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# Primary Grade Students' Expressive Oral Language in Social Situations

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Primary Grade Students' Expressive Oral Language in Social Situations

by

Caitlin A. Kier

A thesis submitted to the Department of Education of The College at Brockport, State University  
of New York, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Literacy.

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**Abstract**

This research discusses the relationship between oral language development and social development. The primary goal of the study was to explore the use of expressive oral language within social situations in primary aged children. Data were collected over the course of six weeks. Data were collected using audio recordings, pre and post interviews and surveys, and observations. The data were analyzed to determine if and how students use oral language in social situations. The findings proved that students were able to improve their oral language skills within social situations.

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### **Introduction**

As I supervise children on the playground, I catch my eye on two students engaging in an argument. Their body language shows me that their disagreement is escalating. Next thing I know, one student is on the ground and, the other student is walking away. As I rush over to find out what happened, I can't help but think about how some students don't have the skills to solve a disagreement between each other effectively. I see this particular social situation occur often.

Their expressive and oral language skills are lacking and, it's important for students to learn how to develop and use their expressive language skills in social situations. "Children with low social skills usually have inappropriate social behaviours which are related to deficiencies in social cognition or information processing" (Choi & Md-Yunis, 2011, p. 250). I am constantly thinking of ways to develop my students' expressive language and social skills. I observe my students in various academic and social situations and notice significant social skill deficits. Part of my teaching philosophy is that teachers need to teach not only academic skills such as reading and writing, but teach how to interact socially with peers as well.

Cannon, Clark, Kornblum, Müller, and Powers (2016) discuss how conversations play a major role in social development. In order to have relevant conversations with peers, a student's expressive language skills need to be strong. Students also need to be able to effectively communicate what they need or feel through conversations with others. When students are able to use their expressive language skills in a social situation, they will be able to have more positive interactions with their peers.

### **Topic and Research Problem**

The primary topic of this research study is to closely examine children's use of expressive oral language in social situations. Another goal of the research is to gain students'

perspectives about using expressive language skills in social situations. One particular aspect of the research study that analyzed was the idea of friendship and the characteristics of being a good friend. Phillipsen, Bridges, McLemore and Saponaro (1999) claim that students who exhibit aggressive and disruptive behaviors are not as accepted as students who are outgoing and cooperative. I agree with this claim because I have students on both ends of this scale. It is interesting to see how students react to different types of behaviors.

Students need to have strong expressive oral language and social skills in order to function in their society. By examining the students' expressive language skills in relation to social skills, I will be able to implement strategies and activities that will help them positively interact with one another.

### **Rationale**

The study of expressive oral language development in social situations is important for a few reasons. Expressive oral language skills will be used throughout a student's lifetime. It is especially important that the students are able to positively use their expressive oral language skills in various social situations. DERELİ-İMAN explains that early positive experiences can have a lasting impact on children (2014). When children develop different social skills such as morals, it can help them to continue their social development throughout their first few years of schooling (DERELİ-İMAN, 2014). Children able to utilize their expressive language skills, children will be able to express to others what they need, feel, and want. Children will be able to navigate through social situations more independently. When children are able to solve problems that may arise, they can gain more confidence that they are doing the right thing.

Promoting expressive language in social situations help to build a foundation for social skills development. By developing foundational skills, the students will be able to continue to

build on their existing skills. Expressive language and social skill development can be generalized into academic areas. Students will be able to collaboratively work in groups. They will be able to effectively work with peers to accomplish a common goal. Promoting the use of expressive language within the classroom environment can potentially transition to other areas such as social skill development, and academic areas.

### **Purpose**

The primary goal of this research study is to promote the students' use of expressive oral language in social situations. I was able to gain the student perspective on how they perceive social situations. I also conducted semi-structured interviews to understand who they believe is a good friend. The data helped me to determine a student's baseline of his or her social skill knowledge. After I determined the participants' baseline, I modeled various strategies that the students can use in social situations. The students had opportunities to practice the different strategies in a social group setting within the school day. Ultimately, students learned to solve social situations using their expressive language skills.

The students practiced their expressive language that the students and began to generalize their skills into other areas of their lives. Their confidence in themselves improved as a result of their increased use of their expressive language skills in social situations. The students' knowledge about social skills also improved as the study progressed.

### **Research Question**

1. How might I promote primary aged children's use of expressive oral language in social situations?

### **Review of Literature**

The following literature review summarizes key points of children's oral language and social skill development. Oral language and social skill development support each other. Both oral language and social skill development work together so children can develop strategies to have positive interactions with peers. The literature review outlines different strategies and interactions children can use in social situations.

#### **Oral Language Development**

"The pre-school ages of zero to six are critical years during which child development occurs the fastest" (DERELİ-İMAN, 2014, p. 262). Children begin to develop oral language skills before they can talk. Kuhn, Vernon-Feagans, Wilbourn, and Willoughby (2014) discuss how infants first begin to communicate through gestures such as pointing, giving and showing. These gestures are an infant's first experience communicating with others. Infants begin to communicate with others at a very early age. Children continue to use their oral language to communicate throughout their lives. Communication plays a key role in both oral language and social development.

