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ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for increasing the targeted student's ability to demonstrate appropriate use of social skills in a cooperative base group setting. The targeted population consisted of elementary students in an urban middle class Midwestern community. The problem of lack of appropriate social skills was documented through teacher observation and student surveys. A review of solution strategies resulted in the selection of interventions: development of a series of lesson plans to teach appropriate social skills, establishment of cooperative learning base groups, and development of assessment instruments to measure the changes in students learning and behavior. Post intervention data indicated an increase in student use of appropriate social skills, an increase in the awareness of classmates' use of appropriate social skills, and an improvement in the students' ability to work successfully in groups. Recommendations include insuring that the teacher assigning the students to the base groups knows the students well before attempting to appropriately group them. Further, teachers need to consider subject area curricular demands when determining a schedule for teaching social skills in the departmentalized settings. Finally, it is recommended that a departmentalized teacher solicit teachers in other curricular areas to determine their interest in working together on a cross-curricular base group project. (Contains 24 references and 5 tables.) (GCP)

IMPROVING STUDENT SOCIAL SKILLS THROUGH THE USE OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING STRATEGIES

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An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the

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Abstract

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This report describes a program for increasing the targeted student's ability to demonstrate appropriate use of social skills in a cooperative base group setting. The targeted population consisted of elementary students in an urban middle class Midwestern community. The problem of lack of appropriate social skills was documented through teacher observation and student surveys.

An analysis of the relevant professional literature revealed a need for students to learn and demonstrate social skills to insure success in a group setting. Further, students need to learn communication skills in order to effectively express ideas to others and to listen appropriately to their peers' ideas. Reviews of curricular content revealed a lack of direct instruction in social skills and in how to be a successful team member.

A review of solution strategies suggested by knowledgeable others, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the selection of interventions: development of a series of lesson plans to teach appropriate social skills, establishment of cooperative learning base groups, and development of assessment instruments to measure the changes in student learning and behavior.

Post intervention data indicated an increase in student use of appropriate social skills, an increase in the awareness of classmates' use of appropriate social skills, and an improvement in the students' ability to work successfully in groups. Recommendations include insuring that the teacher assigning the students to the base groups knows the students well before attempting to appropriately group them. Further, teachers need to consider subject area curricular demands when determining a schedule for teaching social skills in the departmentalized setting. Finally, it is recommended that a departmentalized teacher solicit teachers in other curricular areas to determine their interest in working together on a cross-curricular base group project.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

The students in the targeted fourth grade classes in an urban Midwestern community exhibited a lack of appropriate social skills in the classroom that hindered their academic growth. Evidence for the existence of the problem included teacher observation, teacher surveys, and student surveys that provided information on student attitudes.

Immediate Problem Context

School A was a fifty-year-old building located on a one square block plot of land, surrounded by a middle class neighborhood. The building had 40 classrooms spread throughout a first floor, second floor, and basement. It had a regulation size gymnasium with balcony seating and a large stage area. In 2001, a new library, computer lab, office complex, and three new classrooms were added.

The building enrolled 520 pre-kindergarten through fifth grade students. It was organized with self-contained classes in pre-kindergarten through third grade, and departmentalized classes in fourth and fifth grades. Seventeen percent of the student population qualified for free and reduced price lunch. The ethnic breakdown was Native American 2%, African American 7%, Asian 2%, Hispanic 7%, biracial 3%, and

European American 79%. The average class size was 12 in pre-kindergarten, 17 in kindergarten, 18 in first grade, 16 in second grade, 24 in third grade, 25 in fourth grade, and 24 in fifth grade. The attendance pattern was stable with a 96% attendance rate.

School A consisted of 38 teachers, a principal, a facilitator, and 17 support personnel. The average years of experience was 26 years for the faculty. Fifty percent of the teachers had earned a master's degree. The faculty was 5% minority.

The curriculum consisted of fine arts, health and safety, language arts, mathematics, physical education, reading, science, and social studies. Five percent of the enrollment was served in special education, and the talented and gifted program served 8% of the students.

School A was a First in the Nation in Education (FINE) award winning school. It had a very active and involved PTA.

A major concern was that scheduled district boundary changes would have an adverse effect on social climate and student performance. Another concern was the achievement gap in testing among sub-groups. Teachers believed there was a need to teach students social skills to provide problem-solving alternatives and to improve their interpersonal relationships.

