ABSTRACT

WILLINGNESS TO TEACH: A LOOK AT PERCEPTIONS OF INCORPORATION OF SOCIAL SKILLS IN THE CLASSROOM

Social skills have been considered as an indicator for long-term success in personal, academic, and professional arenas. Social skills training programs have long been in demand in schools in spite of modest success. This study explored elementary school teacher perceptions of the importance of social skills and their willingness to incorporate social skills training in general classroom instruction. A total of 116 teachers were surveyed about what skills they deemed as critical and how the importance was predictive of teachers’ willingness to incorporate social skills training into curriculum. Results suggested that teachers valued self-control significantly more than cooperation and assertion skills. Value of a specific social skill, however, was not a significant factor in terms of willingness to teach that skill. Implications were discussed in the context of school settings.

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May 2015
WILLINGNESS TO TEACH: A LOOK AT PERCEPTIONS OF 
INCORPORATION OF SOCIAL SKILLS IN
THE CLASSROOM

by

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A thesis
submitted in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Educational Specialist (Ed.S.) in School Psychology
in the College of Science and Mathematics
California State University, Fresno
May 2015
APPROVED

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge my thesis chair, Dr. Hong Ni, for her encouragement, direction and support in completing my thesis. I would also like to acknowledge the rest of my thesis committee, Dr. Lorin Lachs and Dr. Marilyn Wilson for the assistance that they provided at all levels of my research project.

In addition, a very special thank you goes out to Dr. Lorin Lachs, who has provided unwavering support and assistance in my academic endeavors since my undergraduate career. It is the support that I received from faculty members like him that has made this accomplishment possible.

I would also like to acknowledge all of the school psychologists, administrative staff and teachers that took time out of their busy schedules to assist me with data collection for my research project. I would like to thank my research assistant, Alexander Morris, whose expeditious contribution of data coding made all the world of difference to a graduate student who was working with tight time constraints.

I would like to thank my friends and family members who provided me with love, unconditional support and were there for me in times of need. I would also like to thank my significant other, Jarred, whose encouragement of my self-growth, I will always be deeply grateful for. Last but not least of all, none of this would have been possible had it not been for my two sons, Evan and Azriel. I did this all for you both.

In conclusion, I recognize that this research was supported by the financial assistance provided by Associated Students Incorporated Graduate Research Grant and the Graduate Students’ Research and Creative Activities Awards.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Social skills are one of the many skills that a child must develop in order to be successful in life. Strong social skills can help a child make good decisions, react appropriately in a given social situation, and maintain relationships that are integral to overall mental health. The lack of social skills can be a significant problem not only for the individuals that experience deficits in social skills but to society as a whole. In response, social skills training programs have been developed and utilized in clinical and educational settings in order to foster the development of social skills for children who need them. Recent trends in education have placed an increased emphasis on the importance of peer relationships and consequently, social skills (Leary, Kowalski, Smith, & Phillips, 2003). In schools, most social skills training programs are currently being provided on a “pull-out” basis. Children who are identified as in need are being pulled out of their classrooms to receive services. School psychologists have often been responsible for providing social skills training services to children in a separate setting away from students’ classrooms, such as the school psychologist’s office. However, research suggests that this type of pullout social skills training may not be effective and meet students’ needs due to limitations such as lack of generalization from the pullout environment to the students’ natural environment (Spence, 2003).

Teachers are one of the most important adults in child’s life (e.g., Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000; Rudasill & Rimm-Kaufman, 2009). They interact with students in their natural environment—the classrooms. Teachers have consistently demonstrated to be a credible source of being able to assess academic, social and emotional student needs (Firmin, Proemmel, & Hwang, 2005). Teachers also have
the most contact with students within the school setting; every day they observe, evaluate (informally and formally), and give feedback to students on all types of behavior including social behaviors. In addition, the classroom is a social environment where social skills are required in order for the teacher to run the class and provide instruction. It has been found that teachers value social skills such as cooperation and self-control skills (Lane, Pierson, & Givner, 2003) and that this value is relatively stable across all primary grades (Lane, Wehby, & Cooley, 2006). Since research has suggested that one of the most significant obstacles for the current pullout social skills training program to be effective is skill generalization to natural environment, is it possible for teachers to provide social skills training in students’ natural environment—the classroom? Based on the author’s personal experience, some teachers have naturally incorporated social skills training into their normal classroom teaching and it is successful. However, it has yet to be explored by research whether teachers’ value of social skills would predict their willingness to incorporate some form of training within the classroom. To explore this alternative for social skills training, this researcher intends to first identify the specific social skills valued by elementary school teachers. Secondly, this research will examine the relationship between the level of teachers’ value of social skills and their willingness to teach them in the classroom. Determining specific social skills sets that teachers value and are willing to incorporate in the classroom can lend an opportunity to further develop methods and strategies of incorporating the appropriate social skills training that all children can benefit from within their natural classroom settings.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Social Skills

In the literature, there is not a universally agreed-upon definition of social skills. However, there are two major approaches to conceptualizing social skills. One is to perceive social skills as a set of behaviors and strategies in order to produce positive behavioral results in social settings (Gresham, 2004). A competing conceptualization identifies social skills as indicators of underlying personality traits (Arslan, 2011). Gresham, Cook, Crews, and Kern (2004) have identified these competing conceptualizations as “sample” and “sign.” “Sample” refers to the behaviors that a child engages in that make up social skills. “Sign” refers to the social skills a child possesses that are indicative of the child’s personal characteristics including personality traits. For example, a researcher who takes the “sample” perspective would consider that a child who doesn’t initiate peer interaction might not possess the skills to do so. A researcher who takes the “sign” perspective would consider a child who doesn’t initiate in a lot of peer interaction may have a shy personality. The two approaches have yielded different methods in how social skills are measured.

One way to measure social skills using the “sign” approach is to gauge the level of peer acceptance as an indicator of the child’s social skills. The level of a child’s social skills can be inferred by his or her sociometric status among their peers (Ollendick, Weist, Borden, & Greene, 1992). The sample approach differs from the sign approach when measuring social skills in the sense that specific social skills are broken down into observable behaviors. The measurement of a child’s social skills is based on the frequency of the observable social behaviors that make up social skills. Gresham and Elliott’s (1990) Social Skills Rating
System (SSRS) is representative of this approach. The SSRS is a multi-rater assessment system that assesses children’s three domains of behaviors—social skills, problem behaviors, and academic competency.

The Social Skills Scale measures positive social behaviors in cooperation, empathy, assertion, self-control, and responsibility. Each of those aspects of social skills is further broken down to specific and observable behaviors. The level of a child’s social skills would be based on the ratings of these observable behaviors from his or her teachers, parents, and sometimes him/herself. On each item, the rater, based on his or her observation, gives ratings on specific behaviors such as how often they are occurring and how critical that particular behavior is to the rater. Measurement of strong or lack of social skills is all based on the child’s specific and observable social behaviors. Although both sign and sample approaches rely on others’ report, the sample approach, such as the SSRS, has advantages in the sense that social skills are broken down into behaviors that can be directly observed by parents and teachers, rather than relying on inferences made by measures such as sociometric status. Considering the first purpose of this study, which is to identify the specific social skills valued by teachers, the current study adopts the sample approach and uses the teacher form of the Social Skills Scale in SSRS to identify those social skills.

The teachers’ Social Skills Scale in SSRS contains over fifty specific social skills that comprise five major domains as previously mentioned: cooperation, empathy, assertion, self-control, and responsibility (Gresham & Elliott, 1990). Each domain contains 10 items that describe 10 different behaviors that make up the domain of social skills. The Social Skills Scales use teachers or parents as informants, who have opportunities to observe behaviors that represent social skills.
In the next section, I will review studies to discuss the importance of social skills. Although the sample approach is adopted for this study, I will not ignore the studies that adopt the sign approach. This is based on the assumption that social skills would contribute to a child’s positive relationships with peers and adults and consequently their sociometric status, which will in turn enhance the child’s development and learning in school.

**Importance of Social Skills**

As mentioned previously, there is not a universally accepted definition of social skills. It might be more difficult to have an agreed upon set of social skills due to the range of developmental levels and settings. In this section, I will review studies that are relevant to the social skills as in the Social Skills Scales in SSRS to discuss their importance. There appears to be a mixture of terms that are used in the research regarding social skills. Terms such as social competence, social functioning, and social coping are often used to imply the possession and use of social skills. In the following review, I will discuss the definition (if there is one) of these terms as in their original study; however, I assume that social skills are necessary for a person to be called socially competent and can cope and function in social situations.

Strong social skills have historically been considered to be integral to personal, professional and academic success (Raver & Zigler, 1997). Some of the most basic social skills that are necessary to successfully navigate the dynamics of today’s world include being able to initiate and maintain relationships such as maintaining eye contact, attending to social cues and engaging in behaviors that are considered within cultural norms (Gresham et al., 2004). The need for social skills arrives early. One of the initial milestones of attending grade school is when
one must develop and maintain interpersonal relationships with both peers and teachers. As a student, a child has to learn how to cooperate with others, be able to maintain responsibility for him/herself, be able to empathize with others, and be able to self-control in a time of conflict. These skills are important to maintain positive interpersonal relationships, which are considered lifelong skills.

Research seems to agree that social competence is a result of strong social skills as many studies about social competence use possession of specific social skills as an indication of social competence and vice versa. For example, possessing strong social skills such as correctly interpreting social cues, developing appropriate solutions to interpersonal problems, and anticipating obstacles and consequences for behaviors could be interpreted as signs of competence. Children who have social skills and demonstrate social competence enjoy more successful outcomes in a wide variety of settings such as school, at home and in the workplace (Goleman, 2006).

Moreland and Dumas (2008) examined the levels of “coping competency” of preschool aged children for several purposes. The first purpose was to determine the validity of a three factor coping competency model, which is a set of coping skills that are organized intro three areas—affective, achievement, and social. The second purpose of the research study was to determine whether high levels of coping competency would be associated with lower levels of disruptive behavior as reported by teachers and parents. The coping skills that were described in the social area include the ability to develop solutions to problems and the ability to use self-talk during stressful situations.

The researchers asked 521 parents and 250 teachers to complete several academic and social rating measures on their children ranging in ages from 2 to 6 years old. These measures included the Coping Competence Scale and the
Disruptive Behavior Disorders Scale, both of which were developed by the researchers. The results showed that children who fared poorly on social and achievement measures were more likely to demonstrate problematic behaviors as assessed by the Disruptive Behavior Disorders Scale. This suggests that preschoolers with adequate social skills of problem solving and self-taking during stressful situations may be at a lower risk of developing a disruptive behavior disorder.