From an early age children use language to communicate with others. The Conversation Analysis Theory aims to investigate how humans interact with one another. More specifically, Nordquist (2017) states, "*conversation analysis* is the study of the talk produced in ordinary human interactions" (p. 1). All day long children are making meaning through language. The goal of the Conversation Analysis Theory is to "describe, analyze and understand talk as a basic and constitutive feature of human social life" (Nordquist, 2017, p. 1). The Conversation Analysis Theory helps researchers study oral language and how people communicate with each other (Nordquist, 2017). There is a specific order in which people use language. For example, when

having a conversation with someone a person would say “hi” before saying “bye”. Language is the primary way in which children communicate with others socially. It is important to help children begin to understand and make their own meaning through language. However, for some children it can be difficult to understand the interactions they have with others.

Bakopoulou, Dockrell, Law, Lindsay, and Spencer state, “fostering good communication skills in classrooms can be challenging” (2015, p. 272). It is important for teachers to promote communication skills within the classroom environment. Teachers and other school personnel such as Speech Language Pathologists can help children develop their communication skills in a variety of ways. One important way teachers can promote communication skills within the classroom is through modeling. Teachers can demonstrate appropriate skills for students. They can also use visuals such as an anchor chart to remind students of important sentence starters. Despite the challenges that can occur when teaching students with a disability, with consistent practice using oral language skills, children can be effective communicators.

A child’s oral language development affects his or her academic and social development. Children diagnosed with Speech and Language Impairments and other disabilities are especially at a disadvantage when it comes to developing oral language skills. More specifically, a child’s receptive and expressive language skills are not fully developed. “The research evidence suggests that communication supporting classroom environments are organized so that they afford high-quality language learning experiences and adults talk with children in ways that enhance receptive and expressive language skills” (Bakopoulou, Dockrell, Law, Lindsay, & Spencer, 2015, p. 273). When children begin to develop essential oral language skills, they learn new ways to make meaningful connections with others. Children are then able to have meaningful conversations with the people in their lives. Once children go to school, they need to

be able to effectively communicate with school staff and peers. Teachers and school personnel play a significant role in developing a child's receptive and expressive language skills. When children are immersed in an environment that requires a student to practice oral language skills, they will be more successful in using their skills independently. Paatsch, Raban, and Scull (2013) suggest that reading and talking about a text can have positive effects on oral language development.

Some students may have a difficult time processing what they are hearing and expressing themselves using language. Newbury, Klee, Stokes, and Moran argue, "Early processing measures may be better predictors of later language outcomes than other early developmental measures, such as expressive or receptive language ability, or environmental factors such as parent education" (2016, p. 1146). The ability to process information and a student's ability to express him or herself have a direct impact on one another. Newbury, Klee, Stokes, and Moran also discuss how a child's inability to process information directly impacts the child's ability to develop language skills (2016). Along with a child being exposed to oral language in his or her home and school environment, it is important to understand that there are more underlying factors that could be impacting a child's oral language development.

### **Social Skills Development**

The term social skills can mean a variety of things. Bakopoulou and Dockrell (2016) defined social cognition as the ability to identify and label emotions, and the ability to problem solve and resolve conflicts. In early childhood, children learn the different aspects of social cognition, mostly through their environment. A child learns what a smile means at an early age. Their social cognition continues to develop after children attend school. They begin to make meaningful connections with adults and other children in their class. However, according to

Botting and Conti-Ramsden, there have been studies that suggest that people with poor language development have an impaired social cognition (2008). Children with delayed language development have a difficult time understanding the world around them. Just imagine if a child was unsure of how another individual was feeling or, if a child resorted to hitting or kicking another person because he or she didn't know how to solve his or her problems. In schools, social cognition concepts such as identifying feelings and problem solving are taught through social skill lessons.

Social skills are when people practice the various concepts that make up social cognition. Social skills are an important aspect of childhood development. When children are able to practice their social skills they will be able to positively interact with their peers and adults, resolve conflict, and identify emotions. For students to effectively solve problems and resolve conflict, they need to have strong oral language skills. Cannon, et al. (2016) discuss that conversational skills are important to build and maintain friendships. In order to solve a variety of social situations, a student must possess strong oral language and social skills.

Much of the research around social skills development suggests that the implementation of a social skills program or intervention has been proven successful. There are a variety of social skills programs and interventions that target specific social skills. Cannon, et al. (2016) took a quantitative and qualitative approach to implementing a curriculum that targets explicitly teaching children conversational skills. The explicit teaching of social skills helped to make implementing a social skills program so successful. Students with poor social skills have a difficult time engaging in meaningful conversations with others. Cannon, et al. (2016) state that students with poor social skills could feel isolated or depressed when they are older. It is

important to implement social skills programs to younger students to help them build their skills as they continue through school.

Along with implementing a social skills program into the school setting researchers also used pre and post assessments to determine how effective the program or intervention was during the research study. DERELI-İMAN conducted a research study that focused on implementing the “Values Education Programme” (2014, p. 264). The results of the research study were that the students who participated in the program saw positive effects from implementing the program. The program targeted problem-solving skills. Problem-solving is a key skill that students will use throughout their lives. The ability to problem solve various situations can help a student to be successful in college, and in the workforce.

