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ABSTRACT

The report describes a program to improve students social skills and level of responsibility. The targeted eighth and ninth grade students are located in two communities in northwestern Illinois. The problem of students exhibiting a lack of social skills and responsibility had been documented by student discipline referrals, anecdotal records, student surveys and checklists, and direct teacher observations checklists. Evidence of the problem of a lack of social skills and responsibility revealed that students lack direct instruction in social skills, failed to solve problems and make appropriate decisions, and were unable to work cooperatively as a group. A review of solution strategies suggested by knowledgeable others, together with an analysis of the problem statement, resulted in the selection of the following interventions: direct instruction in social skills, cooperative learning techniques, and direct instruction in problem solving and decision making strategies. Post intervention data indicated an increase improvement in students social skills and problem solving strategies. These noticeable changes in the targeted skills were reflected in the students ability to work together, resolve conflicts in positive manners, decrease off task behaviors, and apply cooperative learning techniques. The post intervention data from the teacher observation checklist displayed improvement in appropriate student behaviors. Nine appendixes are included containing copies of checklists, surveys, and self-assessments. (Contains 36 references.) (Author/GCP)

IMPROVING STUDENT SOCIAL SKILLS THROUGH THE USE OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING, PROBLEM SOLVING, AND DIRECT INSTRUCTION

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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

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ABSTRACT

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Post Intervention data indicated an increased improvement in students' social skills and problem-solving strategies. These noticeable changes in the targeted skills were reflected in the students' ability to work together, resolve conflicts in positive manners, decrease off task behaviors, and apply cooperative learning techniques. The post intervention data from the teacher observation checklist displayed improvement in appropriate student behaviors.

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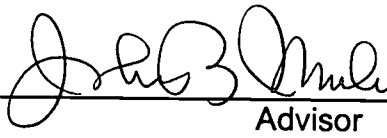

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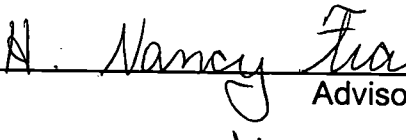

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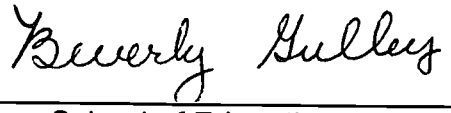

Dean, School of Education

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

The targeted 8th grade students and 9th grade students exhibited inappropriate social skills and a lack of responsibility that inhibited their academic achievement. Evidence for the existence of the problem included anecdotal records that documented discipline referrals to the administration, teacher observations, check lists, and student surveys.

Local Context

School A was a middle school whose student population was located in a lower middle-class area in northwestern Illinois. School A had a total enrollment of 1,353 students and was one of the largest middle schools in the state of Illinois and the only middle school in the district and the community. The middle school had been a member of the Association of Illinois Middle Schools (A.I.M.S.).

The attendance rate of the school was 94.2%. School A had a mobility rate of 38.1%. The truancy rate was 9.0% with 101 chronic truants. The student mobility rate was higher than the district average of 30.8% and the state mobility average of 17.5%. Using heterogeneous grouping, the average class size ranged between 21-26 students.

School A had a total of 110 staff members. Of this total, the following positions were held: 3 administrators, an administrative assistant, 86 teachers, 3 counselors, a full-time nurse, a health aide, 10 instructional aides, a district liaison officer, and a D.A.R.E. officer. The staff was 95% Caucasian, 2% African American, and less than 2.5% Asian. The staff was 78.5% female.

The average operating expenditure per student was $6,524.

Each grade level was divided into two separate teams. The teachers of School A were required to have a seven period day that included one common planning time per team. Each class period was 47 minutes in length. The language arts courses were taught in a two period block totaling 94 minutes. The core subjects were mathematics, science, and social studies. The middle school offered exploratory courses that included communications skills, music, art, home and family living, Quest, and Spanish.

Staff members were encouraged to have frequent contact with parents or guardians. During the course of the school year, 89.3% of the students' parents or guardians had personal contact with the school staff. Parent conferences were held twice a year with an average of 50.8% of the parents or guardians in attendance.

The staff of the middle school believed that it was their responsibility and purpose to prepare all students to be successful citizens in a global society. This was accomplished by providing a safe, nurturing environment which encouraged each student to achieve a high level of performance and fostered positive growth in social or emotional behaviors and attitudes.

The targeted school reported several accomplishments. A new reading series was initiated at all grade levels. An accelerated section of algebra was started at the eighth grade level. Aide assisted (Title 1) social studies and science classes were added at the fifth grade level. The curriculum in the eighth grade Quest program was expanded to include abstinence education. All computer systems were continually upgraded. The computerized food service checkout system was fully implemented. All eighth grade students attended a regional career fair. The fifth and sixth grade after school reading program was implemented.

The targeted school had established school improvement goals. These goals were to improve the students' mathematic, reading and writing skills, and general problem solving

abilities.

The middle school was built in the early 1960s. In 1991 School A was reorganized into a middle school. Because of an increase in the student population, the targeted school district annexed an elementary building next door to the middle school. The annexed building site, that housed fifth grade students, became part of the middle school.

Both buildings were connected by a walkway. In March 2000, the school district passed a $7.5 million referendum. In April 2001, construction began on the school. Both wings of the building were united with a central office that housed administration for the school, nurses' offices, counselors' offices, and conference rooms. A new computer lab, library, gymnasium, and several new classrooms were added to the building. Each grade level was given an individual hallway for the grade appropriate students.

The middle school was handicap accessible. The site was wired for Internet usage and each classroom was equipped with a telephone. The two wings of the building, north and south, were equipped with a cafeteria, gymnasium, and computer labs. The south wing of the building included two science and mathematics computer labs at the seventh grade level, a computer communications center, a home and family living lab, and a band room. The Temporary Education Program (T.E.P.), which was the in-school suspension program, the police liaison officer, and the administrative assistant were also located in this wing of the building. The north wing of the building contained the bilingual classroom, the music room, and two self-contained special education programs.

Several academic programs were offered at the targeted middle school. The programs included a bilingual class for the Spanish speaking students. The bilingual program included other students from a variety of non-English speaking cultures. Other academic programs that were offered to the students included Title 1, and Thinking, Enrichment, and Challenge (T.E.C.),

Junior Achievement (J.A.) was offered to all students in the building while the Drugs Awareness Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) program was offered to the fifth grade only.

Summer school was offered to all students who were retained. The district had 102 students complete the summer school program. From those students who attended, 77 students were from the targeted district. Of those students, 60 were promoted to the next grade level in the fall.

The middle school and five other districts utilized alternative school placement. The middle school placed 10 students in the alternative program. These students were from the seventh and eighth grade levels.

The students were also provided with non-academic programs. The number of students who participated in these programs were as follows: 25% in Students Taking A Right Stand (S.T.A.R.S.), 33% in band and chorus, and 31.5% in cheer leading and sports teams. Dances and skating events were provided for all students throughout the school year. Conflict mediation was available for students. Big Brother/Big Sister was provided for the students.

School B

The targeted high school, School B, was a multicultural, diverse, co-educational public high school for students in grades 9-12. The student population of the targeted high school was urban lower through upper class located in northwestern Illinois. This was the only high school in the district.

School B had a total student enrollment of 1,656 students in grades 9-12. Of the students enrolled, 48% were considered low income. The ratio and ethnic make-up of the school was 67% Caucasian, 27% African American, 5% Hispanic, and 0.5% Asian/Pacific Islander. Those students who spoke English-as-a-second language constituted 0.2% of the total student population. The attendance rate of the school was 92.3%. The school had a mobility rate of

26.9%, which was higher than the state average of 17.5%.

School B had a total of 97 full-time instructors. The racial and ethnic make-up of the school staff was 98.7% Caucasian, 8.7% African American, and 1.4% Hispanic. The school staff was composed of 73.1% female and 26.9% male staff members. The staff of the district had more Master Teacher award winners than any other district in the region. The average expenditure per student in the district was $6,401.

Classroom teachers were encouraged to have contact with the parents or guardians during the school calendar year. Parent conferences were held once a year, with 51% of the parents attending. School B had all of the students' parents/guardians having personal contact with the school staff during the year. This percentage exceeded the state average of 97.2%.

The school curriculum included comprehensive educational programs which provided opportunities for each individual student to reach his/her full potential. A "Saturday Academics" program was instituted for those students experiencing academic difficulties. School B was very active in a minority incentive program with 250 students who participated. A full-time director for mentoring instituted a program that was a target of 1,000 to one mentors.

The students were also provided with nonacademic programs. The high school featured five different bands and four choirs. Cooperative work training and business internship programs were available to the students. Several clubs, including French, German, Spanish, science, and letterman's, provided the students with opportunities for outside activities.

In the fall of 1997, the community overwhelmingly passed a $26 million referendum to upgrade all district buildings. With the new upgraded facilities, the district utilized a modified "year round" calendar that was implemented for the 2001-2002 school year. At the end of the 2002 school year, all facilities were wired for voice, data, and video in every classroom. School B was handicap accessible.

Community Context

The targeted school districts were located in the northwestern part of Illinois. The county and the communities were located approximately 150 miles from a major metropolitan area. The communities for the targeted schools were located in a valley between two rivers, the Mississippi River and the Rock River. The larger of the two rivers, the Mississippi River, provided the area with transportation, recreation and economic development opportunities. Major employers for the communities included John Deere, Trinity and Genesis Medical Centers, Alcoa, the Arsenal, Oscar Mayer, Ralston Purina, Mid American energy, Case I/H, and three riverboat casinos.

Cultural and entertainment facilities were easily accessible to the targeted communities and their surrounding areas. These facilities included a state historical site, several river front and local parks and marinas, children's and family museums, art museums, a combination convention/athletic/concert center, a separate exposition center, and the John Deere Pavilion. The targeted communities sponsored several local festivals and events throughout the course of the year. The area supported a symphony and three semi-professional sports teams.

The surrounding communities supported several institutions of higher learning. These facilities included three trade and technical schools, three universities, one four-year college, two community colleges, one graduate center, and one chiropractic college.

Fifteen percent of the nation's population resided within a 300 mile radius of site A and School B. This made the area an ideal market for virtually every product and service available. The area was recognized world wide as a major industrial center.

The community of School A had a population of 20,147. Of this populations, 16,833 persons were Caucasian, 2,003 African American, 192 Asian, and 1,052 from other races. The population was 49.4% male and 50.5% female.

There were 5,216 families in the community with 7,990 households, or 62%, that were

owner occupied. There were 3,014, or 37%, that were renter occupied. There were 2.3 persons per household. The number of households with school age children were 3,653 and 891 families were headed by a single female parent.

The age group distribution for the comity was divided into 3 groups: first, 34% of the population was 24 years of age or younger, second, 41% was between 25 and 54 years of age, and third, 25% was 55 years of age or older. Within the population, 1,145 persons had less than a ninth grade education, 2,460 persons a ninth through twelfth grade education with no diploma, 5,289 persons with a high school diploma or equivalency, 3,001 persons with some college, but no degree, 876 persons with an associates degree, 1,358 persons with a B.A., and 523 persons with a graduate or professional degree.

The median income in this community was $24,746 and the median family income was $31,449. the average non family income was $14,777. These average was $3,337 less than the national average. Families living on social security were 2,164, with an average income of $7,351. Public assisted households numbered 67 with an average income of $3,656. Families living on a retirement income numbered 1,872 with an average income of $9,511.

The number of employed persons over the age of 16 was 8,330. Among those employed, 21% worked in manufacturing, 23% in retail, and 17% in professional services. The targeted closing of Case I/H by the end of 2002 was a concern for the welfare of the targeted communities.