In addition to having a decreased risk of developing a disruptive behavior disorder, higher levels of social competence are associated with lower levels of aggression. Malti (2006) examined the relationships between the variables of social competence, aggression, and self-understanding in 93 elementary aged Swiss children. No formal definition of social competence was explicitly provided; however, it was implied that social skills for cooperative problem solving were considered characteristics of social competence. Self-understanding was conceptualized as tantamount to self-concept, or a self-perception of one’s self. Level of social competence was measured by randomly assigning children to a dyad to build a tower made out of blocks while being video recorded. Performance on the task was coded by observing behaviors that were broken down into different categories, which included initiation, praise, requests, rule setting, agreeableness, helping and sharing behaviors and play suggestion. It seemed that if the child demonstrated these social skills, the child was considered socially competent. Self-understanding was measured by conducting a semi-structured interview with the study participants, which asked questions pertaining to how a child perceived themselves. Levels of aggression were measured by the utilizing the aggression subscale of the Child Behavior Checklist, which was completed by the parents of the participants. A correlational analysis of all three variables
revealed that children who demonstrated higher levels of social competence were rated as having lower levels of aggression and high levels of self-understanding. Interestingly enough, levels of social competence had a stronger association with levels of aggression, when compared to levels of self-understanding. These studies suggest the important negative relationship between social competence or possession of social skills and aggressive behaviors or behavior disorders.

In addition to experiencing reduced conflicts with others, socially competent children can also have a protective effect on their less socially skilled peers. Tu, Erath, and Flanagan (2012) examined the effects of peer relationships of socially skilled children with victimized children with respect to academic achievement. They collected a variety of assessments on sixth and seventh graders that included peer nomination of victimized peers and reciprocated friendships between victimized children and socially skilled children. The children that were considered to be socially skilled were identified by their teachers using the Social Health Profile. They found through a series of regression analyses that victimized students who had reciprocated friendships with socially skilled peers fared better academically than students who had fewer reciprocated friendships with socially skilled peers. Overall, the research demonstrates that social competence, as a result of social skills, is an important contributing factor to improved behavioral and interpersonal outcomes for children.

Strong social skills also have been linked with improved academic outcomes. A study conducted by Arnold, Kupersmidt, Voegler-Lee, and Marshall (2012) examined the association of social functioning, aggression, attention and academic skills of 467 preschoolers. The authors cited the SSRS as their definition of social functioning, which could be broken down into social skills in areas of empathy, responsibility, and cooperation. Measurements that were used in this
study to measure achievement included the Peabody Picture Vocabulary test, several subtests from the Woodcock Johnson including Letter Word Identification, and Applied Problems. Social functioning was assessed using the SSRS. The Iowa Teachers’ Conners’ Rating Scale was used to measure levels of aggression and attention. A correlational analysis between all variables found that attention was significantly associated with academic achievement, when controlling for social functioning and aggression. Most important and relevant to the current study, however, it was found that social functioning was a predictor in academic achievement amongst preschool children, indicating that social skills are an important factor in academic development. These results suggest that the association between academic achievement and social functioning is significant and may start before the child starts a formal education.

Malecki and Elliot (2002) assessed 139 third and fourth graders by using teachers’ ratings as measures of social skills. These measures were used to determine whether there were significant associations between social skills and academic competence and to determine whether the presence of social skills had a predictive effect on academic competence. Social skills were defined by the researchers as a set of learned behaviors that could enable someone to be able to interact effectively with others. Academic achievement was defined as a result of standardized testing. The teacher rating scale of the SSRS was used to assess social skills along with the survey battery of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills to assess academic achievement. Some of the specific social skills that were rated by the teachers included the ability to follow directions, how well one could work with others, the ability to ignore distracting peers, and how well a child makes friends. The ratings were collected at the beginning and at the end of the school year. A correlation analysis revealed that children who were rated highly by teachers on
social skills measures also fared well academically. In addition, a regression analysis between SSRS scores and Iowa Basic Skills scores indicated that social skills were predictive of academic achievement, which led researchers to suggest that social skills act as "academic enablers."

In general, these results suggest that social skills such as being able to follow directions, being able to resolve interpersonal conflict, and working well with others are consistently and positively associated with academic functioning and that some of them may serve as "academic enablers" for learning.

Research has also shown that a child with social skills experiences less maladjustment even when faced with life stressors such as divorce or a death in the family, or a less than ideal family background. Goodman, Gravitt, and Kaslow (1995) examined the social problem solving skills of 50 inner city children ranging in ages from 8 to 12 years old. The purpose of the study was to determine if a child’s ability to solve social problems could have a moderating effect on negative life events and their influence on levels of depression. The researchers assessed participants’ depressive symptoms, quantity of negative life events experienced, the impact of negative life events, and their ability to develop alternative solutions to social problems. While the researchers did not explicitly define social problem solving skills, it is my perception that the ability to recognize, resolve and/or avoid conflicts with others could be reasonably associated with social problem solving. The assessments used in the study were the Negative Life Events Checklist to quantify the amount of negative life events experienced, the Children’s Depression Inventory to assess current levels of depression, and Alternative Solutions test, which assessed the ability to resolve three social problem scenarios. A correlations analysis of the results suggested that children who experienced a significant amount of negative life events but possessed more developed social problem
solving skills reported significantly lower levels of depression when compared to children who had a less developed social skill set. These results suggest that children with a well-developed social skill set are less vulnerable to depression, even when experiencing a stressful life event.

Research also has shown that children who possess good social skills would have more reciprocated friendships and higher peer acceptance, both of which would help alleviate the negative outcomes of social adjustment despite less than ideal family backgrounds. Social skills can contribute to more peer acceptance and friendship. For example, Rahmati, Adibrad, Tahmasian, and Sedghpour (2010) set out to determine whether social skills training would increase the levels of social adjustment of fourth-grade girls. Children with lower levels of social adjustment were identified through the use of a peer rejection test, peer nominations, and teacher rating scales. Participants consisted of 40 children total, with half assigned to the control condition while the remaining half participated in social skills training that focused on self-awareness, communication, decision-making, managing emotions, etc. The training took place over a series of two-hour 16 sessions that included group discussions, group play, and role playing exercises. A post-test analysis revealed that the children who participated in the intervention significantly increased their level of social adjustment when compared to the control group. Most notable, however, was that the children who participated in the intervention experienced less peer rejection. The researchers contended that the development of social skills not only increased the intervention’s group social adjustment overall, but also allowed them to gain access to peer acceptance.

In an ongoing longitudinal study, Criss, Pettit, Bates, Dodge, and Lapp (2002) examined the relationship between temperament style, social information processing, peer acceptance, and level of family adversity amongst 5-year-old
children from at risk backgrounds. According to the authors, social information processing could be construed as the cognitive process that underlies children’s’ patterns of social responding. Temperament style, particularly a resistant temperament style, is manifested by poor self-regulation and intractability. Family adversity was measured by parental interview, a marital conflict assessment, and an assessment on physical discipline. Temperament style was measured using maternal responses to the Retrospective Infant Characteristics Questionnaire. Peer acceptance was measured using peer nominations, which were determined by using a standard deviation between like and dislike scores amongst children within their class. Social information processing was determined by a teacher checklist of child behavior and a series of vignettes of social situations that were presented to the participants of the study. The results of the vignettes were rated by several trained researchers. A correlational analysis found that peer acceptance—an indicator of good interpersonal social skills was a significant factor in moderating the effects of family adversity. Additionally, they also found that peer relationships moderated the effects of externalizing behaviors, which was a result of family adversity. This suggests that friendships may serve as a protective effect in the sense that these children have a source to draw upon within their interpersonal relationships. Based on these research results, it seems reasonable to say that social skills are integral to moderating the effects of stressful or negative life events. Good social skills and consequently good interpersonal relationships can provide the support in times of need and help to maintain academic progress during stressful life events or problematic family environments.

In contrast, children who lack social skills may experience a variety of negative consequences. These consequences can include peer rejection, lowered academic performance, and victimization. Maintaining peer relationships have
been considered one of the primary aspects of development in childhood (Gresham et al., 2004) so the chances of peer rejection pose a significant risk to the mental wellbeing of a child. Ollendick et al. (1992) set out to determine the predictive validity of peer nominations in regards to adjustment 5 years later by asking fourth graders to nominate their peers based on friendships. The measurements used included peer nomination, which required children to indicate three peers that they liked the most in their class, and to rate each peer based on how much they liked to play with them. A child’s sociometric status was derived from these ratings and nominations, and the children were classified as either popular, rejected, neglected, controversial or average. Measures to assess adjustment 5 years later included the Locus of Self-Control checklist, peer nominations of social behavior, and a self-report assessment of adjustment that the researchers developed themselves. While the researchers did not specifically define what adjustment was, the researchers evaluated and outlined specific variables in regards to adjustment. These variables included whether the child had been retained, whether they had dropped out of school entirely, how their peers perceived them, and their perceived locus of control. The results indicated that children who had been classified as rejected through peer nomination were perceived to be more aggressive and less likeable when compared to peers who were classified as average, popular, or neglected. The follow up assessment that was conducted 5 years later found that these same rejected children reported more long-term adjustment problems such as an external locus of control, substance abuse, and symptoms of depression and anxiety when compared to their peers of a different sociometric classification. Clearly, these results indicate that children who have difficulties with peer relationships can experience immediate and long-term consequences.
A lack of social skills can lead to peer rejection. Research suggests that a child who faces peer rejection often experiences academic problems. Ladd, Kochenderfer, and Coleman (1997) examined how different types of peer relationships affected academic and social adjustment of 5- and 6-year-old children. They used the Friendship Features Interview for young children to assess different features of friendship, such as companionship, self-disclosure, and conflict. The results showed children rejected or disliked by their peers tended to fare poorly on assessments of academic performance. The researchers suggested that disliked and rejected children were regularly excluded from peer activities that may have limited their access to assistance and opportunities for learning.

Deficits in social skills don’t just prevent a child from being able to form relationships and perform poorly on academics; they can also place a child at risk for being victimized. Fox and Boulton (2005) asked children ranging in the ages of 9 to 11 years old to identify which of their peers were often bullied, in addition to rating themselves and their peers on social skills attributes. It was found that the children who were more often identified as victims of bullying fared poorer on assessments of social skills that were rated by their peers. Thus, research evidence demonstrates that a child faces significant consequences in academics and personal relationships if deficits are not addressed and remedied.