### **Working together using interventions and strategies**

Many aspects of social skill development require a person to have strong oral language skills. To effectively participate in social situations a person must possess both receptive and expressive language skills. Receptive language is the ability to listen and process information. Expressive language is the ability to communicate with a person using words or through gestures. Without the ability to process information and express ideas or thoughts meaningful conversations between people cannot happen. Botting and Conti-Ramsden (2008) conducted a study that suggests language and social development support each other. More specifically, their findings showed that expressive language and social cognition were dependent on each other. If a student had strong expressive language skills, then their social cognition was also strong (2008).

The research also suggests that language plays a significant role in social development. Students use their oral language skills within social scenarios. Students use their oral language

and social skills to build and maintain relationships and friendships. Degotardi, Hoyte, and Torr (2014) state, "Language plays a key role as children initiate and maintain friendships at the same time as they represent and explore the physical world and create imaginary scenarios in play" (p. 20). In order to have social situations be meaningful for children, they must be able to use language to build relationships with others. If a child is not able to use his or her oral language skills effectively in a social situation, then there will be little to no interactions being made with others. There are interventions that teachers can use in the classroom setting to promote positive interactions and conversations between students. The intervention targets many aspects of starting and holding a conversation with another person. The program is called "The Conversation Club" curriculum (Cannon, et al., 2016, p. 193). "The Conversation Club is a comprehensive curriculum intended to provide direct instruction in both the how and the why of conversation" (Cannon, et al., 2016, p. 193). When children are able to practice using their oral language skills they are practicing skills they will continue to use for the rest of their life. It is important that teachers give students the opportunity to use their expressive oral language within social situations.

Oral language skills and social skills work hand in hand to help children effectively interact with others in the community. Teachers play an important role in helping children develop their oral language skills. There are strategies that teachers can use to assist students in developing their skills. For students who have poor oral language skills, it is especially important for teachers to consistently provide instruction that helps students build their oral language skills. Paatsch, Raban, and Scull (2013) state, "Encouraging teachers to repeat and rephrase children's responses prompted more elaborated language and invited other children to connect the ideas that were being discussed" (p. 72). When teachers provide students examples of how to answer

questions about a text, it will allow students to practice using their oral language skills. Teachers can also give students sentence starters to help structure their ideas effectively.

Neuman and Roskos (2012) wrote an article about promoting oral language development within the classroom. The authors specifically focused on enhancing vocabulary instruction. The children need to be able to use their vocabulary knowledge effectively in their lives. Neuman and Roskos (2013) state, "We must involve children in more intentional instruction in oral language development" (p.64). Along with teaching students a variety of different ways to develop their oral language skills, it is also important to ensure that the instruction is meaningful and relevant to their lives.

Teachers provide students with many opportunities to develop their oral language skills in all academic subjects. However, it is also important to provide the same opportunities for students to develop their oral language skills in a variety of social situations. Promoting oral language development in social situations can help students to solve problems and resolve conflicts. These are skills that a child will use throughout their lifetime. To teach these important skills teachers can use a variety of resources. Teachers can model appropriate behavior for their students to show examples on how they interact in social situations.

Visual representations can also serve as a reminder for students when encountered with a social situation. Pekdoğan (2016) suggests that through storytelling, children can begin to learn about social skills. "Stories introduce children to the human relations in the society and help children to perceive socially accepted, unaccepted or opposed attitudes and behaviors" (Pekdoğan, 2016, p. 307). Children can then generalize what they learn from stories to real life scenarios. Teachers can provide time for students to role play various social situations. If a student has practiced using his or her expressive oral language skills during role playing

sessions, it is more likely that a student will be able to transfer the skills to a social situation outside of the classroom environment.

### **Summary**

The primary goal of my study was to promote expressive oral language within social situations. The literature review outlines both academic and social benefits of promoting expressive language in the school environment. Through various activities such as role playing social situations, students will begin to make meaning from their interactions with peers. If a student has weak oral language skills, it is especially important to use teacher modeling and role playing to improve their language development. By dedicating time every day to practice these essential skills students will begin to generalize social skills that they will use throughout the rest of their schooling and in the community.

## **Methodology**

### **Introduction**

The study focuses on promoting expressive oral language in social situations. Student perceptions also play a role in determining what strategies will be beneficial to students. The students learned a variety of strategies that provided them with opportunities to use their expressive language skills.

### **Participants**

The participants of the study were selected because they are students in my 8:1:1 self-contained classroom. Five out of seven students participated in the study. All of the students are performing below average academically and socially. One girl and four boys participated in the study. Three students are Caucasian and two students are of mixed race. All students speak English as their first language. All five students qualify for free or reduced lunch. All of the

students have shown significant delays in language processing and outputting language resulting in their expressive language skills to be weak.

All of the students who participated in the study have special needs. All of the students also have Individualized Education Plans (IEP). Three students are classified as Speech and Language Impairment, one student is classified with a Traumatic Brain Injury, and one student is diagnosed as emotionally disturbed. The students all demonstrate the inability to independently navigate their way through social situations. They tend to be shy and socially awkward in comparison to typical peers. All of the students require explicit modeling and teaching of social skills within the classroom setting. The ultimate goal for the students is to generalize the social skills learned in the classroom to their everyday life.

Throughout the day children are encouraged to use their expressive language skills in academic areas. For thirty minutes, five days a week, students participate in a social group. In social group, students are encouraged to use their expressive language skills to discuss various topics such as classroom expectations, and strategies they can use when they are upset or frustrated.