School B was a one-story building about 40 years old. It contained 22 regular education classrooms and 3 special education classrooms. There were about 450 students enrolled in School B in kindergarten through third grade self-contained classes, and fourth and fifth grades in departmentalized classes. School B averaged 96% attendance rate. The ethnic breakdown for School B was 14% African American, 1% Asian, 9% biracial, 71% European American, 4% Hispanic, and 1% Native American. School B had

a mostly stable enrollment with 20% of the students eligible for free lunch and 7% qualified for reduced lunch. Average class sizes were 18 for kindergarten, 18 for first grade, 21 for second grade, 20 for third grade, 23 for fourth grade, and 24 for fifth grade. There were 30 full-time certified teachers, 17 of whom had master's degrees in teaching. There were seven part-time resource people, three of whom held advanced degrees. The average years of experience of teachers at School B was about 20 years. There were 15 noncertified support staff members at School B. The building administration at School B consisted of a principal, a part-time facilitator, and three office support staff.

School B had a standard elementary curriculum, which included mathematics, language arts, reading, social studies, science, physical education, health and safety, and music. In addition, all kindergarten through third grade students at School B received additional scheduled instructional time for fine arts.

School B had a strong and active PTA, which was one component of its reputation as a good and desirable elementary school within the community. Each quarter, 70 to 80% of all fourth and fifth grade students earned a grade point average above 3.0. School B received a district award for a business partnership program.

Concerns at School B included the achievement gap among tested sub-groups of students in the building, the effect of proposed district boundary changes on the student population, and the need to teach students interpersonal skills.

The Surrounding Community

Schools A and B were located in a historic Midwestern community of about 100,000 people. It was part of a larger metropolitan region in a bi-state setting with a population about 350,000. The median age range in the city was 30 to 34 years. The

population was comprised of about 72% European Americans, 16% African Americans, 7% Hispanic, 2% biracial, 2% Asian, and 1% Native Americans. The city encompassed 70 square miles.

Traditionally, the economy of the city was based in manufacturing, most of which was agriculturally related. Several of the large corporations with factories in this area included The John Deere Company, Aluminum Company of America (ALCOA), Oscar Meyer Foods Corporation, and Ralston Purina Company. Included in the bi-state area was a U.S. government employment facility. In more recent years, the economic base became diversified when some insurance and related health care businesses and some computer related businesses took more prominent roles.

The transportation system for the area included a full-service international airport with major air passenger and airfreight carriers. There were also several municipal airports, a major rail transportation system, and a city bus system in the area.

The bi-state area is well covered by various media services. Three major television stations, two major newspapers, and numerous radio stations provided media coverage for the area.

The school district for Schools A and B had an enrollment of about 15,000 students. There were around 30 school buildings and about 1,300 professional staff members. The district provided educational services for pre-kindergarten to twelfth grade. Within the district there were numerous award winning schools and programs at both a state and national level. Individual teachers and administrators had been honored by various state, federal, and professional groups for their contributions to the educational process. The district had some budget concerns and considered closing several schools to

cut cost. All day kindergarten was another issue under study. Another option under consideration was raising the class size limits for elementary classrooms.

The city offered a high quality of life for its citizens. There were over 25 city parks, several museums, public library, convention centers, theaters, professional orchestras, and many cultural and recreational events. The bi-state area had three universities, four colleges, and several vocational training centers.

The National Context

Over the last century, there have been many changes in society and family structure. The economy has shifted away from rural and agricultural to urban and diversified. Most families no longer live with extended family members nearby to offer support in child rearing. Technological advances have brought down prices so dramatically that many homes have numerous television sets, often connected to a cable service that can provide hundreds of channels, many of which are not suitable for children to view. According to Bellanca (1992), the combination of the large number of hours that children sit in front of television sets and the decrease of adult supervision, direction, and support, make it easy to see how television could have a negative impact on young children. These changes have had a tremendous impact on families and how children are socialized. It can no longer be assumed that students will come to school with established social skills. Along with television, personal computers are prevalent in homes, and many homes have access to the Internet.

While these advances are certainly positive in many ways, there are also disadvantages and dangers for children in homes with Internet access. Kagan (1994) noted that students today do not arrive at school with the same prosocial values that were

once the norm. Many students are not as respectful, caring, helpful, or cooperative as they were in the past.

The effect of these social changes was reported by Kagan (1994), and the role schools must play in preparing students for full participation in the economy and society is fundamentally different from the traditional role. Further, Kagan concluded that society has moved into an information-based, high technology, and interdependent economy. In addition to providing students with basic skills and information, schools must also produce students capable of using higher-level thinking skills, applying communication skills, and displaying appropriate social skills.

The changes in society extend far beyond the classroom. Numerous studies have determined the most common cause of job loss is the lack of appropriate social skills, even more common than a lack of job-related skills (Kagan, 1994). In school, as in society, the need for learning cooperative skills is evident. Johnson and Johnson (1999) suggested that it takes a cooperative effort to achieve greatness. Social skills instruction must be included as objectives in lesson plans just as content objectives are planned for. Learning the appropriate social skills to work successfully in a group is necessary for success in today's society.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

The students in the targeted fourth grade classes demonstrated a lack of appropriate social skills in the classroom. Students were unable or unwilling to successfully work with classmates in a small group setting. As a result, their academic learning was negatively impacted.