In summary, research has consistently demonstrated that social skill acquisition is an important factor in regards to gaining peer acceptance and to be able to do well academically. Peer acceptance has been shown to serve as a protective factor for children who are dealing with life stressors, even in spite of disadvantaged and dysfunctional family backgrounds. Children who do manage to foster relationships with more socially competent peers face less bullying, when compared to children who do not. Social skills have been shown to serve as
“academic enablers,” as the skills of being able to cooperate with others, and being attentive to others are the same skills that are considered to be necessary for appropriate classroom functioning. Lack of social skills increases the likelihood of poorer grades, misconduct, and bullying. Social skills are important to a child’s overall development—socially, academically, and emotionally. This is why schools try to provide social skills training to students who are lacking social skills. The important question to ask is how to provide social skills training to maximize its effectiveness to all children.

Social Skills Training Effectiveness

A significant amount of research has been focused on providing social skills training for children, especially with populations such as children with autism, who have historically struggled with deficits in social skills within the last decade. This has been a shift in the initial focus in teaching social skills in mainstream environments within the school setting (Korinek & Popp, 1997; Lampi, Miller, & Fenty, 2008). However, research outcomes have not been consistent about the effectiveness of the increasing amount of social skills training programs and interventions. In reviewing the research in this area, I found that there is a common challenge across most of the social skills interventions—generalizing the skills learned in the training programs to children’s natural settings. This might not be related to the content of the social skills training. Instead, it might be related to how the social skills training intervention is delivered and who delivers the interventions. In this section, I will first review studies about the effectiveness and limitations of social skills training. Then, I will discuss the effectiveness of an increasingly popular social skills training program
designed to be delivered in a different model in comparison to traditional social skills training. Finally, I will summarize to make my arguments.

Many social skills training programs and interventions target specific skills for populations who have consistently struggled in the area of social skills such as children with autism and Pervasive Development Disorder (PDD). Research suggests that these social skills training programs have yielded modest success (Cotugno, 2009; Hillier, Fish, Siegel, & Beversdorf, 2011; Mazurik-Charles & Stefanou, 2010). For example, Solomon, Goodlin-Jones, and Anders (2004) found that when high functioning young males with Autism participated in groups that taught skills of emotion recognition and problem solving, their performance improved on tests of facial emotional recognition and a problem solving skills task. The study took place at the Medical Investigation of Neurodevelopment Disorders institute and the groups were led by a psychologist, a psychiatrist, and a speech language pathologist. The groups took place over 20 sessions, each 90 min in length. In another study conducted by Gevers, Clifford, Mager, and Boer (2006), theory of mind skills training was delivered to children with PDD by the researchers in a series of 21 training sessions that were 60 min at length. The training sessions were conducted outside of a classroom setting. Children with PDD who were taught about false belief tasks fared better on assessments conducted on beliefs, desires and emotions compared with those who did not receive training. Although successful, it is important to note that a common theme of limitations presented in these studies is that specific deficits in social skills have been the primary focus of studies with special populations. An additional theme to point out is that these interventions were conducted outside of naturalistic setting and were conducted with professionals that were trained to deliver the
interventions, thus with limited application to an outside setting, which are social skills in the natural and general environment of a mainstream classroom.

In addition to social skills training being effective for children with specific deficits, social skills training and interventions have been demonstrated to be generally effective with students in the general population. Researchers have explored how changes in content and intervention strategies of social skills training would make a difference in the effectiveness. Grizenko et al. (2000) examined both the long and short term effects of a modified social skills training program that was specifically aimed at perspective taking skills in comparison to a more traditional social skills training program with children ranging from 8 to 11 years old. The researchers defined perspective taking skills as the ability to accurately interpret the perspective of another person. The 41 children that participated in the study attended mainstream classes at their public schools in the city of Montreal. The children that participated in the study were identified by their teachers as having displayed disruptive behaviors in the classroom in the past. Study participants were randomly assigned to two intervention training groups and received 60 min of social skills training twice a week for a total of 6 weeks during their lunchtime. The training was provided by medical students, a psychiatrist, and childcare workers. The traditional social skills training methods consisted of role-play, rehearsal, modeling, feedback, and reinforcement that focused on skills such as self-control, dealing with teasing among others. The modified social skills training included perspective-taking skill training in addition to other areas of social skills. The assessments that were used to evaluate social skills before and after the interventions included the Child Behavior Checklist and the Matson Evaluation of Social Skills with Youngsters (MESSY), both of which were completed by participants’ parents and teachers. Assessment of social
perspective taking skills was conducted by the administration of the Bystander Cartoon Test, which asks children to interpret a social situation based on the information that they are given. The results revealed a significant increase in self-awareness and improvement in behavior overall in the modified social skills training group when compared to a traditional social skills training program. Furthermore, the increase in self-awareness and improvement in behavior were maintained 9 months after the program was completed.

These findings suggest that including perspective taking in social skills training is important to maintain the effectiveness even after the completion of the intervention. The reason might be that perspective taking is a hallmark of the development of children’s social cognition and consequently facilitates behaviors in social settings. In spite of the positive results, the researchers cited some limitations of the study. One was that the treatment only lasted for 6 weeks. Considering the feasibility and the possibility to maintain the program in the school settings, it is challenging to keep outside professional support in the schools for a long period of time. Professional training for teachers within the schools might be needed in order to keep the program and its effectiveness. Second, in this study, the intervention took place outside of the classroom and in the library instead. The length of the intervention given on a weekly basis was 120 min. To teachers, this is significantly more than what is typically given in schools, which also means a disruption to the participant students’ daily instruction. Thus, from a researcher’s point of view, the modified social skills training program is effective in both short and long term. However, the issue is, in reality, how to keep the program and maintain its effectiveness in the school system for all the students in need of social skills instruction.
Denham, Hatfield, Smethurst, Tan, and Tribe (2006) explored the effectiveness of two different intervention strategies—direct skills training and peer mentoring in primary school children ages 7 to 11 years old. The children who were targeted in the study were selected based on teacher ratings indicating risk for exclusion. Students’ participation in the two groups was determined by their teacher’s judgment, based on their previous knowledge of the child and what they felt would be the most effective intervention for them. Direct social skills training was facilitated by a school psychologist and focused on emotion recognition, increasing self-awareness, and generating solutions for social problems. The peer mentoring intervention was co-facilitated by the students and teachers and focused on group discussions on how to solve theoretical social problems. The students were provided with resource cards on social skills to help guide them with the discussion. Both intervention groups spanned a 12-week period. The Spence Social Skills Questionnaire was used to collect parent and teacher ratings of participant performance prior to and immediately after training. In addition to parent and teaching ratings, the participants were asked to complete a Social Situations Checklist in order to assess how each participant would handle a specific social situation. An ANOVA analysis revealed that while there were no significant differences between the two types of intervention, both groups of children did experience a significant improvement in their social skills as reported by teacher ratings. Qualitative data that were collected 6 months after the intervention revealed that teachers overall regarded the intervention in a positive light, and felt that the interventions had improved student behavior in the classroom. These findings suggest that it might not be critical for a professional from the outside to lead and provide direct social skills instruction. It seems that students themselves, if supported by teachers and provided with the right resources
and guidance, are able to successfully gain significant improvements in social skills through discussions. With professional development, the teachers can help in facilitating student groups, scheduling the peer monitoring and providing resources and guidance. These results also suggest that teachers may possess adequate knowledge about what types of social skills training might be beneficial for their students, as the teachers were tasked with selecting the intervention for each specific student.

Sawyer et al. (1997) explored both the short and long term effects of social skills training on primary school aged children. The researchers primarily focused on participants’ ability to handle social situations and peer relationships. However, they took a different approach. Instead of outside professionals coming into schools to provide the intervention, the researchers trained all of the third and fourth grade teachers at the school to deliver the social skills training. The Rochester Social Problem Solving program was implemented in the classroom by 85 teachers for a 20-week period that focused on specific social skills, such as emotion recognition and developing solutions to social problems. The teachers were trained to provide instant teaching of specific social skills within the students’ natural context of a specific social situation, such as how to handle teasing from peers or disagreements during play. There were several measures used to assess the effectiveness of this program, including the Inventory of Problematic Social Situations which assessed the students’ ability to handle a social dilemma, participant peer sociometric ratings for peer relationship, and the Child Behavior Checklist by parent and teacher on participants’ behavior. A two-way ANOVA analysis during baseline and immediately after the intervention revealed that, when compared to children who did not participate in the intervention, the participant children self-reported an increase of being able to
control behavior and solve social problems and experienced more positive peer relationships. These results were further supported by teacher and parent report of behavior when pre and post intervention data were compared. An analysis of data collected a year after the intervention took place revealed that the children who participated in the intervention did maintain their gains in the areas of social skills but not peer relationship status. The researchers cited several possibilities for the mixed results. First, the teachers who participated in the intervention themselves were unsatisfied with the length of the program, citing that the training was not long enough to sustain a real and lasting improvement in behavior. The teachers argued that math and reading instruction takes course over a lengthy number of years, and that social skills require the same length of instruction. Secondly, because the program was taught over a just a few classes and was not a school wide intervention, generalization of skills obtained in the classroom might have been limited. The findings of this study suggest that when teachers are given training and support, they can effectively teach social skills programs and help their students improve their social competence in the naturalistic setting of the classroom. Teachers’ complaints about the short term duration of the intervention also suggest teachers’ willingness to participate and provide the social skills training.

While there have been positive results reported in the use of social skills training programs, there have been limitations that have been consistently reported (Brown, Jimerson, Dowdy, Gonzalez, & Stewart, 2012; Edwards, Hunt, Meyers, Grogg & Jarrett, 2005). One limitation of the current social skills training is lack of skill generalization and application. According to Daly, Lentz, and Boyer (1996) the process of learning a new skill generally includes five steps: acquisition, fluency, mastery, generalization, and application. To social skills
learning, the current research about the effectiveness of social skills training mostly focuses on the acquisition and mastery of the skills. Few studies have followed the trainees to examine if the trainees generalize the skills to other settings and apply them. However, the ultimate goal of social skills training is for the children who receive training to generalize and apply the skills in multiple settings in their natural environment. Generalization is the transfer of skills that are learned within one setting to another (Gresham et al., 2004). Generalization is a genuine concern in regards to the current social skills delivery training model.

