the necessity for the skills in their daily life. Consequent to this realization, the students worked more cooperatively and effectively with their peers.

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Appendix A

August 30, 1999

Dear Parents:

Welcome to the start of another exciting school year full of wonderful learning possibilities. I am looking forward to getting to know your child.

I am currently enrolled in a Master's degree program at Saint Xavier University and will be conducting an action research project in partial fulfillment of the requirements for my degree. This project will involve the addition of enriching activities that will enhance social skills among children. The students may be asked to complete a survey or questionnaire in regards to my research project. Any responses that the students make will not affect their grades in any way, nor will the project interfere with their required studies. Your child will not be identified in any way, and all results of my project will be confidential.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this project, please call me. My phone number is (xxx) xxx-xxxx.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Miss xxxx

Appendix B

Observation Checklist

Class observed: _____

Date: _____

Time: _____

Behavior Observed	How many times was this behavior observed?
Students do not raise hands to speak.	
Students do not say please and thank you when asking questions.	
Students interrupt when others are talking.	
Students use 'put downs' when interacting with others.	

Appendix C































Teacher Survey**How often do you observe the following behaviors in the targeted classroom?**

1 Never	2 Sometimes	3 Always
1. Students say please and thank you.	1	2 3
2. Students assist others.	1	2 3
3. Students raise hand to speak.	1	2 3
4. Students do not interrupt when others are talking.	1	2 3
5. Students listen when others are speaking.	1	2 3
6. Students do not talk back.	1	2 3
7. Students excuse themselves at appropriate times.	1	2 3
8. Students encourage each other with words.	1	2 3
9. Students respect authority.	1	2 3
10. Students do not bully others.	1	2 3

Thank you for your time!!!

Appendix D

Student Survey**How often do you see the following behaviors in your own classroom?**

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Students say please and thank you. |  |  |  |
| 2. Students help others. |  |  |  |
| 3. Students raise hand to speak. |  |  |  |
| 4. Students do not interrupt when others are talking. |  |  |  |
| 5. Students listen when others are speaking. |  |  |  |
| 6. Students do not talk back. |  |  |  |
| 7. Students excuse themselves when needed. |  |  |  |
| 8. Students encourage each other with words. |  |  |  |
| 9. Students respect authority. |  |  |  |
| 10. Students do not bully others. |  |  |  |

Appendix E

Student Survey**How often do you see the following behaviors in your own classroom?**

1 Never	2 Sometimes	3 Always
1. Students say please and thank you.	1	2 3
2. Students assist others.	1	2 3
3. Students raise hand to speak.	1	2 3
4. Students do not interrupt when others are talking.	1	2 3
5. Students listen when others are speaking.	1	2 3
6. Students do not talk back.	1	2 3
7. Students excuse themselves at appropriate times.	1	2 3
8. Students encourage each other with words.	1	2 3
9. Students respect authority.	1	2 3
10. Students do not bully others.	1	2 3

Appendix F

Introductions

Let's begin by having you introduce yourself. Always remember to say "hello," your name and to ask the other person's (or persons') name.

Fill in the blanks below.

_____. My name is _____. What is/are your _____?

Fill in the word balloons over the characters' heads. Remember, one character is you and the other is the person you are meeting.



Circle which behavior in each line is most appropriate when you are introducing yourself.

- | | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. stand up | sit down | lie down |
| 2. look person in the feet | look person in the eyes | look person in the stomach |
| 3. mumble | speak loudly and clearly | whisper |
| 4. shake hands | tickle other person's hand | arm wrestle other person |

Appendix G

Making Conversation

When you are introduced to someone, don't just stand there and twiddle your thumbs. Say something. Try to make conversation. The person introducing you should tell something about you so you have a start as to what to talk about. When someone tells you about a person, ask questions.

Try it. Fill in the balloons.



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Appendix H

Handshakes

When you meet someone and introduce yourself, a handshake is a polite greeting. Practice with your classmates giving a good handshake. Then have a contest for the best handshaker.