In order to document the lack of social skills, teacher observation of group work was conducted. Five behaviors were included in the baseline observation: listening to teammates, encouraging teammates, using group level voices, disagreeing with the idea rather than the person, and using put-downs. The use of or lack of use of these behaviors defined the level of success obtained by the group. A summary of the observation data is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Frequency of Observed Social Skills for Fourth Graders in Group Problem Solving

Behavior	Incidents	Number of Individual Students
Listening to teammates	23	21
Encouraging teammates	2	2
Using group level voices	17	12
Using put-downs	45	34
Disagreeing with idea, not the person	0	0

n=141

The baseline observation indicated that the observed students were unable to disagree with an idea presented by another member of the group without making a personal attack on the team member. There were no observed instances of a student successfully demonstrating the ability to explain why it was the idea or solution that was incorrect, not the person presenting the idea or answer. During the observation there were just two instances of a student encouraging another student as the group attempted to solve a problem together. Students tried so hard to get the correct answer by themselves that they paid little or no attention to ideas put forth by team members.

Another social skill included in the observation was the use of group level voices. During the observations, 17 students were able to remember to keep their voices at a level that only the other team members could hear. Most students struggled with this skill, however. Twenty-three students were observed listening to a group member during the observations. This skill was most often noted among the positive social skills being

observed. Listening is a skill that is continually used at school in various settings, whole class, group, or partner, so it makes sense that this is the skill most observed. Students frequently used put-downs during the observation of group problem solving. When students did not agree with an idea or answer, a put-down was often the reaction. This baseline observation reinforced the belief that social skills must be taught; many students do not consistently use social skills without instruction and practice.

Teacher perceptions of student behavior provided further evidence of the problem. Teachers at the targeted schools were asked to complete a survey on student behavior during the first month of the school year. A summary of the data collected from the teachers is included in Table 2.

Table 2

Percent of Responses on the Teacher Perceptions of Student Behavior

Behavior	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree
Listen to classmates	43	24	33
Encourage classmates	48	38	14
Can work in a group	29	48	24
Can work with any classmate	14	57	28
Can disagree with idea, not speaker	0	29	72
Can resolve conflicts in group	14	19	67
Use put-downs	48	19	34
Lack social skills	53	19	28

n= 28

Teacher perceptions of student behavior indicated that many students lacked social skills. Fewer than half of the teachers maintained that their students listened to and encouraged classmates. Further, just 29% of the teachers believed their students were able to work well in a group of two to four students, and only 14% felt their students could successfully work with any other classmate. Not one teacher felt that the students knew how to disagree with an idea instead on the speaker, and only 14% of the teachers presumed that the students know how to resolve conflicts within a group. Teachers indicated that many students lacked the necessary skills to deal with issues that arose within the group. Nearly half of the teachers believed that students used put-downs with other students, a negative interaction that hindered attempts to build community within the classroom. Finally, 43% of the teachers surveyed agreed that some students lacked social skills in general, which was consistent with the perceptions expressed on the specific skills included in the survey. These results indicated that many students were lacking in social skills and needed to receive direct instruction in how to use and practice the application of such skills.

Student surveys were administered to assess the attitudes of the students regarding social skills. Students were asked to rate how they felt about classmates' use of social skills and how they would assess their own use of social skills. Results of the student surveys are found in Table 3.

Table 3

Percent of Responses on the Student Attitudinal Survey on Social Skills

Behavior	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree
Classmates use put-downs	38	24	38
Classmates listen to my ideas	59	13	28
Classmates encourage me	56	6	38
I use put-downs	16	9	75
I listen to my classmates	82	6	12
I encourage my classmates	71	15	15
I feel comfortable working with any classmate	56	18	26
I prefer working in a group	60	15	24

n= 141

The student survey results indicated a discrepancy between the students' perceptions of social skills demonstrated by classmates and social skills personally demonstrated. For example, 82% of students believed they listened to classmates, but only 59% of students felt that classmates listened to them. Further, 71% of students surveyed believed they encouraged classmates, while 56% felt that they received encouragement from their classmates. Only 16% of students admitted to using put-downs, but more than double that amount, 38%, felt that classmates used put-downs. These perceptions demonstrated that students' perceptions of personal behavior did not match their perceptions of classmates' behavior. Finally, the survey indicated that 56% of students felt comfortable working with any classmate, and 60% preferred to work in a group rather than work alone.