Currently, social skills training programs are often delivered to a group of students, usually most of them or all with a social skills deficit, in a pull out setting, such as a school psychologist’s office. Although this is often considered a direct service delivery model that has some empirical support (Forness & Kavale, 1996), children receive services in an isolated and often controlled artificial environment, which is different from their natural environment such as a classroom setting. For example, the isolated and controlled setting typically does not include socially skilled children who usually can serve as models. Direct training provided in this isolated setting, if without a purposefully designed activity for generalization, tend to stay in this setting. It may even make the goal of generalization even more difficult to achieve. Given the limitation in generalization and application, there has been a shift in focus over how social skills training programs should be delivered and by whom. The previous reviews suggest that, for the ultimate goal of social skills learning and generalization and application, not only the effectiveness immediately after the training or intervention is important but also the long term effectiveness. In order to reach long term effectiveness, it is critical to involve teachers, who are the main adults in children’s school environment, in professional training in providing and
maintaining the social skills training. More important, to engage teachers, the program has to take into account the teachers’ regular roles in daily teaching and instruction.

Teachers have the advantage of having greater access to students on a more frequent basis as opposed to school psychologists who often are not aware of a child unless there is a problem. Having social skills training merged into the classroom instruction would promote generalization of skills to the natural settings because the training occurs in the natural setting and by a person who is a part of that natural setting. Direct instruction in the child’s natural setting such as the classroom has been advocated (Rotheram-Borus, Bickford, & Milburn 2001) for both special populations and the general population. But little research effort has been made in this direction.

Delivering social skills in a universal setting has yielded several popular pre-packaged social skills training programs. Second Step is an example of a pre-packaged social skills program that is designed for classroom teachers to use in classrooms with the intent of violence prevention by increasing prosocial behaviors and decreasing aggressive behavior. Second Step has been developed for use with children from kindergarten through the eighth grade. Each grade level of the Second Step program is divided into several modules. The modules include Empathy, Impulse Control, Problem Solving, and Anger Management. A wide variety of teaching strategies are utilized, including role play, problem solving activities, and discussion. The Second Step program is based on social learning theory and the curriculum focuses on three areas of social competency—social problem solving, anger management, and empathy (Frey, Guzzo, & Hirschstein, 2000).
Edwards et al. (2005) investigated the effectiveness and acceptability of the Second Step program amongst fourth and fifth graders in a small urban school district. In total, 455 students from six different schools participated in the research. Although Second Step was designed with the intent of being used by teachers, the curriculum was delivered by either a staff member or a school counselor in the classroom for a total of 45 min on a weekly basis. Teachers were present during Second Step instruction to observe and to participate in role-playing sessions. The study used the Self Reliance subscale from the Behavior Assessment System for Children (BASC) to assess the effects of the Second Step curriculum. A Bully survey that was developed by one of the study’s authors was also used to assess the effects of Second Step within the context of positive and negative coping skills. A Second Step Content assessment was also used, as a pretest measure of social skills. In addition to these assessments, teacher report cards were analyzed and teachers rated students on their ability to listen and follow directions, respecting the property of others, and cooperation with peers and teacher. Furthermore, teacher and student interviews were conducted to assess the acceptability of the Second Step Program. An analysis of pre and posttests revealed that participant students experienced significant social skills acquisition across several measures, which covered not only the immediate post-tests in the classroom but also in other settings as well. Students experienced gains in the areas of empathy, impulse control, anger management, and anti-bullying. Similar gains were also made on teacher report cards in all areas except for listening and following directions. In addition to positive gains made in social skills, the researchers also found that there was a high rate of acceptability amongst the students and teachers that participated in the study. An overwhelming 98% of students who were interviewed indicated that other students should participate in
the Second Step curriculum. Similar results were found amongst the teachers that were interviewed, where all but one teacher had positive perceptions of the Second Step program. While the research findings were positive, the study was not without limitations. One of these limitations set forth was the concern over the generalization. The researchers indicated that previous research has suggested that short periods of time are insufficient for observing significant changes in a wide variety of environmental situations or generalization of skills. It was the researcher’s plan to train teachers in the Second Step curriculum so that they could deliver social skills training within their classrooms to address the issue of generalization by providing a long term and stable method of providing social skills training to students. Thus, even though the research did not involve teachers in the social skills training, they were aware of the importance of training and involving teachers in order to maintain the effectiveness and have the skills learned generalize to other settings.

In some studies, teachers are partially involved in Second Step curriculum training. McMahon, Washburn, Felix, Yakin, and Childrey (2000) explored the effectiveness of Second Step in diverse populations, by providing the curriculum to at-risk preschoolers and kindergartners. A team that consisted of clinical psychologists, clinical psychology students, preschool teachers, and public school teachers received training and collaborated together to provide the curriculum to the study participants. The teachers, in conjunction with the project directors, taught the curriculum. The Second Step curriculum was provided in groups of 5-8 preschool participants but in a class to the kindergarten participants. Measures that were used included behavioral observation and parent and teacher interviews that were conducted pre- and post-intervention, and the teacher rating form of the SSRS. Observational data revealed a significant decrease in aggressive behavior,
when pre- and post-intervention observations were compared. Interview data also yielded similar results. Interestingly enough, there was no significant decrease in problematic behavior as reported by the teacher form of the SSRS. The researchers suggested that teacher expectations on classroom behavior could have likely increased due to the children’s participation in the violence program, therefore altering the results. The researchers suggested that further study into teacher characteristics could help our understanding of the results of studies in the future. Although the training was provided in a naturalistic setting of the classroom, the mixed results could have also been due to the fact that the curriculum was not delivered by the regular teachers of the study participants. Having the curriculum be delivered as intended could have made a difference in the results. While no difference was mentioned about the effectiveness between teachers and professionals, these results suggest that there can be a successful collaboration between a school and mental health professionals in the community. Ultimately, it would be most beneficial for schools to take the training provided and be able to train their teachers to disseminate the curriculum to students.

Second Step has been demonstrated to be effective for culturally diverse students even without teacher involvement. Brown et al. (2012) examined the effectiveness of the Second Step program on Latino English Language Learner youth. A total of 403 students ranging from preschool to fourth grade participated in the Second Step Program from an elementary school located on the Central Coast of California. Students participated in pre-testing measures before Second Step was implemented that included the self-report version of the Behavior Assessment for Children (BASC-2), the Knowledge Assessment for Second Step (KASS), and the Behavioral and Emotional Screening System (BESS). The KASS consists of interpreting facial expressions, handling problem situations, and
assessing social skills knowledge. The BESS is a behavioral multi-rater system which is an assessment of behavior and emotional strength and weaknesses. The BESS along with the KASS was administered prior to implementation of the Second Step program with the intent of obtaining a snapshot of the current social skill set of the study participants. The Second Step program was taught at the appropriate grade level by school psychology doctoral students for about 20 sessions lasting approximately 30 min long over the course of the school year. The training sessions occurred in the classroom, with classroom teachers typically present for the training sessions and at times participated in the training. Because a large number of the study participants had limited English proficiency, portions of the Second Step program were presented in Spanish. Posttest results revealed that across all grades, students increased their knowledge of social and emotional skills when compared to their pretest results. Post intervention ratings of the BESS, however, revealed an increase in aggressive behavior. The authors attributed these particular findings to the possibility that when students increase their knowledge of social and emotional skills, this could in turn lead them to make a more accurate account of their behavior post-intervention. Therefore it is possible that the study participants could have underestimated their aggressive behavior before the intervention took place, which would explain why there was a reported increase in aggression. It is entirely possible that the students reported an increase of aggression due to an increase in awareness. The authors specifically pointed out one limitation in the study that the program, although taught in the naturalistic setting of the classroom, was taught by graduate students and that more studies were needed to explore whether having teachers deliver this curriculum would make a difference in effectiveness.
Overall, these results suggest that Second Step, designed for teachers to use in classrooms, can be an effective intervention tool, even with diverse populations. Studies have demonstrated that when children are exposed to the Second Step curriculum, their knowledge of social and emotional skills increases. Even though Second Step was designed for classroom teachers and most of the training was provided in the classroom in all of the studies that I reviewed, they did not include the teacher as the main intervention agent. A consistent suggestion amongst the studies called for teachers to be trained to deliver social skills training within the classroom. Therefore, the next logical step would be to explore the effectiveness of social skills training programs that are delivered in the classroom and by the classroom teacher. The benefits of teachers providing social skills training in the classroom are clear. Providing social skills training in the classroom promotes generalization of social skills at school. Having teachers provide social skills training in the classroom reinforces the generalization of those skills in the classroom. An additional advantage of the Second Step program is that the curriculum has been designed to be used by teachers, who are at an advantage for delivering social skills training, given the amount of contact that they have with students on a day-to-day basis.

Proposed Social Skills Service Delivery

Increasing emphasis on the social and emotional needs of children has placed the responsibility of facilitating socio-emotional learning squarely on the shoulders of school psychologists (Ross, Powell, & Elias, 2002). School psychologists have increasingly received training to address the emotional and social needs of children and this has often taken the shape of providing social skills training groups or even providing brief counseling sessions. These types of
interventions are often implemented outside of the classroom. This delivery mode of intervention is often referred to as the pull-out method. Typically, in this type of model, children are pulled out of their typical classrooms, usually once, but up to several times a week, to receive a targeted intervention by the school psychologist for at least 15 to 30 min at a time. Often, children who receive these types of services are referred by their teachers, for a variety of reasons. These reasons can vary from disruptive behavior in the classroom to simply struggling to make friends. Services can last throughout the school year, or until the child has demonstrated satisfactory progress. This approach of providing services to children outside of the classroom is not an uncommon one, and is often used for children who receive special education services, such as speech therapy, or resource services. Research, however, has suggested that this type of delivery of social skills training may not be the most effective. DuPaul and Eckert (1994) reviewed different social skills programs and how each program addressed the issue of generalization. The authors noted that the generalization of social skills had not been given enough consideration in previous research in the past, in spite of the significant implications. In total, they were only able to locate and review seven studies that addressed the issue of generalization along with the efficacy of social skill interventions. Across all studies that were analyzed, the study participants received a significant amount of social skills training. These ranged from students receiving a 15-min training session on a daily basis to receiving 45 min of training on a daily basis. The studies that were selected to be part of the analysis attempted to address generalization in variety of ways. The researchers noted several important findings from their analysis. First, they found that very few commercially packaged social skills programs addressed the issue of generalization. Secondly, they found that the least effective generalization strategy
employed was the “train and hope” strategy, in which the issue of generalization was not addressed at all and social skills training was conducted outside of the classroom. From the studies that they reviewed, the studies that demonstrated remarkable improvements in social competency and maintained these results after the intervention had ended was when training was delivered in the naturalistic setting of the classroom and the agents of change included the teacher and even sometimes their peers. This is consistent with the conclusion from the reviews in the previous discussion about the effectiveness of social skills training. Together, they suggest that implementing social skills training programs in the classroom by teachers could directly address the limitation of generalization, which has often been cited in the literature. In sum, research indicates that improving social skills in distinct training sessions alone has not yielded significant and sustainable results. Providing social skills training possibly by teachers in classroom settings might be more beneficial for the goal of generalization. In this research, I call this an alternative social skills training delivery model.