The community had instituted several major community initiatives. The Quarter was an initiative to revitalize the central business district through the creation of a vibrant waterfront area. The Economic Development Loan Fund offered low interest loans up to the maximum amount of $100,00 to qualified participants. Streetscape enhancements along the roadway and trail system had begun in the community. A regional sports center, a community center, an outdoor performance center, and outdoor playing fields had also been proposed. This proposal

included an interpretive center which explored the ecological and character of the Mississippi River, outdoor interpretive and wild life areas and the potential for outdoor performance grounds or I-Max Theater.

The Marina Housing and Mixed Used District had been proposed by the community of site A. The proposed development included 54 condominiums, private boat slips, an office complex. a river front theme restaurant, and a public marina and river trail. Three new housing developments had been built. The median value of an owner occupied home was $47,700 and the median rent was $314. The median year that housing units were built was 1961.

The targeted community supported an enterprise zone which offered special state and local tax incentives and regulatory relief that encouraged new and expanded business activity. The zone was designed to revitalize the community's industrial base and create new jobs.

The school district of the middle school supported four grade school buildings, one fifth grade site and one sixth through eighth grade site. This was an elementary district that was a feeder school to the separate high school district that was located in the targeted community. The total enrollment for the district was 2,572 students. From this enrollment, 64% were Caucasian, 14% African American, 21% Hispanic, ns 1.2% Asian/Pacific Islander. The percentage of low income students was 43%, with 7.5% having limited English proficiency. The district's attendance rate was 94.8%. The mobility rate was 30.8% and the chronic truancy rate was 6.4% with 151 chronic truants.

The number of teachers employed by the district was 180. The district staff was 15% male and 85% female. The ethnicity of the teaching staff was 93.4% Caucasian, 2.2% African American, 3.3% Hispanic, and 1.1% Asian/Pacific Islander. The average years of teaching experience was 16.4 years and 49.6% had a master's degree and above. The average teacher salary was $45,980 and the administrator's average salary was $74,281.

The educational expenditure for the district ws $13,544,921 yearly. The total expenditure was $18,813,458. The total expenditure included funds for operations and maintenance, transportation, bond and interest, rent, municipal retirement/social security, fire prevention and safety. Total assessed valuation ws $239,355,973. Tax rate per $100 assessed valuation was $3.6642. Operation expense per pupil was $6,812. The targeted community had passed a $7.5 million referendum for construction and renovation.

Information that concerned the middle school district was organized into the following groups: contact between parents or guardians, racial/ethnic background of the student's household, limited English proficiency, mobility, truancy and attendance, average class size, and time devoted to teaching core subjects. Core curriculum areas plans for improvement had been targeted by the school district. Each curriculum had developed a targeted mission. The core curriculum areas included language arts, social studies, mathematics, and science.

The middle school district administered both a standardized achievement test (Scholastic Testing Service) and the Illinois Achievement Test (I.S.A.T.) to students in grades 2-8. For the 2001 school year, the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills were administered to all fifth through eighth grade students. The district coordinated testing programs so students were tested in mathematics, language arts, reading, science, social studies, and reference skills each year.

The targeted school district had a board of education that consisted of seven members. The members were elected without pay of a four-year term. Meetings were open to the pubic and were held on a rotating schedule at each of the district school sites. Meetings were held on the first and third Wednesday of each month. The district had developed educational partnerships with a variety of local businesses and organizations. Higher educational institutions helped support high school and adult literacy programs for the community.

The mission for the targeted middle school district, in cooperation with the community,

was to prepare all students to become life-long learners who were productive, responsible members of a global society. It was a part of the mission to provide a safe nurturing and stimulating environment that offered educational experiences that promoted self-esteem, respect for individual differences, and excellence.

The community for the school district in which School B was located, had a population of 40,461. Of this population, 67% was Caucasian, 27% African American, 5% Hispanic, and 0.5% Asian/Pacific Islander. The population ws 51% female and 49% male.

There were 10,095 families in the community with a total of 16,099 households. The community had 16,264 housing units occupied. The total number of owner occupied units was 10,095 and the renter occupied units was 6,169. The median value of an owner occupied housing unit was $43,200 and the median rent was $313. The median year housing units were built was 1946.

The community offered urban, suburban, and rural housing alternatives to its residents. The biggest asset to the community was its neighborhoods. The Victorian neighborhood offered more than 550 homes in a variety of styles and were built between 1865 and 1915. Other neighborhoods offered homes that were built between 1895 and 1920 and had the original brick streets intact. Homes that were built from the 1920s to the 1950s bordered a state historical site.

The age group distribution of the community for school B was divided into 3 groups: first, 27% of the population was 24 years of age or younger, second, 40% was between the ages of 25 and 54, and third, 28% was 55 years of age or older, Within the population for targeted school B, 2,219 persons had less than a ninth grade education, 4,746 persons a ninth through twelfth grade education with no diploma, 9,817 persons with a high school diploma or equivalency, 7,450 persons with some college, but no degree, 1,572 persons with an associates degree, 3,243 persons with a B.A., and 1,045 persons with a graduate or professional degree.

The median income in the community was $24,131, and the median family income was $30,673. The per capita income was $12,381. The number of employed persons over the age of 16 was 34,00. Nearly 11% of the civilian labor force for the community is unemployed with many of those holding jobs under-employed.

The community in which the high school was located had undergone a renaissance with extensive restoration of homes and businesses. The district was the center for arts and cultural and entertainment options to the residents. The targeted community also sponsored America's largest go-kart races, presented laser light shows and historic walking tours and supported more than 30 art galleries. A botanical center provided the community members with a variety of special events that range from outdoor concerts to bald eagle days.

The school district for the high school supported thirteen elementary schools, two junior high schools, one high school, one alternative high school, and one early childhood center for handicapped students. In addition, 500 students participated in the district operated Head Start program.

Over 6,500 students were enrolled in the high school's district. The district had one of the largest minority populations in Illinois. Approximately 40% of the total enrollment was composed of minority students. The student population was 34% non-white, 46% low income and 67% of the families were single parent families. During the school year, 30% of the district's students moved.

The school district employed 450 certified staff members. An equal amount of non - certified personnel were also employed by the district. The average years of teaching experience was 14.9 years and 43.2% had a master's degree and above. The teacher's average salary was $49,500 and the administrator's average salary was $73,500.

The educational expenditure for the district was $39,788,693 yearly. The total

expenditure was $61,396,981. The total expenditure included funds for operations and maintenance, transportation, bond and interest, municipal retirement/social security, fire prevention, and safety. Operation expenses per pupil was $6,401. The community for the high school passed a $27 million referendum in 1997.

The administrative structure for the school district included a superintendent, three assistant superintendents, a comptroller and eight other persons in administrative positions. The seven school board members were elected at large. School board meetings were held bi-monthly.

The school district had developed several program goals. The district encouraged school participation in developmental asset building activities. Mentors were trained in effective techniques aimed at skill enhancement. The district had built a more caring relationship among elementary students and adult mentors. The district staff had encouraged the number of students engaged in school activities to increase. The district raised community awareness of the neighborhood assets through invitations to the buildings.

The district had several concerns. The high school had presented a freshman reading and study skills program to the board of education. Teachers were encouraged to identify classroom strategies and formulated action plans that were unique for an alternative. A safety audit of the high school had been initiated and completed. A safety core team had been established and security cameras had been installed. Practice drills for a closed campus and evacuation had been introduced to the students and faculty. A study had been suggested to address the current attendance policy. Instructors were encouraged to identify classroom strategies to promote student attendance.

National Context of the Problem

The lack of responsibility of students because of their poor social skills has generated concern at the state and national levels. This deficit inhibits the students' learning processes,

contributes to behavior problems in the classroom, and interferes with effective classroom management.

The lack of appropriate social skills negatively affects students' achievement and their willingness to accept responsibility for their own learning. As stated by Jones (1995), in engaged learning settings, students are responsible for their own learning; they take charge and are self regulated. They know their own strengths and weaknesses and know how to deal with them productively and constructively. Engaged learners are also able to shape and manage change.

Educators are concerned about the number of inappropriate verbal and physical interactions among students. Knowing the rules and rituals of social interactions and expectations in various situations helps students to be well adjusted and accepted. Some students come to school with good social skills while others severely lack social amenities.

The lack of responsibility of students because of inappropriate social skills has a direct effect on students' academic achievement. Poor student interactions limit the effectiveness of working with each other in cooperative groups. In order for students to function in a cooperative learning environment, students must be taught specific social skills. These skills should include effective communication skills, problem solving skills, and cooperation. Helping students develop responsibility through social skills means that they should be taught critical thinking, perceptive listening, clear and concise speaking, problem solving, conflict management, and cooperation.

Academic and social skills should be taught by teachers in tandem with the same degree of importance. Rice (1994) stated "In middle schools, academic skills take precedence and socialization is often forgotten, as it is no longer considered a priority. The assumption is that skills learned in the primary grades stay with students throughout the rest of their lives" (p.32).

Whether most have made significant changes in the last decade or not, one thing is certain; schools have been beleaguered by a flood of social problems plaguing children and young people.

Based on his study of students at risk, Frymier (1992) concluded, "...problems that most children face lie outside the school rather than inside, on the street, rather than on the playground, and in the living room rather than in the classroom" (p.29). To be educationally disadvantaged on several indicators heightens the probability of educational failure.

As reported by Johnson and Johnson (1990), students do not have the innate capability to interact effectively with others. The lack of social skills has a detrimental effect on the students' behavior. Researchers found that educators are concerned with the number of inappropriate social skills exhibited among students. These include things such as invading others' space, talking out, laughing at others, and rude remarks (Cook & Rudin, 1997).

Inappropriate social skills that interfere with positive social interaction in schools is a nationwide concern. The inability to solve social problems interferes with classroom management. Poor student interaction limits the effectiveness of working together to reach a goal. The lack of social skills interferes with learning and increased incidents of problem behaviors disrupt classroom management.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

The targeted eighth grade middle school students and the targeted ninth grade high school students exhibited inappropriate social skills that interfered with their success in the classroom and success in their interpersonal relationships. The existence of the problem was documented through anecdotal records of homework grades, teacher observation checklists, surveys that predicted student behaviors, student referrals, test scores, and academic grades.

Anecdotal records investigated by the researchers consisted of referrals for serious classroom behavior problems and infractions, office referrals, classroom detentions, and daily attendance records. Prior to the issuing of office behavioral referrals, preliminary steps had to be implemented and procedures followed by classroom instructors and administrative staff. Preliminary steps included verbal and written instructor warnings, conferences or mediation with the student, parental contact through phone calls and written letters, counseling intervention methods and classroom detentions. Office behavioral referrals focused on physical and verbal confrontations and insubordination to staff members. Detentions for the classroom focused on inappropriate behavior exhibited in the classroom, poor academic performance, and poor classroom attendance including tardiness. Detentions for poor academic performance concentrated on the students' failure to complete assigned homework, failure to turn in assignments, and failure to complete missing assignments in a timely manner. Researchers charted

daily attendance to identify any possible patterns with the targeted eighth and ninth grade students

Researchers collected data about the existence and extent of the problems from anecdotal records provided by the targeted schools. Office behavioral referrals that indicated students' inappropriate behavior, were recorded from August 2000 through June 2001 of the previous school year. Table 1 notes the number of incidents and behavioral categories for School A.

Table 1

Categories and Number of Discipline Referrals August through June

Behavior Category	All Students	Students Minus Top 5%
Defiance of Teachers	217	59
Disrespect of Authority	298	101
Disruptive Behavior	339	148
Threats Toward Others	116	60
Violent Actions	226	118
Total	1,196	486

n=1,308

School A had an enrollment of 1,308 students. From the anecdotal records, 50% or more of the referrals for discipline problems were instituted by approximately 5% of the entire student population. Administrators estimated that approximately one third of the discipline referrals were attributed to eighth grade students. Any student seen in the office over four times

was considered to have chronic behavior problems.