Baseline data indicated the need for direct instruction of social skills to the targeted students. Preliminary observation indicated that many students were unable or unwilling to demonstrate appropriate social skills while working in a group to solve mathematics word problems. Many students struggled with using group level voices and lacked the ability of encouraging teammates appropriately. Teacher perceptions of student behavior provided further evidence of the problem. Teachers were convinced that many students were unable to work well in a group of two to four students, only 29% of the surveyed teachers credited students with this skill. The students in the targeted fourth grade classes demonstrated a lack of appropriate social skills in the classroom. Academic achievement was negatively impacted by this lack of demonstrated social skills.

Probable Causes

Family life and society have changed so teachers can no longer assume that students will arrive at school with appropriate social skills in place. Students need actual instruction and practice on such skills as encouraging, disagreeing appropriately with an idea, and avoiding the use of put-downs. Lack of appropriate social skills inhibits students from working successfully in groups.

A probable cause of students having difficulty with group work is their poor communication skills. Teachers need to provide direct instruction and provide opportunities to practice communication skills. Successful students know how to listen to classmates and how to express their own ideas, thoughts, and opinions clearly. Further, group work may be negatively impacted if students do not have the skills to resolve conflicts that arise naturally when working together.

Problem solving skills can be directly taught so that students can use of them as the need arises. Encouraging diverse thinking and ideas increases the likelihood that conflicts will arise within the group. Students need to learn the skill of managing conflicts within the group. Problem solving skills must be taught and practiced with supervision before they will be applied in the group setting.

According to Buckenmyer (2000), the increased use of teams in the business world has increased the need for students to have experience with teams while in school. If students are taught the necessary skills to work successfully in teams, they not only enhance their educational experience, but also increase the likelihood that they will be able to be successful team members as employees later in life. Direct instruction and practice of team skills do not guarantee that teams will never experience conflict, however. Buckenmyer (2000) reported that there is frequent conflict in real world teams that must be resolved within the group, and students need to learn how to resolve issues that occur within their groups.

Self-esteem issues may be another probable cause of the inability of students to work together successfully. When students feel valued and accepted by classmates, they learn to value and accept others. Further, when they feel that their contributions are important to the group, they may contribute and cooperate even more (Church, 2000).

The diversity of the student population has never been greater, and minority populations are increasing. Related to the diversity issue is social inequity. Slavin (1998) stated that the degree of social inequity found in schools is unique to the industrialized world. Students who have not been taught to value diversity have more difficulty working with classmates who are different from them. Acceptance of all group members is a life-

long skill students need to learn. In today's most innovative companies, the best and most successful employees share their knowledge with colleagues. These same companies stress the value of diversity within the team to promote imaginative and creative thinking (Andres, 2000).

It is critical in today's world for social skills to be regularly taught and practiced in today's classrooms. Students cannot be expected to apply knowledge they do not possess, so if educators want them to work well together teachers must teach the skills they need to be successful at group work. Communication skills are critically important to this process. Students need to learn how to express their own ideas in clear, non-threatening ways. Further, students must learn how to listen to ideas from their peers, even if they do not agree with those ideas. Finally, students need to feel acceptance from their team members. If students feel their thoughts and ideas are important, they may be motivated to increase their positive involvement in the group.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

When students are unable or unwilling to use appropriate social skills in the classroom, learning is adversely affected. The students in the targeted fourth grade classes demonstrated this lack of appropriate use of social skills. Many students were unable or unwilling to work together effectively in small groups as a result.

Students learn best when they are actively involved in the process. According to Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec (1994a), learning is something that students do, rather than something that is done to them, and such learning requires their direct and active involvement and participation. Students need to feel that their participation is valued and necessary for the group to succeed. Students must be involved in their own learning (Shaw, 1992). Further, it is vitally important for educators to realize that the challenge of teaching is not covering the material for students, but rather it is uncovering the material with the students (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1994b).

Society has changed greatly since public education was started in this country. Technological advances occur frequently and alter family and business structures. Additionally, there has been dissolution of the traditional family, and negative television

content is frequently a role model for value formation (Williams, 1996). Educators and the educational system must adapt to the changes. Kagan (1994) reported that as society moves into a rapidly changing information-based economy, the school's traditional role of providing students with basic skills and information must change to include producing students capable of demonstrating higher level thinking skills, using effective communication skills, and using appropriate social skills. It cannot be assumed that students will learn these skills on their own. McKendall (2000) reported that it is important to remember that the United States possesses one of the most individualistic cultures in the world, so it would be inaccurate to assume that people entering the workforce have well-developed collaborative skills.

Another societal concern is the equity issue. According to Slavin (1998), when schools continue in the traditional role of the past without updating the delivery system, the schools do as much to increase the differences between students from wealthy and impoverished backgrounds and students with different ethnic backgrounds as they do in overcoming these differences. Diversity should be welcomed and celebrated in the classroom. When students learn to look at a situation from many different perspectives, they learn to work together to find cooperative solutions (Miller, 2000).