In the alternative delivery model, social skills training is integrated into the classroom curriculum, is conducted in classrooms school-wide and the training is conducted by teachers. In this model, students receive social skills training on daily basis, in conjunction with instruction in other subjects, such as reading or social science. Teachers are given adequate training and support to effectively deliver social skills training to their students. Social skills training would span the length of the school year, with students receiving consistent instruction, with plenty of opportunities to practice new skills. Ideally, curriculum integrating social skills training should be a school wide intervention. In order for generalization of newly learned skills to develop, students need to have the ability to practice what they learned outside of the classroom and be reinforced for demonstrating
appropriate behavior. Offering curriculum integrating social skills training as a school wide intervention makes this possible, as additional school personnel could eventually be trained to recognize, teach, and reinforce social skills, in a wide variety of settings within the school and not just the classroom.

The benefits of the alternative social skills training delivery model would be numerous. First and foremost, the opportunities to teach and reinforce social skills are significant in the classroom (Forness & Karvale, 1996). Curriculum integrating social skills training addresses the concerns brought up by previous research regarding generalization. Spence (2003) suggests that children would benefit much more from day to day social skills training as opposed to isolated sessions of treatment.

The research concerning social skills training delivered in the classroom with general education students is still emerging. January, Casey, and Paulson (2011) conducted a 28-study meta-analysis on the effectiveness of social skills training program provided in the classrooms by teachers. Overall, the researchers found a modest, yet positive effect on students’ overall social competency. Although the results from this meta-analysis were modest, the researchers found several interesting findings. They found that there was a significantly greater effect of classroom social skill interventions on younger students when compared to older students who were a part of the studies that were analyzed. The researchers also found that the length of the program, predicted effectiveness, with interventions that were longer in length having a tendency to be more effective than interventions of shorter duration. An additional finding was that the intervention programs where children took an active role in learning social skills yielded more effective outcomes when compared to programs in which students were taking on a more passive role during training. These results also suggest that
integrating social skills training in the classroom may be effectively used as a preventative measure to address deficits in social competency earlier, before they become more problematic later in life. However, the researchers did not take into account how much training teachers received in order to implement the interventions, which could have had a significant impact on the overall outcomes of the studies that were analyzed. This study suggests that more studies need to be conducted in order to explore teacher training and intervention fidelity.

There is evidence to support that teachers are in an ideal position to provide social skills training to their students. It has been established that teachers can have a profound impact on student behavior. Webster-Stratton, Reid, and Stoolmiller (2008) evaluated the effectiveness of the Incredible Years curriculum, a classroom based socio-emotional intervention that was delivered by Head Start teachers for children with low socio-economic status. Study participants consisted of 120 classrooms from 14 different schools. The teachers received an extensive amount of training on how to deliver the curriculum itself and positive classroom management strategies. Several assessments were used to track progress of several variables, which included classroom atmosphere, student conduct, and teacher behavior. The results indicated that teachers who received the intervention demonstrated more positive classroom management strategies, when compared to controls. In addition, students demonstrated more emotional knowledge and problem solving skills according to observations and assessments. Lastly, according to observations, more cooperative behaviors and student engagement were present post intervention. These results suggest that when given proper training and support, teachers can effectively develop their students’ social competence and promote a more positive classroom environment. These results are also consistent with prior research findings that suggest that teachers who
promote positive teaching strategies can lead to less aggression and increased attentiveness in the classroom (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2004). Teachers also have the advantage of having greater access to students on a more frequent basis as opposed to other school personnel who often are not aware of a child unless there is a problem. Because of their frequent access to students, teachers are in the position to assess and tailor social skills instruction to meet the needs of their students within any given academic year. Having socials skills training conducted in the classroom promotes generalization across several different settings. The teaching of these skills are carried out in the child’s natural environment as opposed to an isolated setting, which has been supported by the literature as the most effective method for implementing social skills training.

An emerging trend in providing interventions systematically within a school setting involving teachers has been gaining momentum in recent years is positive behavioral intervention and support (PBIS). PBIS is a school wide prevention system that can be conceptualized as a framework for the adoption of empirically supported interventions. These interventions have been designed to directly meet the needs of students. PBIS is structured into a three-tiered model. Tier 1 typically consists of preventative and universal interventions that all students receive within a school. Tier 1 supports include explicit instruction of behavioral expectations and the adoption of school wide rules and consequences for undesirable behavior. Approximately 80% of students should respond to universal instruction (Sugai & Horner, 2006); however, for non-responders, there are tier 2 interventions. Tier 2 interventions usually consist of Check In-Check Out procedures where a student regularly meets with adult regarding a target behavior. If a child still does not respond to tier 1 or tier 2 interventions, there are tier 3 interventions. Tier 3 interventions are for students who display severe behaviors or
may suffer from a disability that prevents them from correcting their behavior. Interventions that are suitable for tier 3 are highly individualized and targeted towards specific undesirable behaviors. All decision making within the tiers are data driven, meaning that progress is monitored and decisions concerning the child are based upon that child’s response to the intervention.

The adoption of PBIS in schools has shown very promising results. Lewis, Powers, Kelk, and Newcomer (2000) found that PBIS procedures that were implemented at an elementary school of 450 students greatly reduced the occurrence of problematic behaviors on the playground. In a similar study, Scott (2001) presented a case example where PBIS procedures were implemented at a school where most of the students were deemed at risk. School suspensions were reduced an astounding 75% when compared to baseline. Even more impressive results were reported by Mann, Lebrun, and Muscott (2008) who collected data from 28 schools that implemented PBIS procedures. The results demonstrated that schools were able to not only successfully implement PBIS procedures, but also sustain these procedures for a second year, and the rate of suspensions was greatly reduced when compared to baseline levels prior to intervention. Overall, these results suggest that school wide systems that focus on preventative and positive behavioral measures can have a substantial impact on behavior.

While the first tier of PBIS is similar to the alternative delivery model that has been proposed in this study, it differs from the alternative delivery model in the sense that PBIS primarily focuses on behavior. Few studies have focused on social skills training as a school wide prevention strategy. However, Lewis, Sugai, and Colvin (1998) explored the effectiveness of social skills instruction in reducing problematic behaviors in conjunction with a school wide behavioral support system. Three different areas of the school were targeted, which were the
cafeteria, a hallway, and the playground during recess. PBIS had already been established at the school and all students from grades first through fifth participated in the study. The researchers trained the teachers at the school to deliver social skills instruction, during class for 30 min on a daily basis for 4 weeks. After the conclusion of social skills training, direct interventions were implemented that established contingencies for behavior in the three target areas. Baseline and frequency data of problematic behaviors were collected prior to, during social skills instruction and after intervention in the targeted areas of the school. An analysis of the frequency count in behaviors in the targeted areas post intervention revealed that there was a modest reduction in problematic behaviors in those targeted areas when compared to the rate of behavior prior to the intervention phase. While these results only demonstrated a modest reduction in problematic behaviors, these results do suggest that social skills training can be an integral part of a school wide support system to address behavior at school.

Currently, teacher delivering social skills training within the classroom is not the widespread model, despite evidence that suggests that this may be a more effective approach. In light of the evidence that suggests the significance of social skill acquisition, teachers do consider the lack of social skills to be a significant issue for students (Webster-Stratton et al., 2008). Little attention, however, has been paid to teacher perceptions regarding social skills training, particularly as an intervention that is integrated into classroom curriculum. However, there is evidence that demonstrates that teachers value social skills in the classroom. Lane et al. (2003) sought to investigate what domains of social skills teachers considered being most essential for academic success. Using the teacher form of the SSRS, the researchers surveyed 366 teachers regarding their preference of social skills domains of assertion, cooperation and self-control. A one way
ANOVA analysis revealed that teachers valued the social skill domains cooperation, and self-control, when compared to the assertion domain. Overall, the results suggest that teachers consider social skills of assertion to be less essential to academic success. Exploring what social skill domains teachers value and whether this impacts their willingness to teach social skills within the classroom environment could shed light on not only on the preferred social skill sets that teachers deem to be the most important for academic success, but also whether these preferences shape their willingness to conduct social skills training within their classrooms. Being able to pinpoint the preferences of social skill sets of teachers could help us develop more effective teacher professional trainings interventions in order for them to integrate social skills training in classroom settings.

Conclusion

It has been established that social skills are an important factor in the emotional and academic development of children. The possession of strong social skills can afford a child many advantages. Studies have shown that children with strong social skills do better in school and enjoy more satisfying relationships with their peers. Even when a child experiences a stressful life situation, having strong social skills affords them the ability to draw upon resources in times of need. A lack of social skills can place a child at risk for doing poorly in school. Studies have shown that children who lack social skills may be perceived as more aggressive and are less liked by their peers. Other studies have suggested that poor social skills may place a child at risk for being bullied.

Social skills training have been demonstrated to be an effective way of increasing social competency in children. Direct instruction of social skills
training to children, however, has not always translated to engagement of socially skilled behaviors. The lack of generalization of social skills outside of isolated training sessions has been a consistent issue (DuPaul & Eckert, 1994). This issue has yielded a shift in the approach to the delivery of social skills training, which has consistently called for the teaching of social skills to be provided within the classroom (Lampi et al., 2008). Several packaged programs that have been designed for teachers to use in the classroom setting such as Second Step, have been demonstrated to reduce aggression and increase social knowledge in students. Research suggests that students need opportunities to be able to practice social skills in a wide variety of settings in order for skill generalization to occur. Systematic and school wide preventative measures, such as a social skills training delivery in the classroom, could help bridge the gap between the teaching of social skills and the manifestation of socially skilled behaviors. This type of intervention first starts in the classroom and with the teacher. Therefore it is important to first consider what skills teachers value and whether those values shape their willingness to incorporate social skills training in the classroom.

The current research aims to answer the following questions:

1) What specific domains of social skills do teachers value as most important?

2) If teachers consider specific social skills sets to be more important, would this preference predict their willingness to incorporate social skills training into classroom curriculum?

3) Would preference for a specific domain of social skills be more predictive of willingness when compared to other domains of social skills?
CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Participants

A total of 200 surveys were distributed to primary grade general education teachers from 12 different schools in six different school districts in the Central Valley participated in the survey. A total of 116 general education teachers participated in the survey, garnering a 58% response rate. Grade levels that were taught ranged from kindergarten to sixth grade. Demographic data (see Table 1) revealed that out of 116 participants, 99 of them were female while the remaining 17 were male.