Researchers collected data from the anecdotal records for School A for the targeted eighth grade students. Data collected were from the period of August 2000 through June 2001. Table 2 represents a summation of the anecdotal records for this period at School A for the eighth grade students.

Table 2

Categories and Number of Eighth Grade Student Referrals August through June.

Behavior Category	Number of 8th grade students
Defiance	76
Disrespect Toward Staff	105
Disruption of Classroom	131
Inappropriate Conduct	76
Refusal to Cooperate	60
Presence in Unauthorized Area	24
Skipped Detention	288
Tardy to Class	114

n=315

Of the incidents recorded during the 2000-01 school year, 7% of the eighth grade students accounted for 51% of the discipline problems of School A. Many of these students had multiple infractions and were considered to be chronic. From the anecdotal records provided to the researchers, Table 3 was developed to document the total actions taken by administration for

these infractions.

Table 3

Infraction Actions for School A Eighth Grade August through June.

Infraction Action	Number of Eighth Grade Students
Alternative Placement	16
Bus Privileges Revoked	43
Detentions,classroom	439
Detentions, Office	106
Suspended from school	101
Temporary Education Program	264
Warnings	134

n=315

Researchers collected data about the existence and extent of the problems from anecdotal records provided by School B for the ninth grade students. Office behavioral referrals that indicated students' inappropriate behavior, were recorded from August 2000 through June 2001. Data was recorded on a quarterly basis and grouped according to gender. Table 4 notes the number of incidents and behavioral categories for School B.

Table 4

Categories and Number of Discipline Referrals August 2000 through June 2001

Behavior Category	1st Quarter	2nd Quarter	3rd Quarter	4th Quarter
Defiance	500	343	310	436
Disrespect	54	53	46	79
Disruptive	4	48	84	108
Threats	2	10	11	31
Violence	40	9	33	18
Total	604	419	474	672

n=1,603

Researchers collected data from the anecdotal records for School B for the targeted ninth grade students. Data collected were from the period of August through June. Table 5 represents a summation of the anecdotal records for this period at School B for the ninth grade students.

Table 5

Categories and Number of Ninth Grade Student Referrals August 1, 2000 through June 30, 2001

Behavior Category	Number of 9th grade students
Defiance/Insubordination	52
Disrespect Toward Staff	59
Disruption of Classroom	399
Inappropriate Conduct	359
Refusal to Cooperate	262
Presence in Unauthorized Area	606
Skipped Detention	66
Tardy to Class	949

n=547

Of the incidents recorded during the 2000-01 school year, 8 % of the ninth grade students accounted for 55 % of the discipline problems of School B. Many of these students had multiple infractions and were considered to be chronic. From the anecdotal records provided to the researchers, Table 6 was developed to document the total actions by administration for these infractions.

Table 6

Infraction Actions for School A Ninth Grade August 1, 2000 through June 30, 2001

Infraction Action	Number of Ninth Grade Students
Alternative Placement	17
Detentions	3,491
Suspended	353
Temporary Education Program	39

n=547

Teacher surveys were issued to the eighth grade teachers of School A and the ninth grade teachers of School B prior to the beginning of the intervention. The teachers surveyed included the regular education, elective course, and special education teachers who saw the eighth grade students on a regular basis. Teachers' responses at School A and School B indicated that students had the most difficulty in staying on task, accepting consequences for behaviors, working with and solving conflicts within a group, and using school appropriate social skills.

Anecdotal records provided information about the existence and the extent of the problems. Office behavioral referrals indicating a problem regarding students' inappropriate behavior were recorded from September 2000 through June 2001 of the previous school year. From the referrals issued to students, researchers determined that inappropriate interpersonal and intrapersonal behaviors interfered more often with a positive classroom environment.

Probable Causes

Teacher researchers at the targeted middle school and high school identified four

probable causes that existed for the inappropriate student behaviors exhibited at both schools: students lacked the ability to interact with peers from other cultures and ethnic groups, students faced a multitude of influential problems outside the classroom, students failed to see meaningful possibilities for the future, and students lacked the self-discipline that provided the foundation on which moral behavior is built.

Researchers determined that student behaviors were influenced by the negative behaviors that were modeled by others in society. Television and movie violence, video and computer games, the acceptance of unsportsmanlike conduct at athletic events by participants and spectators, and the acceptance of domestic violence and drug abuse seemed to be major contributors to the problem. The negative role models that students were exposed to influenced them to use violent acts as a resolution to their problems. Berreth and Berman (1997) described children as "mirrors" that were the reflections of today's society. When the needs of the child were not addressed and met, violent tendencies and behaviors were brought to the forefront and focused on material values and gratification. Children were influenced to seek out an instant response and gratification to their wants and desires. Gest, Witkin, Hetter, and Wright (as cited by Roper, 1998) stated that the Children's Defense Fund reported an increase in juvenile gun violence. From 1982 to 1992, the incidents of teenagers ages 13 to 15 arrested on murder charges doubled from 390 cases to 740 cases on a national level.

Researchers also determined that the family structure was a large contributor to the students' lack of appropriate skills. Educators often operated on the assumption that appropriate social skills and a sense of responsibility had been taught and reinforced throughout the child's home rearing.

Many families of the targeted students had a family member incarcerated in the local prison. The absence of this family member contributed to a lack of family support. There were

fewer positive role models in the home, and students were often left with no instructions and unsupervised for unusually long blocks of time. This fundamental change in the basic family structure had a negative effect on students and their use of appropriate social skills and acceptance of academic and social responsibilities.

Garbarino (1997) stated that children are most vulnerable to the negative influences of an increasingly "socially toxic" environment. A study conducted by Garbarino found that over the past 30 years there has been a 50% decrease in the time that parents spend with their children engaging in positive constructive family activities. The lack of constructive family time has made it easy for children to give in to negative societal influences. As a result of the lack of time spent with positive adult role models, children have more opportunities to engage in negative behaviors.

One of the basic problems facing students in the classroom is the lack of direct instruction of social skills. Teachers, aides, and administrators of the targeted schools often lack sufficient and appropriate training for the incorporation of social skills in the curriculum. Teachers maybe inadequately trained to incorporate social skills into their curriculum and many students fail to see the relevance for developing appropriate social skills. The teaching of social skills to students is often not effectively incorporated into all areas of the curriculum. Lack of appropriate teacher training and failure to use direct instruction strategies may contribute to the students' failure to see meaningful possibilities for their education and their own future.

As a result of the lack of direct instruction of social skills, many students may not be able to establish and develop strong interpersonal relationships. Conflict mediation programs are resources instituted by both schools studied, but are not used consistently by all staff members. Little transfer from these programs was noted in the classroom. Researchers concluded that in the past, parents took more responsibility for teaching their children appropriate social skills. Today, the evidence of parental support is severely lacking. Social skills exhibited in the

classroom are just as important as those used in the home or in any other social situation. Not knowing the rules and rituals of social interactions and expectations in a variety of situations inhibited the students from being well adjusted and accepted. Students are expected to use certain manners in the school environment using the teacher as their role model.

After examining the investigative literature, researchers were able to find evidence that supported the students' failure to make appropriate decisions. "Teaching for consequences encourages students to realize what they decide to do matters" (Hansen, 1998, p.20). Many pupils fail to understand the relationships between actions and consequences. Instead of applying appropriate strategies, students often depend upon counselors, staff, and their peers for making decisions and solving problems.

Researchers concluded that students were often unable to successfully interact in small diverse groups in a cooperative learning environment. Students are often grouped by traditional methods with little to no knowledge of cooperative learning techniques. Success of cooperative learning groups is often inhibited by the lack of definitive cooperative role assignments. Failure to accept cultural and ethnic differences, personal disagreements and unequal contributions of group participants are contributing factors for the unsuccessful implementation of cooperative learning in the classroom. Time restraints for cooperative learning implementation, outdated facilities, over crowded and limited classroom space, and financially under- supported facilities often contribute to the lack of teacher implementation of cooperative learning methods and techniques. Carlson and Bullion (1995) reported that students knew how to work in groups but did not know how to interact cooperatively.

Kramer (1998) cited several probable reasons for the lack of appropriate social and decision making and problem solving skills. Students' lack of self-esteem and self-respect, the inability of students to communicate thoughts and feelings on sincere personal levels, and

unrealistic life expectancies contribute to the problem. Gender issues are a factor concerning socioeconomic levels of expectation and in the background for child rearing.

After reviewing available articles and literature, researchers at the targeted middle school and high school found the following causes of students' inappropriate behaviors: deficient instruction of social skills, poor implementation problem solving strategies, the disruption of family, and failure of students to accept responsibility and the consequences for their behavior.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

Researchers at the targeted middle school and high school conducted a study of available literature related to the teaching of cooperative learning techniques, decision making and problem solving strategies, and the development of appropriate social skills. The wide range of findings supported the teacher researchers' initial observations that the students' lack of appropriate social skills inhibits students' academic achievement levels and their ability to accept responsibility for their behaviors and their consequences. From the articles studied, researchers determined that the students lack of appropriate social skills and the failure to accept responsibility for inappropriate actions was a concern nationwide.

Morgan and Jensen (1988) defined social skills as "interpersonal behaviors that allow an individual to interact with others successfully" (p. 245). Social skills include verbal and nonverbal behaviors and attitudes used to develop positive communication with peers, family members, and other persons. The positive development of these skills is essential for students to be successful in school and in the real world.

Social skills must be taught and learned, and transfer of that learning made to everyday learning and living situations. There is no guarantee that socially unskilled students will successfully cooperate with one another when placed in cooperative groups. Appropriate social

skills must be taught to the students in order to achieve high quality levels of cooperation. Students who achieve higher levels of cooperation are more motivated to implement appropriate social skills to be a positive and productive individual in a global society.

Social skills are essential for successful functioning in a modern global society. The knowledge and transfer of appropriate social skills enables students to get along well with one another. When a lack of appropriate social skills is exhibited there often is an increase of student misbehavior. Through the improvement of social skills misbehavior maybe reduced and students' time on task increases. Johnson and Johnson (1990) noted that people with strong interpersonal skills are employable, productive, and successful in the work place. Employers stated that the most desirable skills were interpersonal and problem solving skills, verbal communication, acceptance of responsibility, and initiative and motivation. Researchers for the Center for Public Resources found that 90% of people fired from jobs were fired for "poor job attitudes, poor interpersonal relationships, and inappropriate behavior" (as cited in Johnson & Johnson, 1990, p. 32).

Bellanca and Fogarty (1991) suggested that weak social skills of students should be identified during the first quarter of the school year. In teaching students appropriate social skills through cooperative learning strategies, the instructor needs to understand what skills to teach and how to teach those skills. As reported by Deci and Ryan (1985) and Lepper and Malone (1987), providing students with a sense of control and choice over their school lives often increases their intrinsic motivation. When choices over class activities are given, many students exhibit more interest in the course content, value the subject more, and are more focused on learning for mastery (Pintrick, 1992). When cooperative learning groups are formed, students must learn both academic subject material and interpersonal small group skills that are required to function as part of a group or teamwork.

The targeted social skills focused on and taught should be age appropriate and based on individual classroom needs. Examples of social skills taught at the middle school and high school levels might included: using school appropriate verbal and body language, using an appropriate speaking volume in the classroom, preparedness for class, mutual respect for peers and their belongings, acceptance of the responsibility for behavior and logical consequences for their actions, and acceptance of the cultural diversity in the classroom and in society. As the pioneer psychologist, William James (1890), observed over 100 years ago, "No fiendish punishment could be devised were such a thing possible, than that one should be turned loose in a society and remain absolutely unnoticed by all the members thereof" (p. 179).