Dos of Handshakes

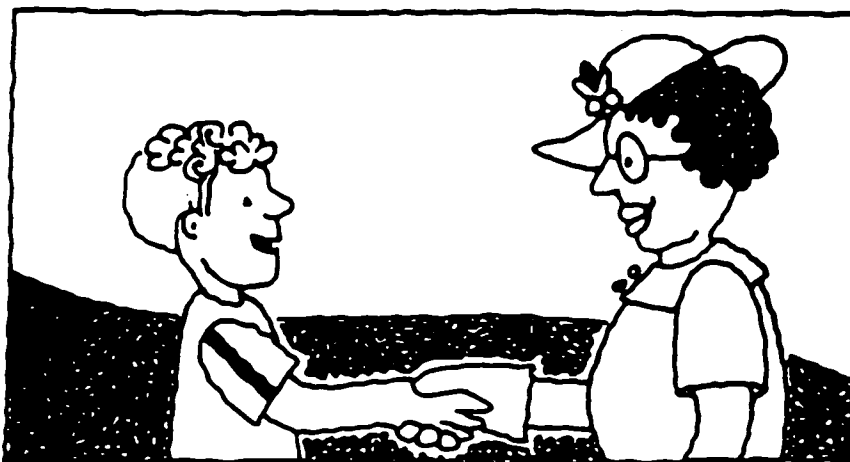
- short
- firm
- dry
- solid

Don'ts of Handshakes

- be wishy washy
- hold on too long
- crush the other person's hand
- be slippery and wet

Handshakes communicate although no words are used. What does a good handshake say to you? _____

What do you communicate to someone when you give a good handshake? _____



Fill in and cut out your ballot for the best handshaker. Give to your teacher.

My vote for the best handshaker in the class is _____

I have selected him/her because his/her handshake is _____

Appendix I

Name _____

First Impressions

ROLE-PLAY

When you meet someone for the first time, you always leave an impression. Likewise, that person leaves an impression on you. First impressions can turn out to be true or false, but they are difficult to change. Act out each situation below. Then, consider the questions which follow each role-play and discuss the first impression each person is communicating.

Situation #1: Jim is going for his first job interview at a local fast-food restaurant. He rushes from his after-school basketball game without taking a shower. He arrives in gym shorts, his hair still wet from sweat, chewing a piece of bubble gum. The manager of the restaurant is dressed in clean, casual pants, a pressed shirt, and tie.

Questions: Before the conversation even begins, what impressions has Jim made on the manager? How did Jim communicate these impressions? Would you give Jim the job? Why or why not?

Situation #2: Calvin is picking Alicia up for a casual dinner date. It is the first time he will meet her parents. He is dressed in clean blue jeans and a matching blue sweater. He has a rose to give to Alicia and one for her mother. When her mother opens the door, Calvin smiles and says, "Hi, Mrs. Lopez, I'm Calvin Singer. It's nice to meet you." Offering her the rose, he continues, "This is for you."

Questions: What impressions has Calvin made on Alicia's mother? How did he communicate these impressions? Would you feel good about letting your daughter go out with Calvin? Why or why not?

On your own: Rewrite situation #1 so that Jim leaves a good impression on the manager. Consider dress, hygiene, and overall personal appearance as you recreate this situation.

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Appendix J

Name _____

Lasting Impressions

The first impressions we get from others or give to others often lead to lasting impressions. Think about the situations below and write your experiences about them. Then share your answers with your group. Discuss how first impressions are formed and how they can be changed.

1. Tell about a time you had a first impression of someone which turned out to be completely false. Include the reasons you got that first impression and why you eventually changed your mind.

2. Tell about a time you feel you left a good impression on someone you had just met. Include the reasons you think you made a good impression.

3. Tell about a time you feel you left a bad impression on someone you had just met. Include the reasons you think you made a bad impression. Did you do anything later to change this person's view of you? If so, explain what you did and whether or not it made a difference in what this person thought of you.