### **Setting**

The district for this study is a small rural district located in Upstate New York. There is a total of 713 students enrolled in this district. In kindergarten through sixth grade, there are 358 students enrolled. At the elementary school, 179 students are male, and 179 students are female. Of the 358 students enrolled at the elementary school, 51% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. (personal communication, 2015-2016).

The setting of the study is in an 8:1:1 self-contained classroom in a rural elementary school. The elementary school houses grade Pre-kindergarten through sixth grade. The

environment is inviting and vibrant. The walls are filled with anchor charts and student art work. The room is divided up into different sections such as a book corner, independent station, and two teacher-led center stations. A kidney shaped table located in front of the room is where most of the whole group instruction during social group occurs.

### **Positionality**

My teaching philosophy and who I am as a person helped to shape me into the teacher I am today. Considering my race, gender, education, and teaching philosophy will help me to analyze my research through a critical lens. I am a single, white woman in my mid 20's. I do not have any children. I grew up in a small suburban neighborhood in a working class family. My mother is in the field of education as an Educational Specialist, and my father works for the Town of Penfield.

I graduated from the College at Brockport with a Bachelor's Degree in English Literature and received New York State teaching certifications for Childhood Education and Special Education ranging from kindergarten through sixth grade. I am currently teaching an 8:1:1 self-contained classroom in a rural district in upstate New York.

### **Methods of Data Collection**

As the participant observer, I closely examined the students' use of expressive oral language in social situations. My goal was to help implement strategies that help students use their expressive language appropriately. I used multiple methods to collect data.

Throughout my six-week study, I was constantly collecting data. I collected data using audio recordings, interviews, surveys, and social group activities which included role playing. After collecting all of my data, I used a coding system to analyze my data. The first step when

coding my data was to transcribe any audio recordings I had from the activities the students did during social group, interviews, and surveys.

The first data collection method was recording field notes in a spiral notebook. I used a double journal entry. Folding the page vertically, I recorded my observations on one side of the page and on the other side of the page I recorded my interpretations of what I saw. As I observed students during various times of the day, such as recess, lunch and social group, I took detailed notes about what I saw and how it pertained to my research topic. I documented observations of what the students did and said in social situations. I saw students interacting with each other, being respectful to others, and playing games without adult support. I also wrote down any questions I had throughout the process. By collecting field notes throughout the study, I was able to develop my thinking and continue to make connections. Throughout the school day, I took notes of various things that occurred between students during the school day. Any conversations that happened in the lunch room or during recess was documented in my double journal entries. I wrote in my double journal entry mostly every day. I made sure to document what part of the day a social situation happened as well as dating the entry.

In my study, I interviewed my students. While I interviewed students, I recorded the conversations. I used audio recordings to record the conversations I had with students. By recording what the students are said, I was able to devote more time to what the student is doing while I asked the questions. I was also more immersed in the conversation I had with each student. I also used audio recordings to record conversations that occur between students. I primarily recorded student interactions during social group. By recording student interactions, it gave me the opportunity to continue to facilitate conversations without feeling the need to write everything down. I used my personal iPad that is protected by a passcode. By using audio

recordings, it allowed me to focus on the interactions and conversations being made between students. After, I was able to listen to and transcribe the conversations and interactions.

I used one on one and group semi-structured interviews and surveys to help me determine the individual student's perspective of their emotions and social interactions. This was key for me to learn how the student views him or herself and to get an idea of what an individual student's baseline of social skill knowledge is. I also conducted similar interviews and surveys at the end of the research project. I photocopied the student surveys and replace the student names with pseudonyms.

The semi- structured interviews were conducted three times throughout the study. I interviewed students one at a time on the first and sixth week of the study. I had a paper copy of the questions for each student. I recorded the interviews and transcribed the answers to the questions after the interviews were conducted. The interview questions focused on friendship. The questions were designed to gain each student's perspective on what the students believe is a good friend. The ultimate goal of the research study is to promote expressive language in social situations. It was important for me to understand how the students interpret friendship because many social situations revolve around peer interactions.

I also conducted a friendship survey. I administered the survey one on one as well. The survey was administered to students during the first and last week of the study. The friendship survey allowed me to gain individual student's perspective on how they think they act as a friend.

Once I was done transcribing my audio recordings and collecting all of my data, I created a key for coding my data. Once the key was created, I used highlighters to highlight different aspects of the key. I coded student responses from the interviews, surveys, and social group

activities. For example, I highlighted any questions or responses that directly related to oral language in yellow. I then used four more colors to show the difference between appropriate answers and answers such as "I don't know" in the interviews, surveys, and audio recordings. I used the constant comparison method to cross examine my data to look for similarities, patterns and anomalies. Shagoury and Power (2012) define constant comparison as, "a data analysis method to enable prediction and explanation of behavior" (p. 143). Constant comparison allowed me to develop themes and findings throughout the data I collected.

### **Procedures**

The entire class participated in a 20-minute social group every day. At the beginning and end of the research study I administered the semi-structured interviews (Appendix A) and friendship surveys (Appendix B) to each student. I conducted the interviews and surveys at separate times during the first week of the study. Throughout the entire six weeks, I used a double journal template (Appendix C) to document my observations in a spiral notebook. I used the data to inform my instruction during social group.