To become a functioning member of society, the understanding, practice, and transfer of appropriate social skills are essential. Johnson and Johnson (1996) stated that individuals are not born instinctively knowing how to interact effectively with others. The teaching of appropriate social skills enables students to get along with one another inside and outside the classroom. The lack of appropriate social skills contributes to the misbehavior of students, inhibits their academic achievement, and impedes their level of success in the outside world.

A sense of control over the events in life yields a feeling of mastery and a feeling of success. The opposite of mastery is helplessness. Students who feel they have little control over outcomes of their achievement may develop a sense of learned helplessness.

The strategy of direct instruction may be the most effective method to teach social skills. Educators cannot and should not be under the assumption that students who enter the classroom have been given a positive background in interpersonal relationships.

Children learn social behaviors through real life experiences. Social behaviors are learned from the available models and may have negative or positive effects on the child. Through classroom and life experiences, students acquire memories or learned cause and effect

relationships, which enhances their predictive ability. Predictive ability is prerequisite to achieving control over events in the students' environment.

Johnson and Johnson (1990) listed five steps for the direct instruction of appropriate social skills. First, the student must think the skill is important and relevant. Second, the student must understand the skill and transfer this understanding to the appropriate use of the skill. Third, students need to practice the skills until a mastery level is achieved. Fourth, students need to reflect on the uses of the skills. Finally, students must practice the skills that are taught on a daily or ongoing basis (p. 29-33). If educators follow the suggested steps of direct instructions of social skills, students are provided with the necessary and essential tools and mechanics required for achievement not only in school, but in the work place and in their interpersonal relationships.

According to MacMullin (as cited in Jordan & Clematis, 1997), appropriate social skills enable the students to get along with one another. Misbehavior is the largest negative component indicating the lack of social skills. As stated in A Nation Still At Risk (1998), U.S. youngsters hold their own at the elementary level but falter in the middle years and drop behind in high school. The U.S. appears to be the only country in the world whose children fall farther behind the longer they stay in school. Goleman's emotional intelligence theory (as cited by Burke, 2000) indicates that students who master social skills and gain acceptance by their peers are better able to achieve personal, social, and academic success for themselves as well as contribute to society.

Cummins and Haggerty (1997) designed and implemented a project called "Raising Healthy Children." The intention of project was to instruct students in social skills that strengthened their interpersonal relationships with family and other students, thus contributing to a reduction in the risk of behavior problems. Workshop sessions included practice, reinforcement, and generalization of skills.

The primary focus for the "Raising Healthy Children" project was centered on staff development. Educators at the middle school and high school levels were given opportunities for training and practice two to three years prior to the institution of the the project. Staff development trained teachers in techniques for integration of social learning skills that would be implemented in the classroom

Trained teachers incorporated proactive classroom management skills in the classroom through teaching students to become self managers. Teachers were provided with an awareness of the interpersonal and intrapersonal skills of the students. Teachers implemented new strategies that conveyed the necessity for increasing student participation.

Cummins and Haggerty (1997) reported that not all issues that encompassed social behaviors improved. In general, the students' behaviors improved overall. Students' ability to use better judgment may have been the result of the direct teaching of social skills.

Ayres and Heeden (1996) reported that several strategies for problem solving were necessary for students to develop and implement solutions for behavioral problems. Working together, students and faculty produced ideas to develop possible solutions to the behavior problems of the students. Input from teachers, parents, students, and school administrators was used to develop criteria for the improvement of social skills. Goals for positive behavior and alternative communication methods were established to enable more positive responses from the students.

Three important needs must be met to provide possible solutions for improving social skills. These needs consist of choices, structure, and predictability. A four phase process was implemented to meet these needs. First, moving from one activity to another within the classroom was implemented. Second, students were given a sense of control over their learning. Third, teachers and students worked together to establish the standards for the classroom at the

beginning of the school year. Finally, information was shared with other students as to the inappropriate behavior of some of the other students in the class. Positive changes were noted by the teachers (Ayres & Heeden, 1996).

Conflict resolution is a strategy that can be incorporated to aid students in the improvement of interpersonal relations and the development of better problem solving techniques. Conflict is the difference of opinion. According to the National Institute for Dispute Resolution (as cited by Michlowski, 1999), conflict resolution programs in schools have grown from 50 to 5,000 since 1984. Conflicts among students are not always solved in a positive constructive manner. Conflict may occur naturally through the process of communication. "As it continues to grow in acceptance, conflict resolution may yet become the fourth R in basic education" (Michlowski, 1999, p. 108).

Michlowski (1999) stated there are three types of conflicts that confront students. These types of individual conflicts include conflicting goals, needs, and resources. When competition occurs between students and individual goals, disagreements occur because only one goal can be satisfied. When two or more students want different things conflict of needs occurs. Availability of lack of availability of materials causes a conflict of resources. The three types of conflicts can be handled by constructive or destructive means. Students who are unable to positively solve problems, destructive ways are often chosen as the acceptable means to resolve differences . Children who experience violence, anger, or destructive tendencies in the home on a regular basis, these methods may be accepted as a normal response to conflict resolution.

When students are instructed in effective conflict resolution techniques, a win-win environment is facilitated. Individuals who used positive conflict resolution strategies were empowered. "The objectives of conflict resolution and peer mediation programs are to teach students self responsibility and self regulation while empowering them to act in socially

approved ways" (Vatalaro, 1999, p.115). When students are provided with constructive behavior choices, students learn the skills necessary to acknowledge and understand the feelings and points of view of others and are able to solve problems in ways that are socially acceptable.

Students and staff members trained in positive and constructive conflict resolution methods for use in the classroom, can successfully transfer these methods and knowledge outside the classroom environment. Through the use of more effective communication skills, students are able to resolve problems in a timely manner, are issued fewer referrals, can improve relationships with peers in a positive manner, and improve their general attitude concerning the school environment.

Conflict resolution is a positive and constructive means to understanding and dealing with interpersonal relationships. Former U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno (as cited by Vollmer, Drook, & Harned, 1999) noted that cases reach the juvenile justice system too late when dealing with today's youth. Federal, state, and local governments need to emphasize and encourage means that are proactive and support the implementation of the teaching of social skills on an equal basis with other academic programs.

Ostlund (1992) reported that assessment for successfully teaching students appropriate social skills is the responsibility of the teacher. Assessment of the students' appropriate skills is done on a continual basis by the classroom teacher. Reminding and reinforcing the expected behaviors of the students is part of the teaching of appropriate social skills. Researchers determine that the teaching of social skills to students needs to be given the same emphasis as academic requirements.

Cooperative learning strategies may be another tool for teachers to use as an intervention for the development, improvement, and reinforcement of positive social skills. Slavin (1995) defined the cooperative learning process as students working together in teams to master

material. As reported by Johnson and Johnson (1989), there is a positive interdependence among students' goals. Students perceive that they can reach their goals if and only if the other students in the learning group also reach their goals. Poet John Doeness famous line, "No man is an island, entire of itself" is applicable to the cooperative learning group.

Cooperative learning methods have a long history. Since the first research study in 1898, nearly 600 experimental and 100 correlational studies have been conducted. Slavin (1995) reported social psychological research on cooperation that dated back to the 1920s. The positive effects of cooperative learning encompasses many educational and personal outcomes. These effects make cooperative learning one of the most valuable tools educators have.

Cooperative learning exists when students work together to accomplish shared learning goals (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). Lumpe and Haney (1998) suggested that a teacher's belief about using cooperative learning plays an important role in its implementation. In classrooms where teachers exhibit positive attitudes toward cooperative learning methods, students are more likely to attain higher levels of achievement, increase time on task, build cross- cultural relationships, develop self-esteem, acquire master skills, and develop habits needed to function as productive members of a global society.

Cohen (1994) stated that because group work dramatically changes the teacher's role, professional development is vital to the implementation of cooperative learning. To learn, implement, and utilize cooperative strategies, teachers need the availability of extensive professional development. This professional development may include: 1) the theory and philosophy of cooperative learning; 2) demonstrations of cooperative learning methods, and 3) ongoing coaching and support at the classroom level. The implementation of cooperative learning is greatly enhanced when teachers have opportunities to work together and learn from one another.

Cooperative learning methods provide teachers with effective ways to respond to diverse student populations through the promotion of academic achievement and cross-cultural understanding. Students and teachers need strategies to help them turn diversity into a positive force for developing themselves as individuals, as well as supporting the growth of others. New ideas for meeting the needs and challenges of a diverse school population must be developed cooperatively by staff and administrators through the use of staff development.

Rice (1994) noted that cooperative learning methods not only strengthen the idea of relevancy but also provide students with real life learning situations. The success of cooperative learning in the classroom is centered on the teacher's success with basic cooperative learning elements and a commitment by the teacher to incorporate and utilize cooperative learning in the classroom. The elements that are essential to develop and incorporate cooperative learning include face-to-face interaction, social skills development, positive interdependence, individual accountability, and group processing.

Johnson and Johnson (as cited in Bellanca & Fogarty, 1992) stated there are five necessary characteristics for cooperative learning. In order for cooperative learning to be present in the classroom, all five characteristics must be included. To develop positive interdependence and provide students with face-to-face interaction, small, heterogeneous teams of four or five members are formed. By working toward a group task, each member is accountable for part of an outcome that cannot be successfully completed unless all members of the group work together. When assisting each other to achieve a common goal, positive interdependence is developed. Members are engaged in team building activities that help develop social skills necessary for teamwork. Group processing activities allow discussion of interpersonal skills that influence the effectiveness of the group's ability to work together. To insure that cooperative learning is successfully being used, teachers must incorporate these five elements into their activities.

When cooperative learning is implemented in the classroom, the role of the teacher changes. Meaningful tasks that require the active participation of each student in the group to achieve a common goal must be carefully designed by the classroom teacher. In a cooperative learning lesson, the role of the teacher, with the cooperation of the students, begins as the task setter. As groups cooperatively work on the assigned tasks, the teacher's role changes to a facilitator/coach mode. In this role, the teacher moves from group to group to motivate the learning process. The facilitator role provides the classroom teacher with an opportunity to provide on-going feedback and the ability to assess the progress of each cooperative group.

Manning and Lucking (1990) stated that educators who wanted to implement cooperative learning needed to be aware of the variety of cooperative learning models. Johnson and Johnson (1978) stated benefits from cooperative learning included acceptance of differences of gender, ethnicity, and the limitations of individuals.

Researchers determined that a wide variety of cooperative learning methods could be successfully implemented in the classroom. Individual teachers are responsible for determining which model or models meet the needs of their classrooms and apply to their objectives. Sapon-Shevin and Schniedewind (1990) noted that when cooperative learning methods are implemented in the classroom, communication, sharing, and working as a unit to achieve a common goal is encouraged. Cooperative learning has the "...potential to transform classrooms, schools, and ultimately, society, by creating communities of caring and support, which in turn, engender high levels of achievement in many domains" (p. 63).

Problem solving is another intervention that can be implemented in the classroom to aide in the improvement of student social skills. Problem solving strategies in the curriculum that includes identifying problems, creating choices, and setting goals are essential for the instruction of appropriate social skills. Because of the complex and ever-changing nature of society, students

find themselves confronted by many situational problems. Life may be thought of as an endless series of situations that require some kind of response. It is the ineffectiveness of the response that can turn any situation into a problem.

Martinez (1998) reported that decision making is a process that can be taught rather than relying on traditional trial and error methods. Problem solving steps need to be taught in a sequential manner that will result in an acceptable solution. In order to reach an acceptable solution, the strategy incorporates a visual aid that consists of stating, narrating, and diagramming the problem. When students put the problem on paper, the brain is given the opportunity to center on the problem to be addressed. The individual can determine and simplify the intended goal. Groups found this method beneficial when trying to reach a consensus.