Table 1

| Participant Characteristics by Grade Level and Years of Experience |
|---------------------------------|---------|---------|
| Grades                          | Total   | Percentage |
| Kindergarten                    | 15      | 12.93    |
| First Grade                     | 13      | 11.20    |
| Second Grade                    | 22      | 18.97    |
| Third Grade                     | 21      | 18.10    |
| Fourth Grade                    | 16      | 13.80    |
| Fifth Grade                     | 15      | 12.93    |
| Sixth Grade                     | 13      | 11.20    |
| Years of Experience             |         |          |
| 0-5 Years                       | 21      | 18.10    |
| 5-10 Years                      | 17      | 14.66    |
| 10-15 Years                     | 22      | 18.97    |
| 15-20 Years                     | 24      | 20.69    |
| 20+ Years                       | 29      | 25.00    |

Instruments

There were two instruments used in the current study. To assess teachers’ perceptions of importance of social skills domains, the teacher’s form of the social skills scale of the SSRS was used with modification. To assess teachers’ willingness of incorporating specific social skills in their classrooms, a self-
developed Willingness questionnaire was used to assess level of willingness to incorporate social skills training of specific social skills in the classroom.

The SSRS is a multi-rater assessment system that has been designed to identify strengths and deficits in the areas of social skills, problem behaviors, and academic competency for children ranging from 3 years old to the 12th grade (Gresham & Elliot, 1990). The assertion scale contains items that describe initiating behaviors, such as complimenting others, inviting others to join activities, being able to make friends easily, and initiating conversations with others. The cooperation scale contains items that describe behaviors such as attending to and following teachers’ directions, producing correct schoolwork, and ignoring peer distractions when doing class work. The Self-control scale includes items that describe behaviors such as compromising in conflict situations to reach agreement, receiving criticism well, and responding appropriately when being pushed or hit by other children. The Empathy subscale includes items that describe behaviors such as showing concern for others, respecting others’ feelings, and being able to see something from someone else’s point of view. The Responsibility subscale includes items that describe behaviors such as demonstrating concern for property and work and the ability to communicate with adults. The system includes three scales: the Social Skills Scale, the Academic Competency Scale, and the Problem Behavior Scale. For each scale, the SSRS system is comprised of three questionnaires for three different informants — teachers, parents, and sometimes students themselves depending on their age. Therefore, for the Social Skills Scale, there are parent rating questionnaire, teacher rating questionnaire, and student rating questionnaire. For each rater questionnaire, there are three different corresponding levels by either student age or grade level. The preschool form is designed for ages 3 years to 4 years and 11 months old. The
elementary form is designed for children in grades K-6 while the secondary school form is used for children in grades 7-12. For the purpose of this study, only the Social Skills Scale and the elementary teacher rating questionnaire were used. Altogether, there are five major social skill behavioral domains that are assessed in the Social Skills Scale—Self-Control, Assertion, Cooperation, Empathy, and Responsibility. Due to situational specificity, different informants rate students’ social skills in different domains relevant to the situation they have opportunities to observe the student. Therefore, the teacher report questionnaire focuses on Self-Control, Assertion, and Cooperation; the parent report questionnaire measures the same three domains with the additional domain of responsibility; the student report questionnaire measures all five domains. All of the items of the Social Skills Scale assess behaviors that can be directly observed.

The authors went through considerable lengths in the development of the SSRS. Pertinent literature included the assessment and teaching of social skills, existing scales of social skills, adaptive behaviors, and social outcomes in relation to social skills took place. The items that were selected for the Social Skills Scale were based on the findings of the Teachers’ Ratings of Social Skills (TROSS) study that was conducted in 1984 by the authors. The initial 100 items were narrowed down to 52 items based on field testing with 194 children in grades first through sixth (Clark, Gresham, & Elliott, 1985). According to the manual, the norm was based on a national sample of 4,170 children using self-ratings and the ratings of parents and teachers (Gresham & Elliott, 1990).

Standardization took place by a series of factor analyses. Items that had a factor loading of .30 or less, or at least a .30 on two or more scales was removed. The five factors that appear on the SSRS, which include cooperation, assertion,
self-control, empathy, and responsibility, were derived from these factor analyses (Campbell, 1999).

There are no formal studies that focus on the construct validity of the SSRS. According to the manual, the authors relied on several sources in the development of the Social Skills Scale of the SSRS, with a particular focus on research concerning child development, special education, as well as clinical and educational psychology (Gresham & Elliott, 1990). The manual provides evidence of validity in the form of criterion validity. Criterion validity studies reported in the manual that used the teacher form of the Social Skills Scale found substantial correlations with the Social Behavior Assessment Rating Scale (.68), the Child Behavior Checklist-Teacher Report (.75) and the Harter Teacher Rating Scale (.70) (Gresham & Elliot, 1990).

According to the manual of the SSRS, reliability was assessed by a variety of methods. Scores of the SSRS reflected a relatively high degree of homogeneity across all scales of the SSRS and across all age levels and reporters for the assessment of all areas which included social skills, academic competency and problem behaviors. For the purposes of the study it is relevant to focus particularly on the reliability of the social skills teacher questionnaire. The subscale of Social skills test-retest reliability for the teacher form overall was reported at a .85, with scores reported at a .88 for cooperation, .75 for assertion, and .80 for self-control. These results suggest overall strong reliability of the social skills teacher questionnaire form. Elliott, Gresham, Freeman, and McCloskey (1988) conducted a study to investigate the reliability of the teacher questionnaire form. Teachers were asked to rate their elementary school students on social skills over a 6-week period. It was found that the teacher questionnaire had a high internal consistency (.96) and high test-retest reliability (.90). Overall, the data in the manual provided
strong support for good reliability and validity of the teacher rating questionnaire of the Social Skills Scale.

Independent research studies using the SSRS provide additional information about the reliability and criterion validity of the Social Skills Scale teacher report form. Diperna and Volpe (2005) collected teacher ratings of 185 students in the third through fifth grade from six urban schools located in the northeastern part of the United States using the SSRS and the Academic Competence Evaluation Scale (ACES). The researchers’ intent was to explore the relationships between student’s self-ratings and teacher’s ratings on social skills. ACES is a student and teacher rated assessment tool that measures the attitudes, skills, and behaviors that support academic competence (Diperna & Elliott, 2000). Data were collected twice with an interval of 6 months on both scales. The research found that the teacher social skills scale of the SSRS demonstrated modest correlations with teacher ratings of academic skills (.34) and academic enablers (.40) with ACES; however, the study found stronger correlations between academic competency and ACES. This makes sense when considering ACES is an instrument that is used to measure student behavior in terms of academic skills, whereas the SSRS measures academic competency, along with social skills and problems behaviors.

The Social Skills Scale of the SSRS has also been found to be consistent with other measures that include social skills such as the Behavior Assessment System for Children (BASC). BASC is an instrument that is designed to assess behavior. Like the SSRS, the BASC consists of a self, parent, and teacher rating scale of behavior. In addition to several rating scales, the BASC also includes a personality inventory, a structured developmental history and student progress rating system. BASC has several scales, which include externalizing problems,
internalizing problems, adaptive problems, other problems, and school Problems. Flanagan, Alfonso, Primavera, Povall, and Higgins (1996) conducted a study to explore the convergent validity of the social skills scales of the BASC (the adaptability scale) and SSRS (the Social Skills Scale). Fifty-three kindergartners were rated by their teachers using both the SSRS teacher questionnaire and the BASC teacher report form. The adaptability scale of the BASC measures pro-social behaviors. A series of independent t tests revealed moderate correlations on the adaptability subscale of the BASC and social skills scales of the SSRS (.44) on teachers’ form. The authors contended that the purposes of both the BASC and SSRS differed somewhat in that the scales of the BASC focus more on how a child behaves globally whereas the Social Skills Scale of SSRS focuses on behavior in the classroom.

Pianta, Walthall, and Konold (2005) conducted an exploratory factor analysis on the Social Skills Scale’s three factor model (Self-Control, Assertion, and Cooperation) with respect to gender and ethnic background using the teacher rating questionnaire of the SSRS at the elementary level. The purpose of the study was to explore the construct validity of the SSRS. Individual test items were grouped into 15 item parcels that were organized by factor loadings as reported in the SSRS manual. These groupings were used to serve the secondary purpose of the study, which was to explore the invariance of items with respect to gender and ethnicity. Data analysis revealed that when compared to the baseline of a one-factor model, the three-factor model (Self-Control, Assertion, and Cooperation) demonstrated a significant improvement, with all values ranging from .67 to .88. Further investigation into this model with concern to gender and ethnic background found little differences in correlation values between gender and ethnic background. These results demonstrate strong support for the elementary
teacher form of the Social Skills Scales that the items are measuring the three factors as it is designed to, regardless of gender and ethnic differences.

Based on the information from the manual and empirical studies that have examined the Social Skills Scale teacher’s rating questionnaire, I can conclude that the teacher’s form of the Social Skills Scale of the SSRS has demonstrated sound reliability and acceptable validity when measuring student’s observable behaviors that represent social skills in the classroom. In the current study, I modified the SSSR to only include items from the Social Skills Scale and excluded items from the Problem Behaviors Scale. The modified SSRS teacher form elementary level (K-6) questionnaire identifies the specific social skills that teachers valued in three different domains, Assertion, Cooperation, and Self-Control. Each item on the SSRS asks the teacher to indicate the importance of the item. The importance rating that indicates how important that social skill is in the classroom was designated as 0= Not very important, 1=Important, 2= Critical. To answer the second and third research questions, a willingness questionnaire was developed. The Willingness questionnaire began with questions regarding grade level taught and years of teaching experience. Teachers had the option of selecting a range of grade levels starting at Kindergarten up to sixth grade. Teachers were also required to choose from categories 0-5 years, 5-10 years, 10-15 years, 15-20 years and 20+ years to indicate current teaching experience. The remaining questions describe specific behaviors from the teacher’s form of the SSRS. Teachers rated level of willingness using a 3-point Likert scale. The responses were designated as follows: 0= Unwilling, 1= Willing, and 3= I already teach these skills. In addition to level of willingness, there was an additional item that asked teachers to indicate willingness or actual time spent on formal social skills instruction per week. The
ratings that teachers had to choose from was 0 min, 30 min, 60 min, 90 min and 120 min.