During the first week of the study, I administered the semi-structured interview and friendship survey to the students. This gave me a baseline of how students are thinking about friendship and how they use their expressive language when communicating with a peer. After I had an understanding of each student's baseline, I conducted meaningful activities during social group to help promote their expressive language in social situations. When students were participating in the activities, I used my personal iPad to record the interactions students had between each other. I continued to collect field notes using the double journal entry template. During the last week of the research study, I administered a semi-structured interview and the

friendship survey. After, I compared all the data I collected and started to investigate trends that were found within the data.

### **Trustworthiness**

My research study was closely examined by my research partner and professor. Both teacher-researchers closely evaluated the research study to ensure that my hypotheses did not impacting my findings. I used different methods to collect data which will allowed me to cross-examine multiple pieces of data to develop my findings. I used triangulation to cross-examine multiple sources of data from multiple participants over time.

### **Data Analysis**

The purpose of my study was to promote oral language in social situations among the students in my classroom. Over the six-week study, I closely examined their progress. With each student, I conducted a preliminary interview and survey to determine the student's perception of social situations. After gaining the students' baseline, I was able to conduct activities, and role plays that directly related to their deficits. After many meaningful conversations, I began to notice students using their words to work out their problems. Through the interviews, surveys, and activities, I was able to see patterns emerge through the data I had collected. I found three major themes.

The first theme I found was that the students classified with a speech and language impairment had more of a significant deficit in oral development and social development than students who had a different classification. The finding made me realize how much these students suffer from social deficits. When cross-examining the data between a student with language deficits and a student who does not, it became apparent that the students require more explicit teaching of social skills.

The second theme that emerged from the data was that students demonstrated the ability to generalize information taught in a social group throughout the school day. The students started to use their oral language skills outside of social group. They demonstrated the capability to perform social skills within the classroom and outside of the classroom as well.

The final finding that I obtained through my data was that oral language development and social development have a direct relationship with each other. Before the start of the study, students would not always use their oral language skills during appropriate times. As the study continued, all students showed me that through explicit teaching of social skills, their oral language skills improved.

**Finding 1: Students with Speech and Language Impairment had a more difficult time processing information and contributing to the activities during the interviews, surveys, and social group.**

For students with Speech and Language Impairments, it can be difficult for them to hold a conversation and keep friendships. When the students in my class participated in this explicit teaching of social skills, it was apparent early on that some students understood the concepts and some did not. The trends throughout my data were that the students with Speech and Language Impairments were less interested and able to participate in the conversations and activities.

During the first week of my study, I conducted all of my interviews and surveys. After coding the data from the interviews and surveys, a pattern emerged. During the first week, I also showed students some videos about friendship to introduce them to the topics we would be discussing in the coming weeks. The students loved watching the videos and they had a great response. After watching the video, the students appeared excited to talk about friendship with

me. However, I couldn't help but notice that some students faded into the background of the conversations that were happening.

While conducting the one-on-one interviews with the five students participating in the survey, I quickly noticed a trend while talking to each student. When conducting the interviews, I took each student out to a table in the hallway to ensure their answers were authentic of their thoughts and feelings. Two out of five students appropriately answered most of the interview questions. An example of student 1 appropriately answering a question:

Miss. Kier: How would you describe a good friend?

Student 1: Hug me, aren't mean to me, helping me if I have questions and my work.

Miss. Kier: Can you think of a specific example of when someone was helping you?

Student 1: Student 3 helped me open my bagel at breakfast yesterday.

Student 1 showed through her answers that she had an understanding of how someone could describe a good friend. Student 1 was able to come up with three generic examples of describing what a friend is in her words. After she had responded to the initial interview question, I asked her a follow up question. I asked her to give me a specific example of how a friend helped her and she was able to with no hesitation. The student appeared excited about answering the questions in the interview. There was another student who participated in the study who was also able to appropriately answer the interview questions. Student 3 was also able to give some specific examples of when other peers were being a good friend to him.

However, three out of five students had more of a difficult time answering the interview questions. The three students who had a difficult time answering the interview questions are all diagnosed with speech and language impairment. An example of student 2 answering some of the interview questions:

Miss. Kier: Who do you think is a good friend?

Student 2: Robert (pseudonym).

Miss. Kier: What do they do to be a good friend?

Student 2: Make me happy. Robert runs away from me at P.E. Robert hugs me.

Miss. Kier: How would you describe a good friend?

Student 2: I don't know.

Miss. Kier: I will give you a minute to think about it.

Student 2: I don't know.

Miss. Kier: Okay we will move on. What does a good friend do?

Student 2: Do work.

Miss. Kier: What does a good friend say?

Student 2: I don't know. Me done.

Student 2 is diagnosed with a speech and language impairment. His communication is significantly impacted by his dysarthric speech. Dysarthric speech is a motor speech disorder that impacts the student's ability to execute motor movement. Student 2 had a difficult time answering questions about friendship. The interview took approximately 17 minutes to complete. I gave the student wait time after asking a question to see if that would increase his likelihood of answering the questions appropriately. He had his head down and spoke in a low voice for most of the interview. While coding the data, I noted that the question, "what does a good friend say" relates to the research question about oral language. Student 2 did not respond to the question and then told me that he was done answering questions. For the questions that student 2 had an answer to, the response that the student gave would not be considered an accurate answer to the questions. When I asked what does Robert do to be a good friend and he responded that "he runs

away from me in P.E.” This answer could be interpreted as student 2 and Robert were playing a game. However, the way the response was worded, it wasn't clear that he was talking about a positive experience with Robert. Student 2's thinking was on the right track, but he did not articulate it in the way that appropriately answered the questions. For two of the questions, student 2 answered with “I don't know.” This information shows me that the student may have some ideas about friendship, but could not clearly articulate them to me. Student 4 and student 5 also answered the interview questions similarly. It was evident that all three students had a difficult time articulating their thoughts.