The next step in the problem solving process enables students to self-reflect. Martinez stated that flexibility is a key component in the problem solving process. Students often make a choice without considering other possibilities when reaching a possible solution. Students are enabled to evaluate other options toward a solution if they are taught steps for effective decision making/problem solving.

Costa (1991) stated that it is important to teach thinking skills to students. The direct teaching of thinking skills needs to be incorporated into all areas of the curriculum instead of being taught separately in isolated incidents. When these skills are interwoven through the curriculum, students maybe more capable of transferring thinking skills in problem solving skills. By focusing on a specific problem, teachers maybe able to maintain desired student behaviors before and during class time instruction. The process of decision making provided purposeful thinking (Brandt, 1988).

Nardi and Walesas (as cited in Costa, 1991) noted that problem solving was a critical step that has an effect on everyone. Decision making is the central core of what students learned.

Problem solving strategies are supported by reasoning skills. Five thinking steps for the basic decision making process can be introduced to the students. These steps include: identifying the situation, developing and stating the goal, brainstorming ideas, developing a plan of action, and implementing the plan of action. Decision makers incorporated the five " WH" words (Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How) in the steps of identifying a situation. Stating the goal is the most crucial step in the plan. Stating the goal sets the direction by which its merits were evaluated.

Students need to reflect on how well the solution is working and what part or parts of the solution need to be changed. If the solution does not work, students need to be given the opportunity to repeat the process to find and implement a new solution to the problem. Students need to be taught that it is all right to make a mistake, learn from that mistake, and find a new solution to the problem so it is not repeated again.

Effective conflict resolution is an integral part of the problem solving intervention. Students are taught that society is constantly in a state of constant change. Today's students find themselves continually confronted with situational problems that may range from trivial to crucial. If solutions are not determined and implemented, problems can become a source of chronic anger. As stated by the philosopher Epicitus, "What disturbs people's minds is not events, but their judgments on events" (p.1).

Costa (1997) stated that flexibility in thinking is an essential component in developing problem solving skills in students. Many students have difficulty considering other points of view and processing several sources of information at the same time. From the student's perspective, the only way to solve the problem is to solve it his way and nothing else appears to matter. Their interest lies in knowing that their answer is correct instead of being challenged to use a logical process to finding the correct solution.

Teachers need to be trained to focus on presenting students with challenging situations that enable the learner to develop higher order thinking skills, to develop creativity in developing acceptable solutions, and to resolve complex problems. As stated by Costa (1988), there are a dozen characteristics that teachers can teach and observe to develop intelligent thinking skills and behavior patterns. These characteristics include:

1. Persistence - persevering when the solution to a problem is not immediately clear.
2. Decrease impulsiveness through the clarification of goals, planning, and exploring alternative problem solving methods.
3. The ability to listen to another person, to empathize, and to understand a different point of view.
4. Flexibility in thinking.
5. Metacognition: awareness of our own thinking.
6. Checking for accuracy and precision.
7. Precision of language and thought.
8. Drawing on past knowledge posing. There needs to be a shift from teacher posed questions and problems toward having students as questions and find problems for themselves.
9. Using all senses. Senses can be utilized in many ways to solve problems: scrutinize, visualize, role play, illustrate, and model build.
10. Creativity. Students need to be taught to use lateral thinking strategies that stimulate their ability and desire to take risks and to seek alternative solutions to a multitude of real life situations.
11. Question and problem posing. There needs to be a shift from teacher posed questions and problems toward having students ask questions and find problems for

themselves.

12. A sense of efficacy as a thinker. Students need to be taught to move from an "I can" mode toward and "I enjoy" mode and to solve their problems with increasing interdependence. (p. 22)

Learning to solve problems is easier when the problem solver is encouraged to adopt an outlook that encourages independent problem solving behaviors. It is usually an individual's ineffective coping strategies used to solve important problems that eventually become sources of chronic anger and aid in the development of a sense of helplessness. Problems become a puzzle that seems insoluble, causing frustration and anger.

Evaluating the consequences for solutions and creating effective strategies, is part of becoming an effective problem solver. Weisinger (1985) noted that learning to problem solve is made easier when a problem solver's outlook is adapted. The problem solver's outlook encourages independent problem solving behaviors. Problem -solving behaviors necessary to adapt included accepting the fact that problems constitute an normal part of life, recognizing problems when they occur, and inhibiting the tendency to respond either on the first impulse or to do nothing at all.

The ineffective problem solver is inclined to think that it is not acceptable to have problems. Problems are viewed as something to hide and that acknowledging the existence of problems is to admit personal failure. Even with the acceptance of the complexities of the surrounding environment, identification of the problem is not always easy. The problem solver often does not recognize the existence of a problem until failing in a situation instead of succeeding. The able problem solver is capable of recognizing emotional reactions to a problem and uses it to focus on what is producing the situation, not on denying a problem's existence or avoiding it.

Successful problem solvers have the capacity to control themselves and not to respond automatically or inappropriately to problems. Successful problem solvers are not impulsive, impatient, or more inclined to look for alternative solutions rather than give up if the solution is not immediately apparent.

Weisinger (1985) noted that two major goals are to be met to aid in the creation of new solution to any kind of problem that is encountered. First, the problem solver must be involved in skills that make available the greatest variety of potentially effective solutions to the problem at hand. The second goal is to increase the probability for the selection of the best response possible from a variety of options. The S.O.L.V.E. acronym is used to help the problem solver remember the technique to become effective in their choices. It stands for:

S State the problem

O Outline response

L List alternatives

V Visualize consequences

E Evaluate results (Weisinger, p.121)

The first step implemented from the S.O.L.V.E. problem solving model incorporates the defining and identification of the problem. Thinking about the various aspects of life enable the problem solver to identify and focus on the areas of life that contain the most problems. Second, the problem solver needs to specifically describe the problem and the usual response. When the problem is specifically and concretely stated, the problem solver is able to determine what is relevant to solving the problem. By reframing the statement, the problem solver shifts the creation of the problem from the situation to the individual problem solver. Reframing gives the problem solver the opportunity to generate goals that contribute to the creation of an effective

response. Third, by listing possible alternatives, appropriate solutions are generated including the most effective response. Fourth, consequences for each strategy need to be visualized in order to select the most appropriate solution. Good problem solvers believe that long-term positive consequences are better than short-term positive consequences. Finally, results of the process need to be evaluated. After new responses have been implemented, it is necessary to observe the actual consequences. If the consequences are not meeting the targeted goal, it may be necessary to repeat the problem solving process until a productive solution is developed.

Educators struggle with the problem of moral reasoning when teaching students to be effective problem solvers. If educators understood the developmental process, methods could be created to help teach students reach their full moral maturity and develop moral problem solving strategies. Efforts in the classroom need to be focused on the constant search for the most appropriate answer to critical moral problems.

Kohlberg (1976) felt that the classroom cannot afford to be value neutral. Students need to struggle with individual and social values. Students need to be taught to examine social and moral problems that exist in culture and society using a systematic and open format. Students need to be taught to endorse a position, think of reasons for selecting that position, and hear the reasoning used by others on the same problem.

Kohlberg's theory for moral reasoning encompasses three levels and incorporates six stages of moral reasoning and problem solving. Level one is the pre-conventional level. Response is given to cultural rules and labels that are interpreted in terms of physical, hedonistic consequences of action, or in terms of physical power of those who impose the rule and labels. The pre-conventional level is divided into two stages: 1. Punishment and obedience orientation, and 2. The instrumental relativist orientation. Stage one constitutes the physical consequences of an action that determines its goodness or badness regardless of the meaning or value of the

consequences. Stage two incorporates the right action which satisfies one's own needs and often the needs of others.

Level two, the conventional level, maintains the expectations of an individual's family, peer group, or society. Stage three focuses on the concept of interpersonal concordance orientation. Behavior at this level is judged by an individual's intention. Individuals earn approval by conforming to what is the majority or natural behavior. Stage four, law and order orientations, consists of exhibiting a positive orientation toward authority, fixed rules, and the maintenance of social order.

The post-conventional autonomous or principled level, is an effort for individuals to define their own moral values and principles. In stage five, the social contract legalistic orientation, emphasis is focused on personal values, opinions, and procedural rules used to reach a consensus. Right actions are defined in terms of individuals rights and standards that have been agreed upon by the whole of society. Stage six encompasses the universal ethical principle orientation. The ethical principal of orientation centers around justice, the equality of human rights, and respect for the dignity of individuals.(Kohlberg, 1976, p.76).

When the six stages of moral reasoning are taught, a pattern of thinking that integrates an individual's experiences and perspectives on issues is brought to the forefront of problem solving. Students are taught to examine reasoning strategies through the use of moral dilemma situations that focus on using more than one reasoning stage to solve a problem.

The stages of moral reasoning are cross cultural. Students move through the same stages in the same sequence, no matter what culture. All students must be taught to move through the stages in a sequential manner. The capacity to understand reasoning occurs because of an attraction to the next higher level of moral maturity. More perspectives are considered when trying to solve conflicts.

Kohlberg (1976) stated that moral development can be implemented in the classroom. Students should be provided with the following opportunities:

a. to consider genuine moral problems.

b. to experience genuine social and cognitive conflict during a discussion of moral problems.

c. to apply their current level of thought to problematic situations.

d. to be exposed to the next higher level of thought.

e. to confront their own consistencies in reasoning over a variety of moral issues without someone stressing a right or wrong answer. (p.35)

The initial step prior to implementing the instructional strategy is the assessment of student's social skills. To identify deficient social skills, a checklist was developed to determine readiness levels and focused on social skills that needed to be taught. Direct instruction was the strategy given in the specific skills that were labeled as deficient. Problem solving methods of how to reach a decision was modeled by students and teachers. To maximize thinking skills and to give students ownership in the solution, open-end questioning was incorporated.

From the literature reviewed, researchers determined that the goal of the teacher is to convey to the student the educational goal of intelligent behavior. Students are taught the responsibility for thinking belongs to them and that more than one solution should be explored prior to reaching a decision or consensus. Students need to have time to plan in a safe risk taking environment and time to reflect on their choices. giving students real life problems that occur on a day to day basis is the most effective strategy to use when teaching and practicing problem solving skills.

The literature reviewed supported possible interventions to improve students' social skills and the ability to interact with one another appropriately. The three interventions chosen

by the teacher researchers were the implementation of cooperative learning techniques, problem solving strategies, and the direct instruction of social skills. Teacher researchers intended to examine the impact on student behavior through the implementation of these three interventions.

Project Objectives and Processes

As a result of direct instruction of social skills during the period of September 2001 to January 2002, the eighth grade students and ninth grade students will improve their application of social skills and acceptance of responsibility in the classroom as measured by teacher observation checklists and teacher-made questionnaires, and student surveys. In order to accomplish the terminal objective, the following processes are necessary:

a. Develop lesson plans to include the instruction of social skills.

b. Set up a schedule to teach cooperative learning skills and strategies.

c. Adapt the curriculum to incorporate the direct instruction of social skills and and the acceptance of responsibility for one's actions and their consequences.

As a result of direct implementing cooperative learning strategies during the period of September 2001 to January 2002, the targeted eighth and ninth grade students will improve and strengthen their interpersonal relationships to work successfully in the classroom as measured by student surveys, questionnaires, and teacher checklists. Processes to be used implemented this objective included the following:

a. Organize cooperative learning groups within the classroom.

b. Develop lesson plans that focus on social skills necessary for cooperative learning.

c. Schedule class time for the direct instruction of social skills.