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Name _____

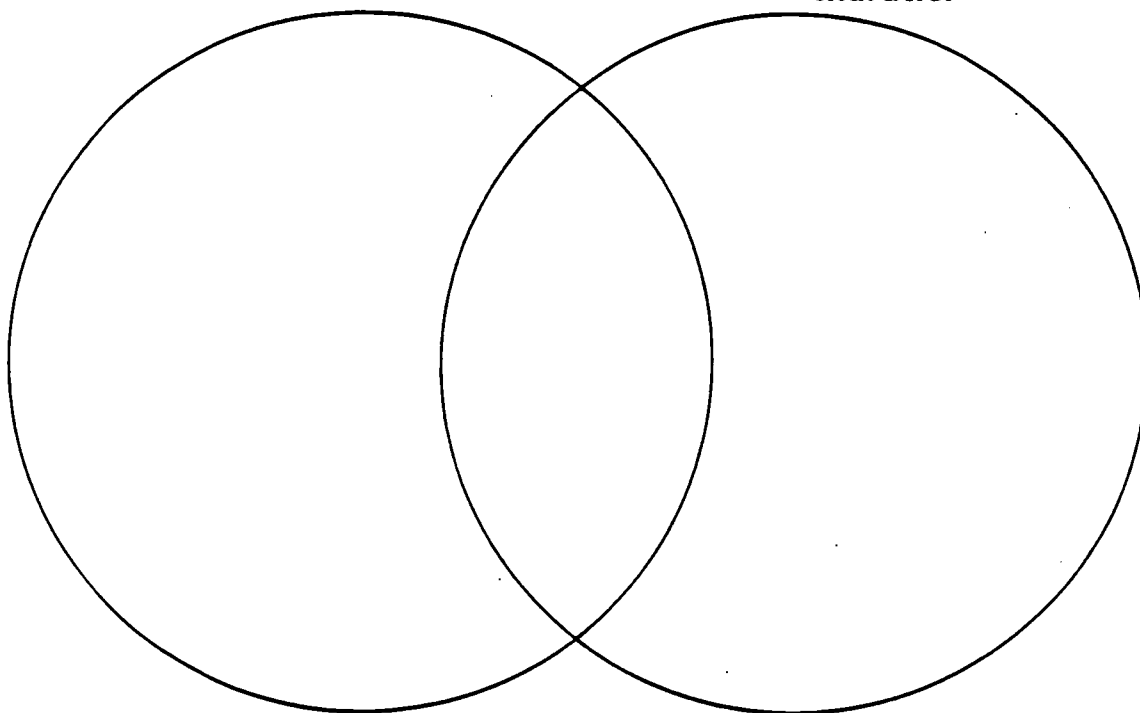
My Good Character

Think of qualities you consider examples of "good character." Write them in the circle on the left. Next, think of qualities you consider examples of "poor character." Write them in the circle on the right. In the space in the center, write the qualities from both circles that describe you.

**Characteristics of
Good Character**

Me

**Characteristics of
Poor Character**



Write three things you need to work on to build your character. Tell how you will accomplish these goals.

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Appendix L

Name _____

How Do You Measure Up?

Rate yourself on the classroom manners listed below. Then add your score to see how close you are to becoming a Master of Manners.