**Design and Procedures**

Social skills domains that teachers identified as critical in the classroom were treated as independent variables in this study. The dependent variables were determined to be the level of willingness to incorporate social skills training in the classroom. The participants rated how important they viewed each skill. After completing the importance rating on the SSRS, the participants were asked to complete the Willingness questionnaire. A total of 200 surveys were distributed to 12 different schools in 6 different school districts over the course of 8 weeks. Once permission was obtained at the district level, permission at school sites was directly obtained through the school principal. Research packets were then either distributed directly to the school site, or the school psychologist that was assigned to the site distributed the packets to teachers at the site. A total of 116 primary grade general education teachers participated in the survey. Each survey participant was given a packet that included instructions on how to complete the survey, a participant consent form (see Appendix A), an SSRS form (see Appendix B), a willingness questionnaire (see Appendix C) and a sheet with instructions to write their email address for a $5 Starbucks gift card. The instructions directed the survey participants to first sign the consent form, then complete the social skill portion of the SSRS survey and finally the willingness questionnaire. Survey participants that did turn in their email addresses were compensated with a $5 Starbucks gift card via email by the researcher. Completed packets were collected by either a school psychologist or a school site administrator and then returned to the researcher. Study participants were given a
total of 2 weeks to complete and return the packet if they chose to participate in the study. Data were then turned over to an undergraduate research assistant who entered the data into an Excel spreadsheet. Names of the participants and which school site they worked at were recorded on the front sheet of the SSRS form. Each completed survey was assigned an identification number as it was collected and was tracked as such. The majority of the data (80%) were entered by the research assistant with the remaining 20% being entered by the researcher. For every 10 surveys collected, three surveys were randomly selected by the researcher to ensure accuracy. The research assistant notified the researcher whenever an incomplete survey was found, and the information that was identified on the SSRS form was used to contact the school psychologist at the school site to have the survey participant complete the missing items on the survey packet. A total of six teachers had to be contacted in order to complete missing items on the survey packets.

**Research Hypotheses**

Based on the previous research review, I would expect that

1. Teachers will deem specific skills from the cooperation and self-control domains as more critical than skills from the assertion domain.

2. Valuing skills from the cooperation and self-control domains will be related to high willingness to incorporate social skills training in the classroom.

3. Valuing skills from any domain would be related to willingness to spend time (minutes) teaching social skills in the classroom.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Data Analysis

Descriptive Statistics

A total of 116 primary grade general education teachers teaching in the range of kindergarten through sixth grade participated in the survey. Gender data revealed that the total sample was overwhelmingly female, with 99 participants being female while the remaining 17 were male. The majority of study participants reported that they taught second grade, with a total of 22 participants representing roughly 18% of the overall sample. Data on how many years taught revealed that the majority of the teacher participants (25% of the overall sample) had over 20 years of experience. Because the targeted amount of participants was not met, a post hoc repeated measures ANOVA power analysis was conducted using the G power statistical (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009) computing software package with $\alpha = 0.05$ and $n = 116$. The power analysis indicated that there was zero chance of a type II error. The power provided by the obtained sample size was sufficient to reveal that there was no chance of rejecting the null hypothesis in error.

Social skill set items were grouped according to whether they belonged to the domains of cooperation, assertion or self-control. For each participant, a summed score across the items within a domain was calculated. Figure 1 presents the mean summed scores of teachers’ ratings on the value of each domain. Visual analysis (see Table 2) suggested that teachers valued the social skills domain of self-control ($M=15.98$, $SD=.29$) over the social skills domains of cooperation ($M=15.11$, $SD=.28$), and assertion ($M=11.82$, $SD=.27$).
Figure 1. Mean summed scores of value for each social skills domain

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for Summed Scores of Value and Willingness to Incorporate Social Skills Domains

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th></th>
<th>Willingness</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation</td>
<td>15.11</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertion</td>
<td>11.83</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Control</td>
<td>15.98</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 2 presents the mean summed scores of teachers’ ratings on the willingness to incorporate social skills of each domain. Visual analysis of the summed score means for willingness did not reveal any immediately notable differences between the domains of cooperation ($M=2.62, SD=.57$), self-control ($M=2.22, SD=.71$), and assertion ($M=2.23, SD=.74$).

![Bar chart showing mean summed scores of willingness for cooperation, assertion, and self-control](image)

*Figure 2. Mean summed scores of willingness for each social skills domain*

Figure 3 shows a frequency histogram of responses to the question: “Indicate your willingness to teach social skills domain cooperation. The figure indicates that no one endorsed option 0: “Not at all.”

Figure 4 shows a frequency histogram of the responses to the question: “How much time do you, or would you be willing to devote per week to formal cooperative skills lessons?” The figure shows that the mode was 30 min.

Figure 5 shows a frequency histogram of responses to the question: “Indicate your willingness to teach social skills domain of assertion. The figure indicates that no one endorsed option 0: “Not at all.”
**Figure 3.** Frequency histogram of responses to willingness to teach cooperation skills

**Figure 4.** Frequency histogram of responses to willingness to spend time incorporating social skills lessons on cooperation
Figure 5. Frequency histogram of responses to willingness to teach assertion skills

Figure 6 shows a frequency histogram of the responses to the question: “How much time do you, or would you be willing to devote per week to formal assertion skills lessons?” The figure shows that the mode response was 30 min.

Figure 6. Frequency histogram of responses to willingness to spend time incorporating social skills lessons on assertion
Figure 7 shows a frequency histogram of responses to the question: “Indicate your willingness to teach social skills domain self-control. The figure indicates that the mode response was option 2: “Yes, I would.”

![Frequency histogram](image)

**Figure 7.** Frequency histogram of responses to willingness to teach self-control skills

Figure 8 shows a frequency histogram of the responses to the question: “How much time do you, or would you be willing to devote per week to formal self-control skills lessons?” The figure shows that the mode was 30 min. The two study participants who indicated the option of “0” were eliminated for further analyses.

**Inferential Statistics**

The first hypothesis posed in this study was that teachers value the specific social skill domains of cooperation and self-control over the domain of assertion. This question was posed in order to replicate the findings of Lane et al. (2003). Using an α level of .05, a one-way within subject ANOVA on summed value scores found that there were significant differences between social skills domains
Figure 8. Frequency histogram of responses to willingness to spend time incorporating social skills lessons on self-control

\[(F (2, 230) = 143.74, p < .0005)\]. Post hoc comparisons utilizing the Bonferroni correction indicated that teachers valued the social skills domain of self-control more than the social skills domain of cooperation (p < .003). The social skills domain of cooperation (p < .0005) was valued more than assertion (p < .0005).

The second question posed in this study was whether a teacher’s value of a social skill domain was related to willingness to teach that said domain in their classroom. A one-way between subjects ANOVA on summed cooperation scores revealed no main effect of willingness \((F (2,113) = 2.232, p = .112)\), A one-way between subjects ANOVA on summed self-control scores revealed no main effect of willingness \((F (2,112) = .463, p = .63)\). A one-way between subjects ANOVA on summed assertion scores revealed a main effect of willingness \((F (2,113) = 4.95, p = .009)\). Post hoc comparisons utilizing the Tukey’s HSD revealed that teachers who indicated they were already teaching assertion skills (N= 48, M= 12.71, SD = .42) were more willing to teach assertion skills than teachers who only indicated that they were willing to teach assertion skills (N= 21, M= 10.38, SD = .636) (see Table 3 and Figure 9).
Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sets</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>$\eta^2$</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation</td>
<td>2, 113</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td>.112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertion</td>
<td>2, 113</td>
<td>4.95</td>
<td>.081</td>
<td>.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Control</td>
<td>2, 112</td>
<td>.463</td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 9. Marginal means of main effect of willingness to teach social skills

The third question posed in this study was whether a teacher’s value of a social skills domain was predictive of willingness to spend more time on teaching that domain of social skills. A univariate ANOVA on summed value scores for each social skills domain revealed that there were no significant effects of time spent teaching a domain for the domain of cooperation ($F (4,111) = .242, p = .914$) or for the domain of assertion skills ($F (4,111) = 1.53, p = .199$). There was, however, a significant effect of time spent teaching self-control ($F (4,111) = 2.49$,
suggesting that teachers’ value of self-control skills is related to how much time they spend teaching the skills (see Table 4 and Figure 10).

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sets</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>$\eta^2$</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation</td>
<td>4, 111</td>
<td>.232</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>.914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertion</td>
<td>4, 111</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>.052</td>
<td>.199</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-Control</td>
<td>4, 111</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>.082</td>
<td>.048</td>
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</table>

*Figure 10.* Marginal means of main effect of willingness to spend time teaching self-control skills
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Social skills have been widely recognized as paramount for classroom functioning and beyond. Socially skilled children enjoy more gratifying relationships with others, can excel academically, and experience less maladjustment when facing stressful life events when compared to children who are not (Goodman et al. 1995; Rahmati et al. 2010; Tu et al. 2012). Children who lack social skills face a variety of possible repercussions, including repudiation from their peers, struggles in academic achievement, and even bullying (Fox & Boulton, 2005; Ladd et al. 1997; Ollendick et al., 1992). Within the last several decades, new pre-packaged social skills programs have emerged and have been adopted at schools to target students who have deficits, not only in the special education settings but in general education settings as well. Although only modestly positive effects have been reported (January et al. 2011), there is a general consensus in the literature in support of social skills programs as a tool to teach children with deficits in social skills. A frequently cited limitation within the research is a lack of generalization of social skills (DuPaul & Eckert, 1994). Although there are social skills programs such as Second Step that have been specifically designed to be used by teachers and be delivered within a classroom setting, these same social skills programs are often being delivered in a pull-out setting, often by a professional with limited contact with a child, a method that is not empirically supported (Spence, 2003). Social skill lessons are often being delivered in isolation to groups of children who may be experiencing similar deficits in social skills. Having social skills training in this manner prevents a child from having access to appropriate models of socially skilled behavior as well as reinforcement for appropriate behavior from peers and teachers within the natural
setting of the classroom. It is the researcher’s assertion that social skills training programs should be delivered universally, within the classroom, with social skills content being delivered by the teacher.

There is research to suggest that teachers, with appropriate training and support, can be effective facilitators of social skills training (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2004). However, adding an additional responsibility to an already overwhelming plate of responsibilities that a teacher has, one would wonder whether teachers would be willing if at all, to incorporate social skills training in the classroom. An important question then to ask is what social skills teachers value, based on the assumption that if this is a skill that a teacher views as important, then they might be willing to explicitly teach that skill. Research has already been conducted to examine just what social skills teachers deem as critical to classroom functioning. The findings of Lane et al. (2003) showed that teachers believe that social skills from the domains of self-control and cooperation are critical for classroom functioning. In addition to replicating the findings of Lane et al. (2003), the main purpose of this study was to determine whether value of specific social skills domains was related to level of willingness to teach that skill in the classroom.