As a result of direct instruction in problem solving strategies during the period of September 2001 to January 2002, the targeted eighth and ninth grade students will improve their classroom their classroom decision making skills and conflict resolution methods as measured by teacher observation and checklists. Processes to be used to implement this objective include the following:

a. Design teacher observation checklist.

b. Change the curriculum to include decision making/problem solving methods.

c. Incorporate decision making/problem solving methods into lesson plans.

d. Develop lesson plans focusing on social skills necessary for conflict resolution.

e. Simulate decision making situations.

PROJECT ACTION PLAN

Week One

I. Data collection for evidence or problem.

A. Anecdotal records from 1999-2000

1. Discipline referrals

2. Daily classroom attendance (on-going)

3. Classroom detentions recorded by teacher

B. Teacher survey - rating scale

1. 8th grade at the targeted middle school

2. 9th grade at the targeted high school

C. Teacher observation checklist

1. Given monthly, within the first week of each month

Week Two

II. Initial Intervention - Social Skills (on-going)

A. Social skills checklist for targeted students- October and December

B. Complete student checklist

C. Teach students the quiet signal

D. Post the social skills and have student discussion time

E. Model and role play school appropriate language and appropriate voice volume for classroom.

Week Three

A. Accepting Responsibility

1. Review appropriate language and appropriate voice volume.

2. Generate class discussion on the differences between rights and responsibilities.

3. Activities:

a. Brainstorm students rights in the school.

b. List characteristics of a responsible student in school.

c. Discussion of rights and responsibilities

4. Students will complete a P.M.I.

B. Completing a task

1. Brainstorm ideas for gaining self-awareness of excuse making patterns.

2. Complete "What's Your Excuse?" handout provided by the teacher.

3. Activities:

a. Teacher will list student responses on board showing the

student developed steps or actions take to remove or reduce excuses.

b. Student reflections - one personal action or decision they would make including excuses for not taking the action.

C. Accepting logical consequences

1. Students evaluate how responsibility helps them manage their lives.
2. Generate /class discussion using powerful language to acknowledge responsibilities for their actions.
    a. Student will write down three things they cannot do (eliminate the obvious).
    b. Pair share lists.
    c. Pair -share lists using powerful language choices.
    d. Teacher directed powerful versus victim language.
    e. Students complete T-chart.

D. Conflict resolution

1. Students will list and discuss the various types of conflicts.
2. In small groups students will discuss problem solving steps handout provided by teacher.
3. Students will compare three styles of communication.
4. Students will practice assertive responses.
5. Students will role play situations provided by teacher hand-out.
6. Students will practice coming statement to control anger.
7. Activities:
    a. Role play

b. Anger log journal

c. Pair share - How Do You Respond? sheet

d. T - chart

III. Second intervention - Cooperative Learning (on-going)

A. Pre-assessment

1. Cooperative learning checklist - monthly

2. Group assessment to be completed bimonthly

B. Discuss differences between co-operation and individual learning.

C. Beginning grouping - getting acquainted

1. Going on a picnic game

2. Divide class into groups of 3 -4 using the month for birthdays as a criteria.

3. Discuss strategies on how to handle group conflicts.

D. Roles within the group

1. Define the roles in the group

2. Assign roles in group that are to change weekly

3. Work in class incorporating roles within the base groups

a. 8th grade cooking groups

b. 9th grade pottery construction

4. Group and self assessment given

5. P.M.I. reflection

IV. Third intervention is decision making/problem solving (on-going).

A. Student checklist given monthly

B. Define vocabulary words related to decision making.

1. Alternative

2. Consequence

3. Risk

C. Introduce steps involve in decision making

D. Students complete activity hand-out and share decisions with base groups

E. Base group will choose one decision and go through the decision making process

F. Review steps involved in decision making/problem solving

1. Model the steps by instruction.

2. Activities

a. Making a Decision - gathering information

b. Evaluate information through role playing

c. Ask appropriate questions to improve communication

V. Post Assessment

A. Teacher Survey

B. Teacher observation checklist

Methods of Assessment

To evaluate the effects of the implementation of the interventions of the direct instruction of social skills, incorporating problem solving strategies, and implementing cooperative learning methods, researchers collected data from a variety of sources. Data were collected on the number and types of behavior referrals and detentions. Interventions were monitored by an observer for each grade level. Observers were used as a non-biased method of collecting data at the eighth and ninth grade levels. Teacher observation checklists were developed. Student reflections and surveys will be kept throughout the intervention.

Student reflections, teacher anecdotal records, and observation checklists were kept throughout the interventions. The Teacher Observation Checklist on Student Behavior (Appendix A) was used three times during the intervention. The checklist was used to show evidence of improvement in students' behavior and social skills. Each period of observation was for a forty minute period.

In addition to the teacher observation checklist, three checklists were developed for use before and during the intervention. Problem Solving Skills (Appendix E), Cooperative Learning Skills (Appendix F), and the Social Skills Checklist (Appendix G) were used prior to and during the implementation period. Observations were conducted on a bimonthly basis for a forty minute time period during direct instruction of the implementation.

The teacher survey (Appendix B) for the targeted eighth and ninth grade students was issued prior to the intervention implementation and provided evidence of a behavioral problem. The survey was issued to the eighth and ninth grade teachers of the targeted middle and high schools upon the completion of the intervention.

Anecdotal records were used to show evidence of the problem before implementation of the intervention. Anecdotal records included office behavioral referrals. In addition, student reflections and teacher anecdotal records will be kept throughout the intervention.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Interventions

The objective of this project was to improve the academic success of the targeted eighth and ninth grade students through the improvement of social skills. The implementation of cooperative learning techniques, the direct instruction of social skills, and application of problem solving techniques were selected to affect the desired change.

The students of the targeted eighth and ninth grade levels exhibited a lack of appropriate social skills that interfered with their academic success. Administrative records and surveys, student surveys, student journals, and teacher observation checklists provided evidence for the existence of the problem.

During the first week of the intervention, parent, teacher, and student permission letters were distributed, collected, and documented. The teacher researchers informed targeted classes about the objectives and goals of the research project. The teacher researchers targeted the group of students that were enrolled in their advisor/advisee classes. These classes met once a week for a thirty minute class period. The teacher researchers implemented activities that were a part of the advisor/advisee program at the targeted middle school. Modifications to these activities were made to accommodate the targeted ninth grade students.

One of the primary objectives of the intervention was to increase students' ability to

resolve conflicts in positive manners and to accept logical consequences for their actions in appropriate positive manners. Direct instruction was used to teach conflict resolution strategies and to enable students to reach a consensus. Students' behaviors were measured by teacher observation checklists and anecdotal records. Lesson plans that focused on the improvement of student social skills were designed and implemented by teacher researchers. Researchers also scheduled common planning times outside of school and designed teacher observation checklists.

The next objective, as measured by teacher-made checklists and student questionnaires, was to improve the students' on-task behaviors in cooperative learning groups. Prior to the intervention period, an observation check list was administered to acquire baseline data from off-task behaviors (Appendix A). The strategies used to implement the objective included devising lesson plans to include cooperative learning techniques and to provide direct instruction in cooperative learning procedures. Cooperative learning base groups wee randomly assigned by the teacher researchers prior to the direct instruction of targeted social skills. Roles that gave each member of the base group specific responsibilities was assigned by the teacher. The researchers used the observation checklist to document information concerning on-task behaviors.

The final objective of the project was to improve the students' application of social skills in the classroom. Devising lesson plans to include social skills instruction and changing the curriculum were two steps used to implement this objective. Social skills were measured by a teacher made checklist and a teacher survey (Appendix B).

The action research was delayed for two weeks because of a scheduling conflict between the targeted schools. The targeted high school had implemented a modified year-round schedule with an intercession scheduled at the beginning of the intervention. The advisor/advisee groups were chosen as the targeted group of students because of the targeted middle school's schedule. The middle school students were on a six week rotation schedule with a new grade level starting

at the beginning of the intervention. Researchers determined that the advisory group was the most appropriate group to target as these students remained with the researchers and their group of peers of the entire school year.

Researchers chose to implement the ongoing activities that were used for the advisor/advisee program at the eighth grade of the targeted middle school. The ninth grade students at the targeted high school also used this program, as the activities were grade level appropriate for this group. The activities were implemented on a weekly basis during the advisor/advisee instructional period of thirty minutes.

Social skills were introduced at the beginning of the project and continued on an ongoing basis throughout the intervention. Students were allowed to determine their own standards of behavior for the advisor/advisee period within the school guidelines. Social skills and standards were posted and directly taught and reinforced throughout the term of the intervention. Quiet signals were employed weekly as part of the reinforcement throughout the remainder of the project. Upon completing each activity, students were asked to reflect about about their experiences using a P.M.I and journals. Evaluation of the direct instruction of social skills and classroom standards included using the P.M.I. format, discussion, modeling, and role playing.

The next step was to implement cooperative learning over a six week period. The purpose of cooperative learning was defined and practice by the students in groups using activities that were designed to build cooperative learning skills. The purpose of initial activities was used to acquaint the students with their fellow classmates. Direct instruction was given and assigned roles were posted within the base groups. Base groups were required to function as a team for a variety of advisor/advisee activities. Individual and group (Appendix F and Appendix H) evaluations were completed by the students to evaluate and reflect on how the students and their group displayed the targeted skills.

Responsibility was the theme for the third week and was on-going throughout the intervention. Student responsibility centered on using appropriate verbal language and volume, appropriate body language, and knowing the difference between students' rights and responsibilities. The responsibility theme centered on completing a task, accepting consequences, and resolving conflicts. During this time period, various graphic organizers were used to reinforce and reflect on concepts, students documented responsibility at home and at school, and role play was used to reinforce conflict resolution strategies. The student self assessment (Appendix C) was readministered to note any changes in attitudes.

The action plan concluded with the intervention of problem solving strategies. In order for students to become more effective problem solvers, lessons were designed to be implemented on an on-going basis. Direct instruction was used to promote critical thinking skills among the students and members of their cooperative base groups. Class discussions focused on the appropriate terms and steps used in the problem solving process. Students used role playing activities in daily decision making situations to build consensus and to determine the most appropriate solutions to the real life problems that were presented to them. The Problem Solving Checklist (Appendix E) was utilized for assessment. Pretests and posttests on Steps in Problem Solving (Appendix I) were implemented to evaluate the students' ability to identify the five steps in problem solving. Social skills and cooperative learning were monitored on a continuous basis.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

The effects of improving students' social skills through the interventions of cooperative learning activities, problem solving strategies, and direct instruction of social skills were assessed with various methods. Office referrals and anecdotal records were analyzed to determine the extent of behavioral problems and to identify possible trends in the use of appropriate social

skills in the classroom and school environment. Teacher-made checklists and observations were used as tools to measure changes in the three interventions. Data from the students were collected through tests and evaluations. Students also kept personal journals using the P.M.I. format to self-reflect on the activies used in the intervetion. Various types of monitored classroom behaviors were assessed by the use of teacher surveys.

In order to assess the effects of improving social skills, the teacher researchers analyzed each of the targeted students' records of referrals. Anecdotal records of referrals to the office were analyzed to determine the extent of behavioral problems among the targeted students.

Table 7 shows the number of referrals over the 12 week intervention period.

Table 7

Categories and numbers of Discipline Referrals October 2001 through January 2002

Behavior Category	Grade 8		Grade 9	
	Targeted Students	Total Population	Targeted Students	Total Population
Insubordination	15	76	22	52
Disrespect	30	105	43	59
Classroom disruption	27	131	17	399
Violence	5	25	9	21
Verbal Confrontation	7	131	11	262
Total	84	468	102	792

n= 315 eighth grade students

n= 547 ninth grade students

Anecdotal records provided information for discipline problems of the eighth and ninth grade students. Of the 468 referrals in the eighth grade, 74 referrals were issued to the same five targeted students. Similar results were found in the ninth grade with 792 referrals recorded; 87 were issued to the same four targeted students. Therefore fifteen of the 20 targeted middle school students and 16 of the 20 ninth grade students had not recieved any referrals.