When comparing the data side by side, it was evident that students with speech and language impairments had a more difficult time thinking about and answering questions about friendship. Both student 1 and student 2 also gave me insight to how they were feeling through their body language. Student 1 was invested in the interview and was excited to get one-on-one time with me. She was smiling, her body was facing me and she was engaged in the activity. Student 2 held his head low and seldom made eye contact with me. He spoke in a low voice and had his body turned on an angle facing out toward the hallway. His body language showed me that he felt uncomfortable.

The interviews were indicative of the students with a speech and language impairment having the most significant deficit with oral language development and social development. The surveys were also a piece of data I used to document this finding. The survey asked the students to check yes or no to the social scenario. The students had to determine if the statement was something a friend does or doesn't do. Student 2, student 4, and student 5 showed social deficits according to how they answered the survey questions. On the survey, questions two, five and eight have a direct relation to oral language.

Despite giving prompts and restating the questions that were being asked, three out of five students answered incorrectly to at least three out of the ten questions. After cross examining the data between student 2, student 4, and student 5, all three students answered number five incorrectly. The statement read, "Listen to all your friend has to say before you start talking" (Do you know how to be a good friend? ,2011). This is an important aspect of oral language development as it relates to turn taking in a conversation. Casillas and Frank state, "Children begin developing turn-taking skills in infancy but take several years to fluidly integrate their growing knowledge of language into their turn-taking behavior" (2016 p. 234). By explicitly teaching students the skill of turn-taking, it can help to close the developmental gap. This topic also relates to being a good listener and being respectful to the person on the other end of the conversation. Through classroom observations, I have documented that all students participating in the study tend to interrupt people when they are talking. Instead of interrupting another person who is talking, the students need to raise their hand or give me a thumbs up to let me know that they would like to add to the conversation.

Another statement that was answered incorrectly by two out of five students participating in the survey is, "Only talk about yourself" (Do you know how to be a good friend?, 2011). This statement on the survey is an example of how oral language and social skills go hand in hand. Through classroom observations, all students were referenced in my notes as talking about topics that the students found interesting. Student 2 was documented quite a few times talking about police officers and Batman. Student 4 talked about wrestling to other peers. Through role playing social scenarios, it quickly became apparent that the students had a difficult time coming up with questions to ask another person when engaging in a conversation with them.

During the first two weeks of the study, it became apparent that the students who have a speech and language impairment had a greater deficit in oral development and social development than anticipated. Through explicit teaching of social skills, the students were able to increase their knowledge about social skills.

During the sixth week of the study, I conducted a post interview that contained the same questions as the interview given during the first week of the study. The results showed student growth. All students added more detail to their answers and more appropriately answered the questions. Student 2 showed significant improvement when answering the post interview questions.

Miss. Kier: What do they say when they are a good friend?

Student 2: Good job, how are you feeling, ask me to play.

Miss. Kier: How would you describe a good friend?

Student 2: Nice.

Miss. Kier: What does a good friend do?

Student 2: I'm out of words.

Miss. Kier: Okay, let's move on to the last question. What does a good friend say?

Student 2: Say sorry, and do you need help?

When comparing the pre and post interview for student 2, it is apparent that he benefited from explicit teaching of social skills. He was able to use his oral language skills to talk about social skills in a manner that makes sense. His response to the questions was quicker and his body language appeared calm. The same results were proven true for the post survey. All students appeared to have a better understanding of what the statements on the survey meant. The students also had an easier time to determine if the statements were about being a good

friend or not being a good friend. Student 2, student 4 and student 5 went from missing on average 5 questions to missing on average 2 questions on the survey. Due to the number of questions the students got correct on the post survey, it showed me that the students' knowledge about what makes a good friend. Not only were the students able to have a conversation about different aspects of social skills but they also showed that students were able to generalize the information they learned in social group.

**Finding 2: Students demonstrated the ability to generalize information taught in social group throughout the school day.**

Through explicit teaching of social skills, the students were able to generalize the skills throughout the school day. In my classroom, I use a class-wide incentive called the bucket filler system. The concept is based on the book, "Have You Filled a Bucket Today?" by Carol McCloud. The main concept that is taught throughout the books is promoting "filling someone's bucket" (McCloud, 2006). When filling someone's bucket, you are using kind words and gestures toward others. When a person is a "bucket dipper" they are being mean or saying hurtful words to others (McCloud, 2006). In my classroom, students have many opportunities to earn bucket filling tickets throughout the day. Once the students earn a certain number of tickets, they can earn a party of their choice. This can range from a movie day to a milkshake party!