With these issues in mind, a teacher has many considerations when structuring a classroom. There is no one structure or method that should be used exclusively. Teachers need to know how and when to structure the student's learning goals: cooperatively, individually, or competitively. The most effective teachers appropriately use all three structures (Johnson, Johnson & Holobec, & Roy, 1984). The most effective structure to

use when teaching and encouraging appropriate social skills is the cooperative learning structure.

Using cooperative learning necessitates the understanding of what it is and, just as importantly, what it is not. According to Johnson, Johnson, and Holobec (1994c), cooperative learning is the instructional use of small groups where students work together to accomplish shared goals. Cooperative learning includes developing student teams, training in social skills and group skills, developing a cooperative classroom atmosphere, and assigning roles within the teams (Kagan, 1994). Not every situation where students work together can appropriately be labeled as cooperative learning. Simply having students sit in a group or giving them permission to talk during an assignment is not cooperative learning. Further, assigning the first students to complete an assignment to help struggling students is not cooperative learning, nor is assigning a group project which is completed by one student while the other group members merely add their names to the finished product (Johnson, Johnson, Holobec & Roy, 1984).

For cooperative learning to be successful, five essential elements must be present. These elements are positive interdependence, individual and group accountability, interaction, social skills instruction, and group processing. (Johnson, Johnson, & Holobec, 1994c). Positive interdependence exists when students believe that the team cannot succeed unless every member of the team succeeds. Group accountability is evidenced when the group goal is achieved, and individual accountability occurs when each student is assessed individually with the results reported back to the group. The third element, interaction, is necessary because cooperative learning is both an academic and a personal support system in the classroom. Instruction in the social skills necessary for

group work is imperative if cooperative learning groups are going to succeed. Finally, group processing allows team members to address how well the group is functioning and to maintain the effectiveness of the group.

There are three types of groups formed in cooperative learning: formal, informal, and base groups (Johnson et al. 1994a). Formal and informal groups are task groups used for instruction, while base groups provide the opportunity for bonding (Bellanca & Fogarty, 1991). Base groups are long-lasting groups and can last the entire school year. Johnson et al. (1994b) reported that cooperative learning base groups are long term, heterogeneous cooperative learning groups with stable membership providing group members the opportunity to support, to encourage, and to assist one another.

There are several proven reasons to utilize cooperative learning as a classroom learning structure. Cooperative learning promotes greater efforts to achieve, encourages more positive relationships among students and increases psychological health (Johnson, Johnson, & Holobec, 1994c). When students learn how to work effectively in groups, they have acquired a life long skill. Kagan (1994) reported that the most frequent reason for individuals to be fired from their first job is not due to lack of job related skills, but to a lack of interpersonal skills. Most students who have been members of effective groups learn to appreciate the work accomplished within the group setting. According to Mueller and Fleming (2001), students recognize and value projects completed as a group. Finally, a reason to use cooperative learning in the classroom is because it has been proven over and over to be an effective learning strategy. Slavin (1999) reported that cooperative learning is one of the most successful innovations in education.

Teambuilding is vital to the successful use of cooperative learning in the classroom. Activities that allow the students to get acquainted with teammates will help the students develop a sense of belonging and a feeling of comfort with their group. Once team members feel comfortable within the group, they are more willing to share their points of view (Shaw, 1992). Further, Kagan (1994) found that greater academic achievement occurred when extensive team building activities had taken place. Most students trained in cooperative learning are able to retain the group work skills learned and can demonstrate the skills without further training at a later date (Gillies, 1999). It is important for a teacher in a departmentalized setting to pay special attention to assigning groups and in selecting the tasks that will be used for cooperative learning. Leonard and McElroy (2000) reported that extra attention in this setting would maximize student participation in the cooperative learning group. Further, students need to be taught how to provide and accept help within their groups including the skills of providing feedback for incorrect answers, confirming correct responses, demonstrating the lifeskill of patience, offering constructive criticism, staying on task, being sensitive to others, and encouraging other team members (Nath and Ross, 2001).

When the decision has been made to implement cooperative learning in the classroom, it is important for the teacher to receive training and support. This is vital because the teacher is the key to using cooperative learning successfully (Bassett, McWhirter, & Kitzmiller, 1999). For some teachers using cooperative learning groups to teach a lesson will require quite different skills. Johnson, Johnson, and Holobec (1994c) reported that the teacher's role in a cooperative learning lesson entails several components: placing the students into groups, planning the lesson, explaining the

academic task, monitoring the groups as they progress through the task, and evaluating the quality of the work produced. Once teachers understand how to use cooperative learning effectively, they can appreciate the freedom of not having to lecture constantly or of not feeling responsible for directing every minute of every class period (Kagan, 1994).