Another method implemented to assess the effects of the three interventions of improving students' social skills was an observation checklist. The number of incidents recorded before and

after the intervention period are represented in Table 8.

Table 8
Decreases in Incidents of Student Behaviors as Indicated in Teacher Checklist

Behavior	October		January	
	8th Grade	9th Grade	8th Grade	9th Grade
Self control				
Does not use appropriate body language	25	17	4	3
Not on task				
Not participating	64	35	12	7
Not following directions	31	27	6	7
Voices				
Not using appropriate volume	46	15	10	9
Not using appropriate language	39	25	8	6
Criticizes others				
Accepts new ideas and opinions	30	22	6	4
Criticizes negatively	5	4	0	0

After implementation of the three interventions, the eighth and ninth grade students were evaluated a second time by the use of the Teacher Observation Checklist. The targeted eighth and ninth grade students were observed three times at the beginning, middle, and end of the

intervention by a trained observer. A decreasing the number of behavioral incidents was found. as represented by Table 8. The two major causes of disciplinary referrals, not "on-task" and "inappropriate volume of voices and language", were more frequently exhibited in October then in January.

Another method of assessment involved a students' self-evaluation of how effectively they worked in groups. In Figure 1, data reflected student assessment.

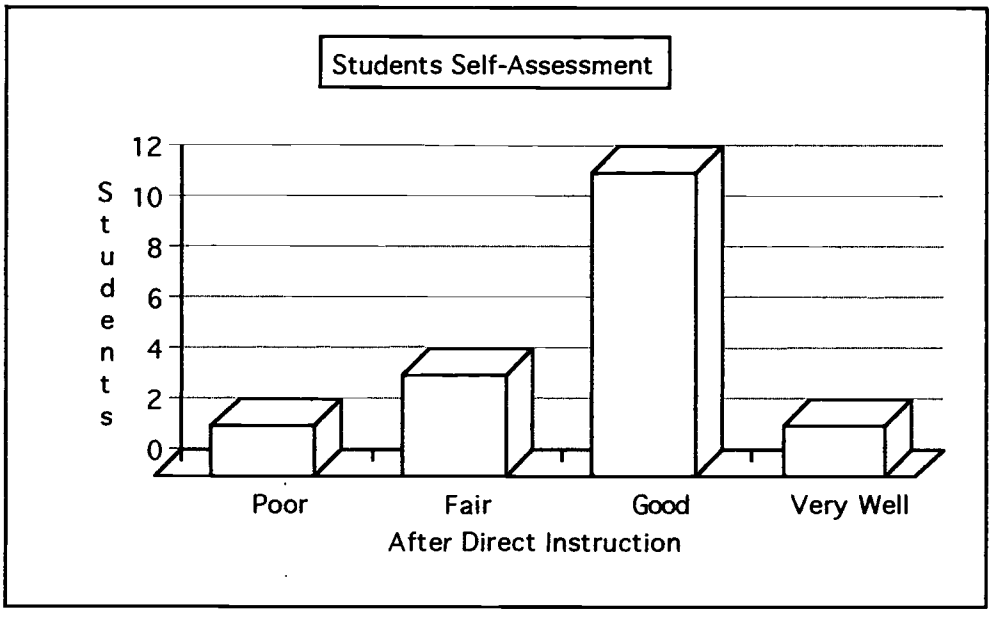


Figure 1. Students' self-assessment on working in cooperative groups and using cooperative learning strategies.

A Student Self-Assessment Checklist was given to students before and after the implementation of direct instruction of cooperative learning strategies. Prior to direct teaching, the majority of the students ranked themselves as "good", and two students chose "very well". The targeted eighth and ninth grade students had cooperative learning strategies incorporated into the advisor/advisee classes for six weeks. After completing advisor/advisee activities in cooperative learning groups, students completed another self-assessment. Twelve out

of 20 students reported a "good" level of competence when using cooperative learning skills, with two out of 20 reporting "poor" and "very well", and four out ot 20 reported a "fair" level of competence. The self-assessment reflected students' attitudes of cooperative learning techniques.

The method of assessment of social skills was the Social Skills Checklist (Appendix G). The checklist involved the following skills: staying in own space; talking in an appropriate manner; respecting each other, the teacher, and the school,; staying on -task; and using appropriate verbal and body language. The selected skills of staying in own space and staying on-task showed the greatest increase by the targeted eighth grade students. The ninth grade students showed the greatest improvement in staying in own space and staying on task after three weeks of direct instruction.

During the cooperative learning intervention, a checklist consisting of four categories was used as a method assessment. As represented in Table 9 , specific social skills were targeted and students were ranked under the categories of frequent, sometimes, and or at all.

Table 9

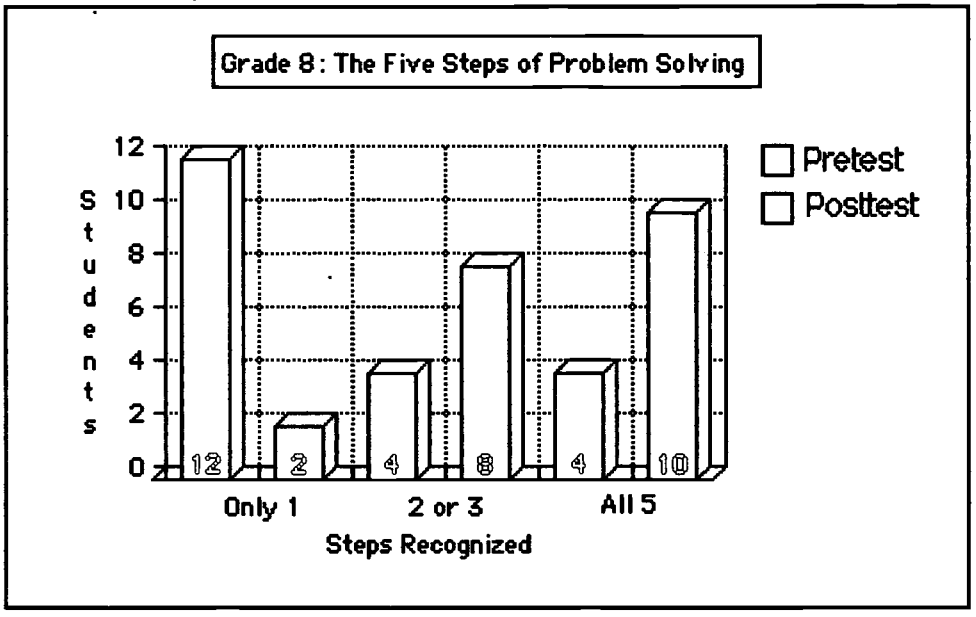
Students Using Cooperative Learning Participation Skills as Indicated in Student Checklist

	Grade 8		Grade 9	
Skill	week 4	week 10	week 4	week 10
Participates appropriately				
Frequently	0	9	10	14
Sometimes	13	10	0	0
Not Yet	7	1	10	6
Occupies own space				
Frequently	4	15	11	15
Sometimes	13	2	0	3
Not Yet	3	2	7	2
Stays on task				
Sometimes	5	13	7	15
Frequently	13	4	11	5
Not yet	2	1	1	0
Constructive criticism				
Frequently	0	12	12	10
Sometimes	4	6	4	3
Not yet	14	2	4	3

Note. Totals may not reach 20 in each grade due to absences.

To determine students' ability to work in cooperative groups, a Student Cooperative Learning Skills Checklist (Appendix F) was devised to evaluate students' ability to work in cooperative groups. Students were assessed on eight participation skills during a six week period that measured the effectiveness of working in a cooperative group. Table 9 indicates the skills that reflected the greatest change. Researchers concluded that after six weeks of cooperative learning, 15 out of 20 students in the eighth grade could occupy their own space and stay on-task. In the targeted ninth grade, 15 out of 20 students could occupt their own space and stay on-task.

In order to assess students' knowledge of the five steps in problem solving, a test was given before and after the last intervention. The data presented in Figure 2 shows the results of the test.



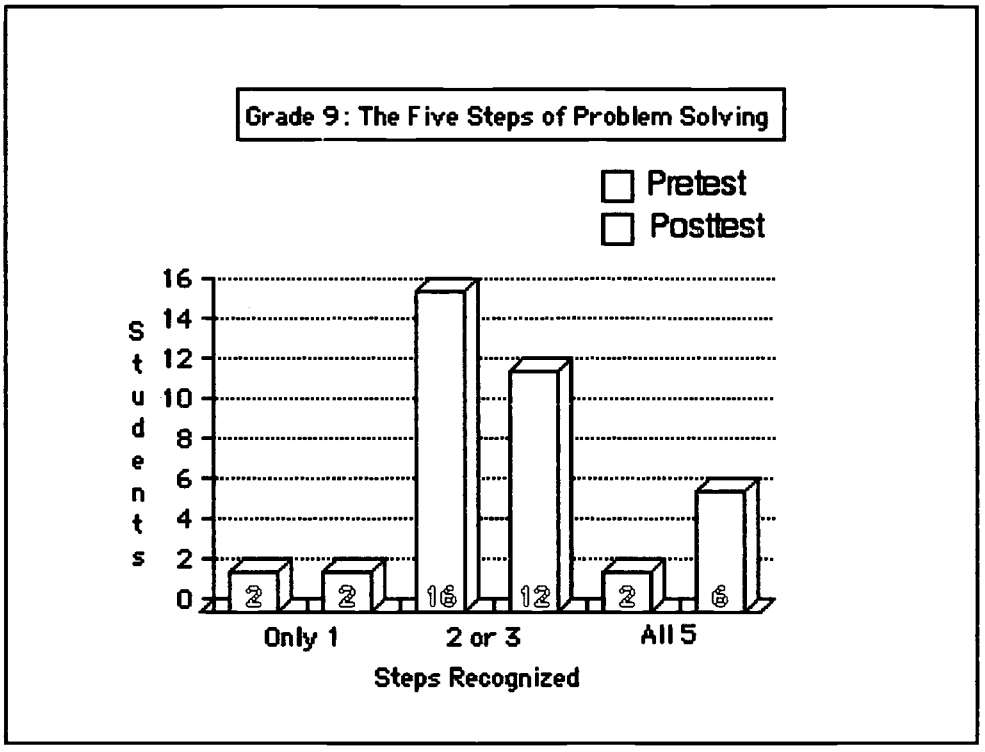


Figure 2. Students' knowledge of the five steps implemented for problem solving.

The last intervention was the teaching of problem solving strategies. The targeted eighth and ninth grade students were given a test in problem solving (Appendix I) which consisted of twelve assorted problem solving steps. The students were able to identify the five best possible strategies in solving a problem. After students received instruction in applying the problem solving strategies, 50 % of the students were able to identify all five steps in problem solving. In the eighth grade, a 20% increase was noted in the number of students who could identify all five steps in problem solving. In the ninth grade 30 % increase was noted in the number of students who could identify all five steps in problem solving.

After the four week period of implementation of problem solving strategies, the eighth and ninth grade students were evaluated by the use of the Problem Solving Checklist (Appendix E). Researchers observed the students' increased ability to identify a problem, develop and consider alternative solutions, formulate and evaluate possible consequences, and select the most appropriate solution. As represented by Figure 2, the two skills of identifying a problem and selecting a solution, as represented in Figure 2, displayed the largest improvement in the problem solving intervention.