At the start of each week, the students and I count the bucket fillers to see how many we earned the past week and how many more we need to reach our goal. During the six weeks, I was collecting data, I began to notice a trend. Prior to the study, the students were earning on average 3 to 5 bucket fillers a week. Throughout the study, I continued to document how many bucket fillers the students earned each week. The number of bucket fillers earned increased each week throughout the study (please see Figure 1 below).

**Number of Bucket Fillers Students Earned Each Week**

Week number	Amount of Bucket Fillers earned at the end of each week
Week #1	+3
Week #2	+5
Week #3	+6
Week #4	+9
Week #5	+8
Week #6	+10

*Figure 1. Number of how many Bucket Filler tickets the students earned each week. The figure illustrates an increase over time in the number of times the students was observed being a good friend to another peer.*

The table above shows the progression of behavior bucks earned each week. The students demonstrated using oral language by helping a friend or the teacher, and by saying “excuse me” when they need help and two adults are talking instead of interrupting. All of the bucket fillers are earned at different times throughout the school day. The students have been able to take the skills taught in social group and generalize them to their everyday lives.

The students have also been practicing congratulating each other using words and gestures like a high-five or hug. This has also occurred not only during various time in the day, but at different locations in the building such as specials. During the research study, I took notes using a double journal entry on what I observed during the school day. Prior to the study, some of the students in my class would solve their problems by pushing, hitting, or kicking another person. It was very seldom that a student would use words to express what they need, feel or

want. Since I have been explicitly teaching social skills centered around oral language such as manners, and conversation skills their use of oral language in other areas has improved. For example, all of the students cheered each other on when making their way through an obstacle course in Physical Education class. The students also would high-five their peers when they got a question right during academic groups.

The students practice the social skills in social group when we do role plays. The pair of students pick a scenario, we discuss it as a whole class, and then the two students act it out for the rest of the class. When the role play is done, the students and I have a conversation about what was said during the role play and what they liked about it. This exercise has been extremely powerful for my students. Being able to “act out” a social scenario before the student is thrown into it is helpful and seems to reduce anxiety about being in social situations.

An important part of this study was conducting the role plays of social scenarios with the students. The activities were primarily student-based which means that the activity had more of an emphasis on the students and the direction that they took the lesson. Yang (2016) explains that student-centered learning provides students with more opportunities to have conversations than typical teaching practices. By conducting role plays during social group, I had the opportunity to observe students acting out different social scenarios. When I first introduced role play scenarios into social group, the students didn't know what to think about them. While I was explaining the procedures for role plays some students were giggling. When we were done talking about the procedures, I chose two students to act out our first social scenario. The students picked the scenario about a student sitting alone at lunch. The first step was to talk about the scenario as a whole group. When I asked what the students could do to help, they didn't know how to respond.

Miss. Kier: If you saw a student sitting alone at lunch, what could you do to help them?

Student 2: You could go over and sit with them.

Miss. Kier: So you would just sit down and not say anything?

Student 2: Yeah.

Student 1: You could introduce yourself.

Miss. Kier: Yes! That is a great place to start. Introduce yourself to the person you want to sit with.

Student 1: That way you can make a new friend.

After I had started with preliminary questions about what actions a student can take, the ideas continued to pour out. However, when I asked the students what could you talk to the student about, some of them started listing off topics that they found interesting.

Miss. Kier: Once you sit down with the student, what could you talk to them about?

Student 5: Trucks. Um... my daddy.

Miss. Kier: That definitely tells the person more about you, but don't you want to get to know the person, too?

The students were sitting at a table staring at each other. Their facial expressions showed that they weren't sure how to answer the question. Both students required a lot of prompting to lead them to the answer of that question. We had a conversation about how it's important to ask questions to get to know others and not just talk about yourself.

Miss. Kier: Is it fun to get to know about a friend?

Student 3: I guess so.

Miss. Kier: I know I like to learn new things about my friends. Like what's their favorite movie, or their favorite song.

Student 5: What's your favorite movie, Miss. Kier?

Miss. Kier: Why don't you ask Student 3 that?

Student 5 (giggling) What is your favorite movie?

Student 3: Hmm... that's a hard one. I really like Batman.

Throughout the first social scenario the students acted out, the students needed a lot of prompting to continue the role play. Both students were giggling the whole time. It was apparent the students were nervous during the exercise. Both students looked at me waiting for me to feed them the next line. Once the students were done with the role play, the class and I had another whole group discussion about how it went. All of the students complimented the students and thought they did a good job.

During the third week of the study, I started to notice an improvement in the students' ability to independently navigate through a role play exercise. As students became more comfortable with practicing social scenarios, they were able to work together to complete the exercise.

The students were even using other objects to act out scenarios. For example, at snack time student 3 and student 5 were using animal crackers to imitate a social scenario.

Student 3: (Walking an animal cracker toward another one) Hey are you okay buddy?

Student 5: (Animal cracker facing toward the other animal cracker) Yeah I'm okay dude.

Later in the day, the same two students had another positive interaction with one another. While doing a craft, student 3 noticed that student 5 did not have a glue stick. He went to his crayon box and got an extra glue stick and gave it to student 3. The students continued to demonstrate their ability to generalize information taught during social group in other areas of

the school such as physical education class and the cafeteria. The students demonstrated the ability to use their oral language in a social scenario outside of social group.