It would be inaccurate to assume that every teacher has had success using cooperative learning in the classroom. According to Cantlon (1991), the most frequent reasons that cooperative learning groups are not successful include the size and composition of the teams, the classroom arrangement, the lack of bonding within a team, or vague directions are given to the team. Further, Randall (1999) reported that the benefits of cooperative learning might blind educators to its drawbacks so its use should be considered carefully rather than trying to teach every lesson with cooperative learning groups. No one knows the needs of the learners better than the teacher in the classroom, so it is up to each teacher to plan how best to serve those needs by using all the strategies available and appropriate for that classroom. Cooperative learning is one of the strategies that can be helpful in meeting those needs.

The targeted fourth grade students were unwilling or unable to demonstrate appropriate social skills in a small group setting. In an attempt to solve this problem, direct instruction of social skills was implemented. Students were assigned to base groups which were utilized periodically for the remainder of the year. Students completed a pretest and posttest survey to measure the effectiveness of the planned interventions.

Project Objectives and Processes

As a result of implementing a social skills curriculum and cooperative learning base groups during the period of September 2002 through January 2003, the fourth grade students from the targeted classes will increase their ability to demonstrate appropriate social skills in a classroom setting as measured by teacher observation checklists and surveys completed by the students.

In order to accomplish the project objective, the following processes are necessary:

1. Develop a series of lesson plans to teach social skills.

2. Establish cooperative learning base groups.

3. Design assessment instruments to measure changes in student behavior.

Project Action Plan

Week 1

1. Distribute parental notification letter and consent form.

2. Administer pre intervention attitude survey to students.

3. Students work in random groups on a mathematics problem solving lesson while teacher completes baseline observation.

4. Teacher establishes heterogeneous base groups.

Week 2

1. Teacher presents lesson on group listening skills, then base group members complete activity to practice listening to teammates.

2. Base groups create a poster to complete the sentence

   Math is like...

3. Base groups work together to complete a mathematics problem solving.

Week 3

1. Teacher presents lesson on encouragement of teammates, then base group members practice skill of encouragement.
2. Base group members complete banner with team name they select.
3. Base group members complete a mathematics problem-solving lesson while teacher completes observation checklist.

Week 4

1. Teacher presents lesson on put-downs, then base group members brainstorm a list of phrases to use to disagree with an idea.
2. Base group members complete cooperative learning mobile.
3. Base group members complete mathematics problem solving lesson.

Week 5

1. Base group members create a group flag.
2. Base group members complete mathematics problem solving lesson while teacher completes observation checklist.
3. Base group members complete Picture Problems activity from Blueprints for Thinking in the Cooperative Classroom, Bellanca, J. & Fogarty, R., p. 126.

Week 6

1. Teacher presents lesson on strategies to use to agree and disagree appropriately.

2. Base group members create skit to present to class on the strategies for agreeing and disagreeing.
3. Base group members write clues to describe a mystery number then share clues with class. Other groups try to guess mystery number.
4. Base group members complete mathematics problem solving lesson.

Week 7

1. Base group members complete conflict resolution puzzle.
2. Base group members complete mathematics problem solving lesson while teacher completes observation checklist.
3. Base groups create T-charts to list what the targeted social skills look like and sound like.

Week 8

1. Base group discussion on careers of interest to members, emphasizing how mathematics is used in that career.
2. Base group members complete a mathematics problem-solving lesson.
3. Base group members write affirmations to members of their group.

Week 9

1. Base group members complete a P M I about their experience working in a base group.
2. Base group members complete a mathematics problem-solving lesson as the teacher completes an observation checklist.

Week 10

1. Base groups complete activity to name and classify feelings.
2. Base groups compete a mathematics problem-solving lesson.

Week 11

1. Base groups create a banner to highlight accomplishments of the group.
2. Base group members complete a mathematics problem-solving lesson.

Week 12

1. Students complete a post intervention attitude survey.
2. Base groups complete a mathematics problem-solving lesson while teacher completes a final observation checklist.

Methods of Assessment

To assess the effects of the interventions, a teacher observation checklist will be developed. Further, a student assessment will be developed and administered to determine student's perceptions on the use of social skills.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

Students in the targeted fourth grade classes exhibited a lack of appropriate social skills in the classroom that had a negative impact on their academic growth. Evidence for the existence of the problem included teacher observation, teacher surveys, and student surveys that provided information on student attitudes. The objective of this project was to increase the ability of the students to demonstrate appropriate social skills. The implementation of cooperative learning base groups and the use of a social skills curriculum were selected to effect the desired changes.