	Usually		Sometimes		Never				
Wait for my turn	4	3	2	1	0				
Listen when others speak	4	3	2	1	0				
Ask for things politely	4	3	2	1	0				
Respect property	4	3	2	1	0				
Think before I act	4	3	2	1	0				
Count to 10 when angry	4	3	2	1	0				
Share willingly with others	4	3	2	1	0				
Use materials appropriately	4	3	2	1	0				
Am kind and courteous to guests	4	3	2	1	0				
Consider another's point of view	4	3	2	1	0				
Total	<input type="text"/>	=	<input type="text"/>	+	<input type="text"/>	+	<input type="text"/>	+	<input type="text"/>

35-40	Master of Manners
30-34	Master in Training
25-29	Apprentice in Manners
20-24	Beginner
Below 20	Reform Candidate

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Appendix M

•••• MANNERS THAT MATTER ••••

Journal Response

—“Manners in the Classroom”—

1. In your opinion, what are the most important manners to remember in the classroom?

Explain why you chose these particular manners. _____

2. What are some ways you can help resolve classroom conflicts peacefully?

3. What are some ways you can respond when you get angry? _____

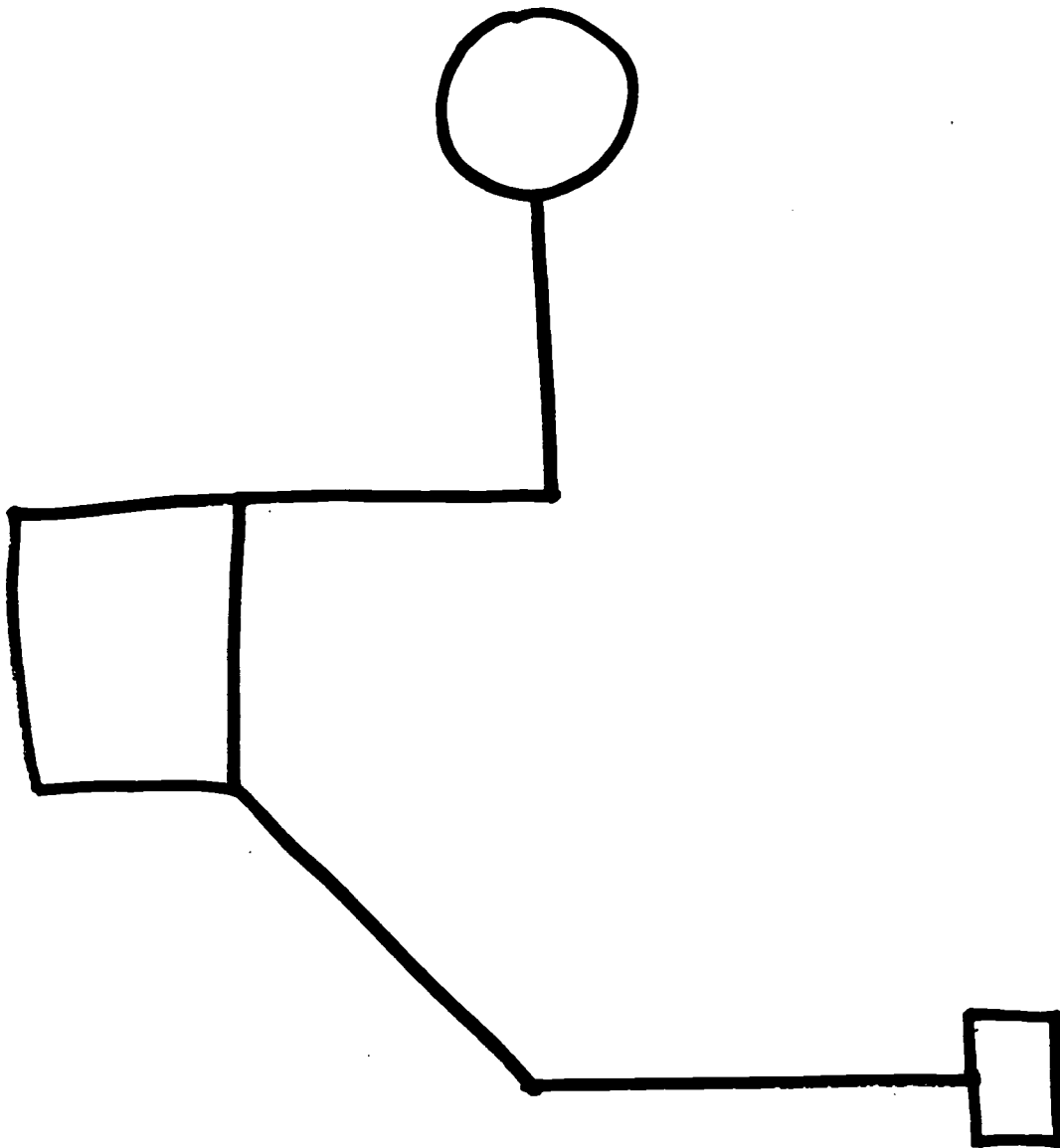
4. Why is it important to consider another person’s point of view? _____