The results of the current study found that teacher valued social skills of self-control, and cooperation and assertion. These results are mostly consistent with the findings of Lane et al. (2003). Furthermore, the current study found that elementary school teachers deem social skills from the self-control domain as the most critical for classroom functioning. If we look at self-control skills a little more closely on the SSRS form, this domain includes behaviors such as “Controls temper in conflict situation with peers” or “Responds appropriately when pushed or hit by other children.” It may be possible that lack of these self-control skills
would lead to the most distraction to classroom instruction because these skills are about controlling physically and/or verbally aggressive behaviors. One might suppose that a lack of self-control skills are easier to notice in a child when compared to a lack of assertion skills, which may be an additional explanation as to why teachers value these skills much more, as managing aggressive behaviors have been shown to take away from already limited instructional time (Alter, Walker & Landers, 2013).

The second question posed in the study was whether or not value of a specific social skill domain would implicate willingness to teach skills from the same domain. Statistical analysis revealed that value of social skills domains of cooperation and self-control over the domain of assertion did not lead to higher level of willingness to teach these skills. There was, however, an increase in willingness to teach assertion skills for teachers who also valued assertion skills. Furthermore, in answering the third research question, statistical analysis indicated that there was no increase in willingness to spend time teaching cooperation social skills when teachers valued higher on cooperation than assertion. However for teachers who preferred self-control skills, there was a significant increase in willingness to spend time teaching self-control skills. Thus, teachers’ higher value of a specific domain of social skills did not consistently predict teachers’ willingness to spend more time teaching those domains of social skills in the classroom. This is partially consistent with the findings to the second research question.

The second and third hypotheses in this study were based on the assumption that teachers would be more willing to incorporate training of the social skills in their classrooms and also to spend more time teaching the social skills that they value more. However, the above findings only partially confirmed
the hypotheses. For the domain of self-control, teachers valued it more and indicated that they spent more time on teaching these skills. However, the overall willingness to incorporate training of self-control in their classrooms was not significantly higher. These findings seem to conflict with each other. However, they may also suggest that in teachers’ perspectives, incorporating social skills training in classrooms and teaching social skills are not the same. The former sounds more close to using a social skills program in the classroom while the latter sounds more close to teaching discrete skills to students. Thus, it is possible that the latter is one form of the former. It is also possible that incorporating social skills training may mean more time commitment such as professional development and more time taken away from academic instruction. Therefore, teachers who valued self-control skills more, were more willing to spend more time teaching them; however, the overall willingness to incorporate training of self-control was not significantly higher.

The study found that teachers valued both self-control and cooperation skills more than assertion skills. However, it also found that teachers were not willing to either spend more time on teaching cooperation skills or incorporate training of cooperation skills in their classrooms. While disconfirming the second and third hypotheses, these results motivated us to reflect on the assumptions behind the hypotheses—higher value lead to higher level of willingness of practice. There are only two variables in our assumption—value and willingness. It is possible that there are other variables involved that were not considered. In other words, additional factors such as school culture, time commitment, teaching load, student population etc. may also affect teachers’ willingness to provide more social skills training in their classrooms even on the skills they highly valued. The results ask us to take an ecological approach when we try to turn values or beliefs
to practices. The above reported results are reasonable if we adopt an ecological approach to examine teachers’ willingness. In this approach, value on social skills is only one of the variables that would affect their willingness to teach the social skills. Therefore, future research should examine the major ecological variables in investigating if teachers are willing to incorporate social skills training in their classrooms or willing to spend more time on teaching social skills.

Overall, there were clear differences in what type of social skills primary teachers value in the classroom. Self-control skills were valued significantly more than cooperation skills both were valued more than assertion skills. Although valuing self-control skills was not indicative of willingness to teach self-control skills, it was indicative of willingness to spend time teaching social skills. Although value of assertion skills was not indicative of willingness to teach social skills, it was indicative of time spent teaching assertion skills. These results suggest that while teachers may consider social skills to be important, value does not necessarily translate into willingness to incorporate social skills training in their classrooms. It is important to recognize that in addition to teachers’ value of social skills, there are other variables within their ecology that could have a direct impact on willingness to teach these skills. This could allow for the development of more focused training and support for teachers to be successful facilitators of social skills training. There are also additional implications for other staff personnel involved. Quite often school psychologists have been tasked with providing social skills training to students with deficits in social skills. School psychologists can work to support teachers in implementing social skills training in the classroom.
Limitations

Although primary findings of this study were mostly consistent with the previous work of Lane et al. (2003) and demonstrated significant findings, this study was not without limitations. First, information collected was based on teacher report, and there was no direct observational data to confirm actual formal social skills instruction in the classroom at reported by some of the study participants. There is also the possibility that the teachers that indicated that either they did not teach social skills or were unwilling to teach social may in fact already engage in social skills instruction without realizing it. Second, study participants were not exposed to actual social skills curriculum, such as Second Step. The willingness survey that was given to study participants did not include an explanation or an example of what training of social skills and formal instruction of social skills might look like, which may have also contributed to a possible lack of understanding amongst study participants when completing the surveys. Lastly, study participants were not asked specifically what social skills programs they use or would consider using and furthermore, there was no explanation sought as to why teachers would or would not teach social skills.

Future Directions

Future directions for research may include exploring the reasons why teachers are hesitant to incorporate social skills lessons within their classrooms, whether it’s a lack of time or funds to spend on social skills programs, as well what teachers feel that they might need in terms of support to incorporate social skills training within their classrooms. Exploring possible hindrances to social skill training programs could possibly yield solutions in later on in the future on how to resolve these problems. An additional direction for future research may entail exploration of teacher expectations in what specific social skills children
should be able to successfully demonstrate by age or grade level. Differing expectations of skills that children should demonstrate could have a direct impact on value of social skills and willingness to teach those skills. Rubie-Davies (2006) suggested that teacher expectations can have a direct impact on the socioemotional environment within the classroom.

There is a growing body research that suggests that social skills should be explicitly taught alongside other subjects, such as reading and mathematics. All children should have access to curriculum that research has shown can maximize their chances of leading successful and productive lives. It is important that we continue in our efforts to understand how to best deliver social skills training programs to appropriately serve all children.
REFERENCES
REFERENCES


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM
Consent to Participate in Research Study

You are invited to participate in a study conducted by Nuvia Bernal, School Psychology Graduate Student and Dr. Hong Ni, Assistant Professor of School Psychology. We hope to learn what social skills teachers deem critical in the classroom and perceptions of social skills training. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a primary grade level teacher.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete a series of questionnaires. You will be asked to complete the Social Skills Rating system questionnaire about your current students. The rating questionnaire should not take longer than 15 minutes to complete. The additional questionnaire should take no longer than 15 minutes to complete. We cannot guarantee that you will receive any benefits from this study.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. This information will be compiled for use in a graduate thesis. This results gathered from this study will provide information regarding teachers’ perception of social skills and social skills training.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice your future relations with California State University, Fresno. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue participation at any time without penalty.
If you have any questions, please ask us. Questions regarding the rights of research subjects may be directed to Constance Jones, Chair, CSUF Committee on the Protection of Human Subjects, (559) 278-4468.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

YOU ARE MAKING A DECISION WHETHER OR NOT TO PARTICIPATE. YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE DECIDED TO PARTICIPATE, HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED ABOVE.

Date

Signature

__________________________________________________

Signature of Witness (if any)    Signature of Investigator

__________________________________________________
APPENDIX B: IMPORTANCE QUESTIONNAIRE
<table>
<thead>
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<th>Social Skills Rating Scale</th>
<th>Not Important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Critical</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Controls temper in conflict situations with peers.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Introduces herself or himself to new people without being told.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Appropriately questions rules that may be unfair.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Compromises in conflict situations by changing own ideas to reach agreement.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Responds appropriate to peer pressure.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Says nice things about himself or herself when appropriate.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Invites others to join in activities.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Uses free time in an acceptable way.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Finishes class assignments within time limits.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Makes friends easily.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Responds appropriately to teasing by peers.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Controls temper in conflict situations with adults.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Receives criticism well.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Initiates conversations with peers.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Uses times appropriately while waiting for help.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Produces correct schoolwork.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Appropriately tells you when he or she thinks you treated him or her unfairly.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Accepts peers’ ideas for group activities.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Gives compliments to peers.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Follows your directions.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Puts work materials or school property away.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Cooperates with peers without prompting.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Volunteers to help peers with classroom tasks.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Joins ongoing activity or group without being told to do so.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Responds appropriately when pushed or hit by other children.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Ignores peer distractions when doing classwork.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Keeps desk clean and neat without being reminded.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Attends to your instructions.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Easily makes transition from one classroom activity to another.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Gets along with people who are different.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C: WILLINGNESS QUESTIONNAIRE
Please answer the following questions

Indicate grade level: Kindergarten  First  Second  Third  Fourth  Fifth  Sixth

Years of experience teaching: 0-5 years  5-10 years  10-15 years  15-20 years  20+ years

1. How willing would you be to devote classroom instruction time to formally teach cooperative skills such as following directions, producing correct school work, attending to your instruction and being able to make transitions easily from one activity to another?

   Not at all = 0, Maybe = 1, Yes, I would = 2, I teach Social Skills= 3

   How much time do you, or would you be willing to devote per week to formal cooperative skills lessons?

   0 minutes  30 minutes  60 minutes  90 minutes  120 minutes

2. How willing would you be to devote classroom instruction time to formally teach assertion skills such as giving compliments to peers, volunteer to help peers with classroom tasks, inviting others to join activities and being able to join an ongoing activity or group without being told to do so?

   Not at all = 0, Maybe = 1, Yes, I would = 2, I teach social skills= 3

   How much time do you, or would you be willing to devote per week to formal assertion skills lessons?

   0 minutes  30 minutes  60 minutes  90 minutes  120 minutes

3. How willing would you be to devote classroom instruction time to formally teach self control skills such as controlling one’s temper in conflict situation with peers, getting along with people who are different, accepts peer’s ideas for group activities and responding appropriately when pushed or hit by other children?

   Not at all = 0, Maybe = 1, Yes, I would = 2, I teach social skills= 3
How much time do you, or would you be willing to devote per week to formal self-control skills lessons?

0 minutes  30 minutes  60 minutes  90 minutes  120 minutes
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Nuvia Bernal

Type full name as it appears on submission

April 14, 2015

Date