Baseline observations indicated a lack of social skills demonstrated by the students in School A and in School B. Most students were unable to disagree with an idea presented by another member of the group without making a personal attack on the team member. There were just two instances of a student encouraging another student during the group problem solving session. Most students struggled with the social skill of using group level voices.

A survey of teachers' perceptions of student behavior provided further evidence of the problem. Fewer than half of the teachers believed that their students listened to and

encouraged classmates. Teachers also believed that their students struggled with being able to work successfully in a group. None of the teachers believed that their students knew how to disagree with an idea instead of the speaker. Teacher perceptions indicated that students lacked the necessary skills to deal with issues that arose within the group.

The objective of the project was to increase the ability of the targeted students to demonstrate appropriate social skills in a classroom setting as measured by teacher observation checklists and attitudinal surveys completed by the students. To effect the desired changes, cooperative learning base groups were established and a social skills curriculum was taught. Following the intervention period, students did show an increased use of appropriate social skills.

Base groups were established during the fourth week of school and were maintained throughout the intervention. Social skills were taught using cooperative learning methods while students were in their base groups. Targeted social skills were listening, encouraging, disagreeing with an idea instead of a person, and resolving conflicts. Each week a social skills lesson was taught and then practiced in the base groups. Team building activities were included as part of the plan also. These included creating group posters, team names, banners, and skits. At the end of the week, the students worked in their base groups on a mathematics problem-solving lesson applying the social skills in a content area lesson.

After baseline data were collected, heterogeneous base groups were established. These groups were maintained throughout the intervention. During the second week of the intervention, a lesson was taught on group listening skills. Students practiced the skill within their base groups while completing a group poster. Later in the week, the base

groups worked together to solve mathematics word problems. During the third week, a lesson on encouraging team members was taught to and practiced by the base groups while they created team names and displayed them on banners. The base groups again ended the week by working together on a mathematics problem-solving lesson. The next week, a lesson on put-downs was taught to the students while they were in their base groups. The groups then brainstormed a list of phrases to use to disagree with an idea, not the person. Due to time constraints, the students did not create the cooperative learning mobile listed in the original action plan. Base group members worked together on a mathematics problem-solving lesson at the end of the week. During the fifth week students worked in base groups to complete a flag and worked cooperatively in a mathematics content area lesson. The social skills lesson during the sixth week focused on strategies to use to agree and disagree appropriately. Students worked in their base groups to develop a skit to present their social skill learning to their classmates. In the mathematics content area, the students worked in their base groups to write clues to describe a mystery number, then shared their clues with the rest of the class. During week seven, the students were taught conflict resolution skills through the use of a consensus-seeking process. Students learned how to give a consensus reading using a five to fist rating. After completing the activity, students completed T-charts to list what conflict resolution skills look like and sound like. At the end of the week, students worked in their cooperative learning base groups on a mathematics problem-solving lesson. Due to time constraints, the week eight activity to discuss careers in mathematics was omitted. Students did write affirmations to their fellow base group members and worked together to complete a mathematics problem-solving lesson. During the ninth week, students

completed a reflection about their experience working in a base group and also completed a content area mathematics lesson. The base group members completed an activity to name and classify feelings during week ten. At the end of the week, the base groups also worked to solve mathematics word problems. During the eleventh week, the students worked in their base groups to create a banner to highlight the accomplishments of their group. These were shared with the class and then posted in the room. Students solved mathematics word problems in their base groups also. During the final week of the intervention, the students completed a post intervention attitude survey and worked in their base groups on a mathematics problem-solving lesson. Due to time constraints, five teacher observation checklists were completed rather than the six observations originally included in the action plan.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

In order to assess the effects of direct instruction of social skills and the implementation of cooperative learning base groups, teacher observation checklists were completed during the first, third, sixth, ninth, and twelfth weeks of the intervention. Students were observed as they completed mathematics problem-solving lessons in their base groups. Complied data from the teacher observation checklists are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Percentage of Observed Social Skills for Fourth Graders in Group Problem Solving

Behavior	Week1	3	6	9	12
Listening to teammates	16	60	48	72	65
Encouraging teammates	1	30	34	42	38
Using group level voices	12	57	49	65	78
Using put-downs	32	28	4	11	8
Disagrees with idea, not the person	0	9	23	28	23

n=141

The intervention appears to have had a positive effect on most targeted behaviors. Over the course of the intervention, listening to teammates increased from 16% to 65% of the observed students. Listening is a social skill needed throughout the school day. Direct instruction in and practice of listening skills sharpened the observed students' ability to demonstrate good listening skills.

Direct instruction in the social skill of encouraging teammates also indicated a positive change. At the end of the intervention 38% of the observed students demonstrated encouraging words to teammates, an improvement from the 1% of the students using the skill during the baseline observation. Students had no difficulty verbalizing how happy they felt when teammates made encouraging remarks to them. The next step was teaching the students how to encourage their fellow teammates.