The problem solving skill of selecting the solution displayed an increase in both the targeted eighth and ninth grade students. Of the eighth grade students, 55% mastered the skill of selecting the solution. Of the ninth grade students, 60% mastered the skill of selecting the solution. At the end of the implementation of problem solving strategies, all students mastered the skill. Developing and considering alternative solutions and formulating and evaluating possible consequences were also observed and recorded. The eighth and ninth grade students improved slightly in both skills; however, both student grade levels exhibited only a slight increase in formulating and evaluating possible consequences.

A teacher survey was issued at the end of the implementation. The teacher survey was

given only to teachers having direct contact with the 20 targeted students in each school. Disruptive behavior in the classroom was rated as a frequent problem. From the data collected from the teacher survey, 86 % of the teachers surveyed in the eighth grade, and 89% of the surveyed ninth grade teachers found disruptive behavior to be a frequent problem. Poor work habits, limited attention, difficulty following directions and being poorly motivated to achieve were rated by both eighth and ninth grade teachers as being a frequent problem.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the presentation and analysis of the data on discipline referrals, teachers' observation checklists and surveys, and student questionnaires and test results, the eighth and ninth grade students made important gains using the three interventions that were introduced. Apparently as a result, student disciplinary referrals decreased in number. The teacher observation checklists reflected fewer behavioral incidents at both grade levels. The overall improvement of appropriate behavior was supported by the teacher surveys. Teachers stated that behavior problems were less frequent. Reinforcement of the targeted social skills led to the mastery of these skills in the classroom.

The social skills used during direct instruction of cooperative learning and conflict resolution appear to have been generalized. Student time-on-task was facilitated when these skills were learned and practiced in base groups. Students became more aware of personal and interpersonal work and study habits.

The first intervention of direct instruction in social skills apparently had a positive effect. The quiet signal was used a reinforcement throughout the intervention. The researchers recommend using this cueing technique to strengthen and aid in the facilitation of mastering social skills. Researchers also suggest using more structured activities to assist in mastering appropriate social skills.

Intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships improved considerably. Researchers felt the need to devote more time teaching and modeling school appropriate verbal and body language, explaining the differences between a students' rights and responsibilities in the school environment, and implementing conflict resolution strategies. Researchers also felt the need to devote more time to brainstorming ideas to gain self-awareness of excuse-making patterns and for students and teachers to devote more time and activities on accepting responsibility for one's actions and the consequences that follow.

Observation of cooperative learning techniques was used to monitor how effectively students worked in base groups. The skills learned and practiced in base groups facilitated student time-on-task. The eight and ninth grade students appeared to have some cooperative learning experiences which enabled them to function more effectively in cooperative groups. The teacher researchers noted the targeted eighth and ninth grade students had some difficulty staying on task and often needed continued reinforcement of the appropriate skills during group activities. Direct instruction of social skills during the cooperative learning intervention apparently made students more aware of appropriate interpersonal skills. Students were better able to develop mutual respect within their base groups and transfer the new skills learned to other situations within the school environment.

Students at grade levels preferred and requested to work in cooperative groups. The students' self-evaluations revealed to the researchers that they had a positive attitude toward cooperative learning. Students' ability to follow directions dramatically improved. Students were better able to understand the components and behaviors needed to complete a group task successfully. Students were able to practice the skills that were taught through projects and team activities. As a result of the cooperative learning intervention, students spent more time engaged in successfully completing their assigned work.

The problem solving strategy interventions also seemed to be effective. When students were required to use social skills and cooperative learning techniques together, they were better able to identify problems and more effectively select the most appropriate solution. The students applied the five steps for problem solving and incorporated moral reasoning strategies in whole and base group activities and in individual situations. Both the eighth and ninth grade students were deficient in recognizing different points of view and accepting multiple solutions to a problem. Researchers determined that more time should be spent on developing the students' ability to generate alternative solutions at the both grade levels. Time should be devoted to analyzing alternative choices prior to making a choice or coming to a consensus. After direct instruction, the targeted eighth and ninth grade students showed a marked increase in recognizing the five steps in problem solving. The number of students who could identify problems and select the most appropriate solution increased significantly. Both the eighth and ninth grade students maintained success in the problem solving strategies that were also gained from past problem solving experiences and from various mediation programs that were available to the students in their individual schools. Researchers recommended the use of problem solving strategies to strengthen thinking skills on a curriculum-wide basis.

Teacher researchers determined that practice, review, and transfer of social skills must be ongoing in order to maintain a high level of positive behaviors in students. With the absence of regular review, the amount of teacher time and energy spent intervening in student disputes maybe increased.

Throughout the course of the action project, students learned to reflect on their experiences. Journal writing proved to be an invaluable reflective tool used by the students during the course of the intervention. As a result of journaling, students became more introspective with their responses to the survey that was issued in January. The higher level of honesty was

unexpected, but provided a positive reflection to the intervention.

Upon completion of the action plan, teacher researchers concluded the implementation of the three interventions was successful. The interventions,direct instruction of social skills, cooperative learning, and problem solving techniques had a positive effect on improving student behavior and social skills. The positive impact shown through this action research indicates many students would benefit from the interventions and strategies. It is recommended that direct instruction of social skills, implementing cooperative learning groups, and applying problem solving methods be initiated on a school wide basis.

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Appendix A

Teacher Observation Checklist

Directions:

1. Put a check every time the following behaviors are observed in your classroom.
2. Observe the classroom behavior within a 30 minute activity or lesson once a week.

BEHAVIOR

NOT ON TASK

1. Out of seat_____
2. Not participating in the activity_____
3. Did not bring materials to class_____
4. Insubordinate to teacher_____
5. Excessively tardy_____

SELF CONTROL

1. Does not keep hands and feet to self_____
2. Does not leave materials of others alone_____
3. Does not accept consequences for behavior_____
   with out becoming defensive or upset_____
4. Uses inappropriate body language and gestures_____

CRITICIZES INAPPROPRIATELY

1. Uses put downs_____
2. Name calling_____
3. Bullying class members_____
4. Lack of cooperation_____

5. Does not accept criticism in a positive manner_____

6. Presents negative criticism of new ideas_____

7. Presents negative criticism of the ideas of class members_____

Appendix B

TEACHER SURVEY

Directions: How often do the behaviors of students interfere with the positive learning environment of the classroom? Use the key and circle the most appropriate response for each question as it applies to your classroom. **1=Almost never, 2=Seldom, 3=Often, 4=Almost always.**

1. Do students understand and practice acceptable ways of joining a group or participating in an ongoing activity?	1	2	3	4
2. Do students listen to and accept ideas and opinions of other students?	1	2	3	4
3. Do students understand class room standards ?	1	2	3	4
4. Do students exhibit signs of having limited attention?	1	2	3	4
5. Do students appear to be withdrawn?	1	2	3	4
6. Do some students constantly seek approval from the instructor?	1	2	3	4
7. Do students disrupt other students while they are engaged in classroom work?	1	2	3	4
8. Do students accept consequences for their behaviors without becoming upset or defensive?	1	2	3	4
9. Do students have difficulty sitting in their seats?	1	2	3	4
10. Do students exhibit appropriate social skills when presented with a negative situation?	1	2	3	4
11. Can students in groups reach a consensus?	1	2	3	4
12. Do students complete assigned tasks and are motivated to achieve?	1	2	3	4

Appendix C

STUDENT SELF ASSESSMENT

DIRECTIONS: Give yourself a score for your work. Circle the number that best describes how you did. Then complete the P.M.I.(Plus, Minus, Interesting) about the lesson that you have just completed. Please be honest with your answers, as there is no right or wrong response. Remember, you are doing this for yourself, not for us. **4=Always, 3=Sometimes, 2=Rarely, 1=Never**

1. I brought all materials and supplies to class.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
2. I followed all written and oral directions.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
3. I used my class time constructively.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
4. When I did not understand, I asked questions.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
5. I used classroom resources to my best advantage.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
6. I worked up to the best of my ability on my own.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
7. I respected the opinions and contributions of others.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**

Appendix D

Student Questionnaire

Circle your answers for Questions 1 - 10.

4=Always, 3=Sometimes, 2=Rarely, 1=Never

1. I know the school rules and follow them.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
2. I listen to others when they speak.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
3. I complete assignments on time.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
4. I am good at working with the members of my group.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
5. When I have a question, I am comfortable asking for help to solve it.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
6. I come to class with all required materials.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
7. I know and understand the standards for the classroom.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
8. I am treated fairly by my teacher.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
9. I feel that this school is a safe place.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
10. I am given real life experiences to enhance my current knowledge.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**

Appendix E

STUDENT PROBLEM SOLVING CHECKLIST

Knowledge is power. The more you know about a subject or situation the better decisions you can make.

DIRECTIONS: Give yourself a score for your individual decision making and problem solving processes. Please remember to be honest with your answers. You are doing this for you, not for us. **4=Always, 3=Sometimes, 2=Rarely, 1=Never**

1. I can identify the problem that is presented.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
2. I look for alternative solutions to the problem.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
3. I seek help or advice from resource persons (parents, counselors, teachers, etc.)	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
4. I rely on my friends to help me make my decisions.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
5. I realize that there are consequences for my actions.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
6. I accept responsibility for the consequences of my actions	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
7. I seek the necessary information before making a decision.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
8. I do not jump to conclusions	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
9. I accept circumstances I can not control that affects my decision and its outcome.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
10. I select the best solution.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**

Appendix F

STUDENT COOPERATIVE LEARNING SKILLS

DIRECTIONS: Circle the word in the column that best describes the statement about you and your cooperative learning skills in the classroom. **4=Always, 3=Sometimes, 2=Rarely, 1=Never**

1. Offers help to group members.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
2. Shares ideas with others.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
3. Appreciates others' point of view.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
4. Stays on task.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
5. Accepts criticism in a positive way.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
6. Accepts responsibility for for assigned role(s) within the group.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
7. Participates in a positive manner in the group.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
8. Helps the group build a consensus.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**

Appendix G

STUDENT SOCIAL SKILLS CHECKLIST

DIRECTIONS: Circle the word in the column that best describes the statement about you and your social skills in the classroom. **4=Always, 3=Sometimes, 2=Rarely, 4=Never**

1. Stays in own space.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
2. Talks in a socially appropriate manner	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
3. Stays on task.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
4. Talks to others in a tone and volume that is classroom appropriate.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
5. Uses school appropriate body language	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
6. Respects the materials of others.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
7. Knows how to use school materials properly.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
8. Asks permission to use teacher materials.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
9. Respects the ideas and opinions of fellow classmates.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
10. Enters classroom on time without disrupting others.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**

Appendix H

GROUP SELF ASSESSMENT

DIRECTIONS: Give your group a score for your work. circle the number that best describes ho you did. The complete the P.M.I. (Plus, Minus, Interesting) about the lesson that you have just completed. Please be honest with your answers, as there is no right or wrong response. Remember, you are doing this for yourself, not for us. **4=Always, 3=Sometimes, 2=Rarely, 1=Sometimes**

1. Our group was prepared.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
2. We assigned tasks to individual member of the group.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
3. We formulated a group plan prior to the activity.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
4. We carried out our plan.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
5. We shared and listened to each others' ideas, opinions and suggestions.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
6. Our group was able to come to a consensus.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
7. We finished our task in a timely manner as a group.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
8. We worked out our problems together.	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**

Appendix I

Problem Solving Test

Name_____ Period _____ Date_____

Out of the following twelve items, pick the five you would use to solve a problem.

See what others are doing

Make a guess

State or identify the problem

Flip a coin

List alternatives

Outline and organize choices (plus - minus)

Visualize consequences

Eliminate some choices

Identify who is at fault

Create choices (brainstorming)

Evaluate results

Make a plan

1._____

2._____

3._____

4._____

5._____

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