5. On a separate sheet of paper, draw a comic strip that shows the use of appropriate manners in the classroom.

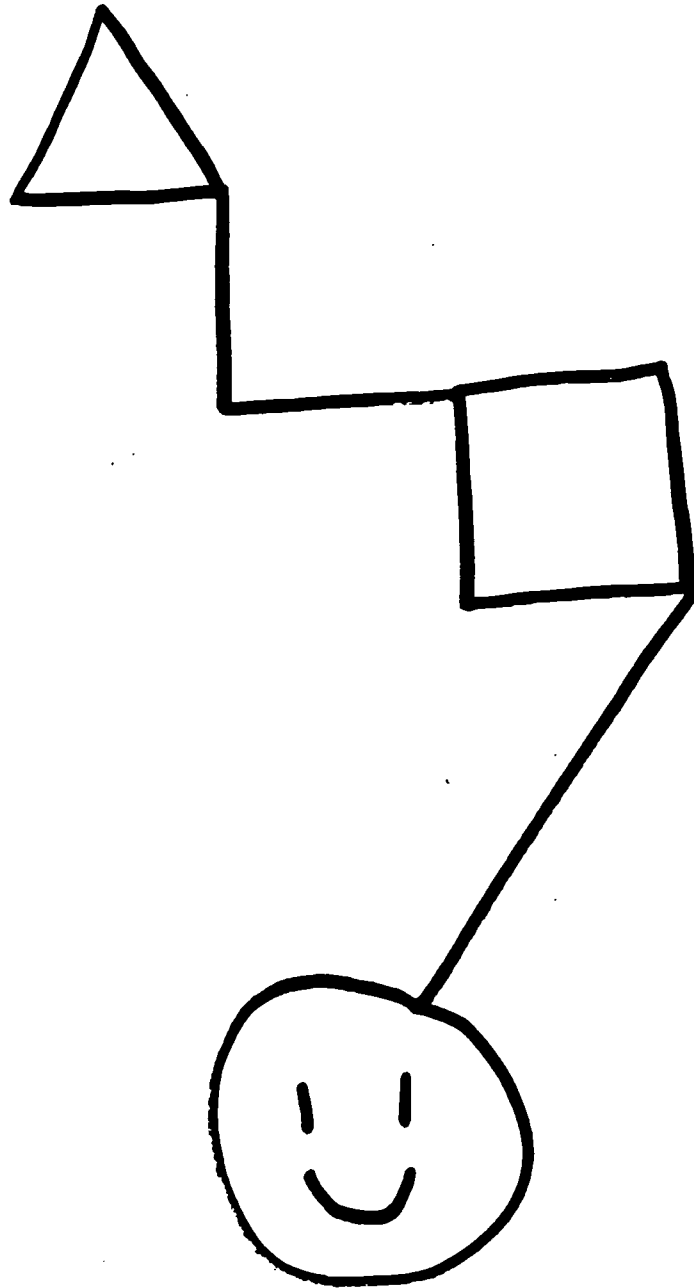


Appendix N

ONE WAY COMMUNICATION



Appendix O

TWO WAY COMMUNICATION

Appendix P

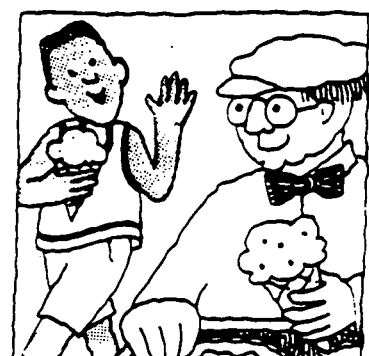
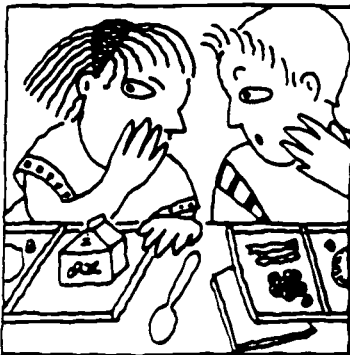
Attentive Listening**Looks like****Sounds like**

Looks like	Sounds like

Appendix Q

Stay Away or Come Close

Good manners help others to want to be around you. Color each picture that displays behaviors that would make you want to be with a person.



Manners matter because they help people want to be with you.

Appendix R

Feeling Words

sad

happy

frustrated

jealous

loving

relieved

curious

anxious

sympathetic

shocked

hurt

disappointed

apologetic

bored

guilty

miserable

enraged

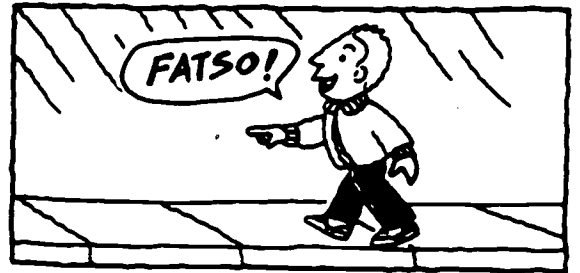
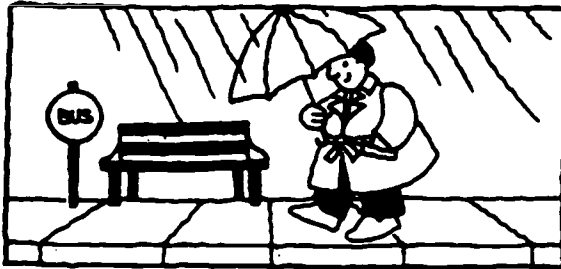
frightened

embarrassed

Appendix S

Honestly, Max!

Read the cartoon strip. Max is being very honest about the way he feels. So what is the problem?



Discuss with your teacher, classmates and parents when being honest with your feelings is not mannerly. What do manners have to do with feelings and sensitivity toward others? Remember it is OK to have negative feelings about others, but in certain times and situations it is best to keep them to yourself!

Circle the situations below in which honest feelings would be best kept to yourself.

in front of lots of people

when you don't know the person

when you could insult and embarrass a person

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Manners matter because they have to do with feelings and sensitivity.

Appendix T

Name _____

Personal and Group Responsibility

We all have a personal responsibility, which relates to ourselves only, and a group responsibility, which involves our membership in any group at a given time. Below are some items of responsibility. Put a check in the "Personal" column if you think the item is a responsibility you have individually. Put a check in the "Group" column if you think the item is a responsibility you have toward a group. Put a check in the "Both" column if you think the item belongs to both categories.

	Personal	Group	Both
To be on time	_____	_____	_____
To help others make good choices	_____	_____	_____
To complete homework on time	_____	_____	_____
To be polite	_____	_____	_____
To listen to others	_____	_____	_____
To speak appropriately	_____	_____	_____
To take turns	_____	_____	_____
To do assigned chores	_____	_____	_____
To help others in need	_____	_____	_____
To dress appropriately	_____	_____	_____

Remember that you are always building your personal or group reputation by what you do or don't do, what you say or don't say, and what you choose to be responsible for or what you decide to ignore. Below, explain what you think your reputation (the way other people see you) is right now. Then tell how you would like to improve your reputation in the future.

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