Students practiced the skill, and then were able to apply it during mathematics problem solving lessons.

The observed students demonstrated marked improvement in the social skill of using group level voices after direct instruction in and practice of the skill. When students focused on keeping their voices low so that only their teammates could hear, they were successful. The groups experienced more success at completing their group problem solving activities when the students kept their voices low.

During the baseline observation, none of the observed students were able to demonstrate the social skill of disagreeing with an idea presented by a teammate, rather than disagreeing with the person. After the students had learned this social skill and had been given an opportunity to practice it, about one-fourth of the students were able to use this skill during the time the observation checklist was completed.

Another measure used to determine the effectiveness of the intervention was a student survey, administered at both the beginning and at the conclusion of the intervention. Students were asked to give opinions on both classmates use of social skills and on their own use of the same social skills. Results of the student survey are included in Table 5.

Table 5

Percent of Responses on the Student Survey on Social Skills

Behavior	Agree Pre/Post		No Opinion Pre/Post		Disagree Pre/Post	
Classmates use put-downs	38	19	24	20	38	61
Classmates listen to ideas	59	7	13	12	28	15
Classmates encourage me	56	81	6	8	38	11
I use put-downs	16	3	9	12	75	85
I listen to my classmates	82	88	6	5	12	7
I encourage my classmates	71	79	15	8	15	13
I feel comfortable working with any classmate	56	68	18	8	26	24
I prefer working in a group	60	81	15	5	24	14

n=141

Results from the student surveys indicate that through the use of direct instruction of and practice in social skills the students' perceptions on the use of these targeted behaviors was positively affected. In the pre-intervention survey, 60% of the surveyed students preferred to work in a group; by the end of the intervention this had increased to 81%. Once the students had gained some skills for working together in a group, a vast majority of them preferred to work as a member of a team.

When students considered the social skills of their classmates positive results were attained in both the categories of listening and encouraging. Before the intervention, 59% of the targeted students believed their classmates listened to their ideas, this amount increased to 72% after the intervention. Likewise, students' perceptions on whether their

classmates encouraged them increased from 56% to 81% from the pre-intervention to the post-intervention. On a further positive note, the number of students who felt their classmates used put-downs was cut in half by the end of the intervention.

Students were also asked to consider their own behaviors on the attitudinal surveys. Students typically were overly positive when rating their own behaviors as evidenced by the pre-intervention surveys. At least 82 % felt they listened to classmates while 71% believed they encouraged their classmates. After the intervention, these amounts increased to 88% who believed that they listened to their classmates, and 79% who stated they encouraged their classmates.

Sixteen percent of the targeted students admitted to using put-downs on the pre-intervention attitudinal survey. After direct instruction on this social skill, this amount decreased to 3%. A number of students believed that they had changed their previous negative behavior by the end of the intervention.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the presentation and analysis of the data of the teacher observation checklists, the targeted students demonstrated an improvement in their ability to appropriately use social skills. The skills of listening to teammates, encouraging teammates, using group level voices, disagreeing with an idea rather than the person, and avoiding the use of put-downs were positively affected by the lessons designed to teach these skills. The social skills the students learned through the direct instruction were applied while they worked in their base groups on mathematics problem solving.

Students did learn how to work successfully in groups, and enjoyed the opportunity to work as teams. Through the group activities, they were able to get to know

their group members and build a feeling of community with them. The feelings of support they developed for their fellow base group members carried over to lessons where they were working alone or as a whole class. There was less conflict among the students, as they used the social skills in other classroom situations, not just on days when they worked in their base group.

After completing the intervention, there are several recommendations to others interested in replicating the action research. First of all, the teacher should know the students before assigning them to base groups. In a departmentalized setting, teachers see their students for a short duration each day. It may take several weeks after the school year begins before a departmentalized teacher feels comfortable enough to determine the make-up of the base groups.

Another recommendation is to consider the curricular demands of the specific subject area when determining a schedule for teaching the social skills lessons and for including the team building activities. It may require that these activities be spaced out over a longer period of time than the twelve weeks included in this action plan.

Finally, it is recommended that a departmentalized teacher solicit teachers in other curricular areas to determine their interest in working together on a cross-curricular base group project. The responsibility for direct instruction of social skills as well as the team building activities could be spread out to all the participating teachers. In this way, a departmentalized building could have the benefit of both specialist instruction in the curricular areas and of community building that occurs in self-contained classrooms.

It can no longer be assumed that students arrive at school with appropriate social skills in place. It is necessary to provide direction instruction in and practice of social

skills so students can work successfully with their classmates. Students can not be expected to demonstrate knowledge they do not possess; social skills instruction must be a regular part of the curriculum. Students who learn to work together, learn together.

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