**Finding 3: Oral language development and social development have a direct relationship with one another.**

After analyzing the data, it became more apparent that students show both oral language and social deficits. Specifically, when students were required to talk about various social skills such as friendship and social scenarios, most students were not able to have a discussion with me or other peers. One specific exercise the students did during social group was the “A Great Friend” activity. The students were asked to come up with ideas about what a great friend is, does, says, and is not. I started taking answers for the “is” section. The students had the most difficulty coming up with words that they would use to describe a friend. As seen in figure 2 below, every other section was filled with more ideas.

The students were sitting around a table with a piece of chart paper up on the board. The words “a great friend” were in the middle of the paper. The paper was split up into four sections. The students looked at the board and eagerly asked me what activity we were going to do during social group. I asked the students to help me fill in each section of the chart. I started with the top left corner of the paper. I started the conversation by asking the students a question.

Miss. Kier: Okay so who can come up with a word that finishes this sentence: A great friend is\_\_\_\_\_.

Student 3: A great friend says hi.

Miss. Kier: Okay that would go in the box below this. What are some words you can use to describe a good friend?

Student 1: Miss. Kier we don't know.

Miss. Kier: Okay I'll give you the first letter of a word that describes a friend and you complete the word (writes h on the chart paper).

Student 1: Helping!

Miss. Kier: Okay how about helpf-.

Student 1: Helpful (jumping out of seat).

Miss. Kier: Awesome! Let's try another one (writes k on board).

Student 3: Kind.

Miss. Kier: Perfect. Let's do a few more (writes n on board). Student 2 can you help me with this one?

Student 2: (After about one minute) Me don't know (puts head down).

Through this excerpt of the conversation that transpired during social group, it was apparent that the students had a difficult time answering the initial question about what a good friend is. Even with some assistance by giving the first letter of the word, some students were unable or did not want to answer the questions. The results of the activity related to the interview answers I coded. The same students who had a difficult time responding to this part of the activity also had a more challenging time answering the interview question: How do you describe a good friend? Once I moved on to the other parts of the chart, all students were able to give me more ideas and quickly filled up each section of the chart with their thoughts.

### A Great Friend Activity

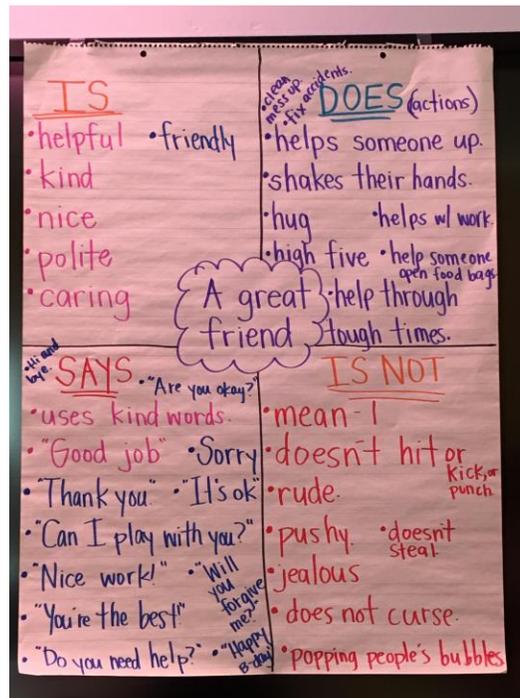


Figure 2. Picture of “A Great Friend” activity that the students did during social group. The figure illustrates recorded answers of student ideas about what a great friend is, does, says, and is not.

After using the triangulation method to analyze the data, I noticed a connection between the “a great friend” activity and the results from the one- on- one interviews. Student 2, student 4 and student 5 all showed difficulty being able to answer the interview question about how they would describe a good friend. Student 1 and student 3 were able to answer the interview questions correctly. All students had a difficult time coming up with words to describe what a great friend is. The students were more successful when I gave them the first letter of a word. For example, I wrote an ‘n’ and student 1 came up with the word “nice”. In attempt to have each student participate I went around the table asking each student to come up with one word. When it came to student 3’s turn he got so upset about not being able to come up with a word he started

to cry. In a one-on-one setting student 3 was able to list words to describe a friend. However, in a group setting he had a difficult time attending to the task as well as coming up with an answer, even with prompting from adults. After conducting the interviews, surveys, and the “a great friend” activity, it became apparent that students had a difficult time talking about social skills topics. I’ve realized the importance of conducting a social group for students to be able to build their ability to use their oral language in social situations.

Prior to conducting the study to promote oral language in social situations, many of my students had a difficult time using their words when confronted with a variety of situations in different settings. For example, in the school I work at, we have a student recognition assembly every other month to honor students who demonstrate excellence in a variety of areas. In October, I chose two students from my class to receive the students of the month award. The students look forward to the assemblies because the students want to know if they won an award. The assembly had started and the students are sitting at the edge of their seats, patiently waiting for their name to be called. As the assembly was progressing, I could see student 3 was starting to look tense. His name has not been called yet and the assembly was almost over. The student’s face became red and in a split second ran out of the auditorium. I sprang out of my seat and rushed after him. He ran all the way back to the classroom. I caught up to him and found the student in the cool down corner. The cool down corner is a place for students to go if they are feeling frustrated or upset. I let him know I was in the room and gave him a minute to catch his breath. He started heavily crying. I asked him what was wrong and he told me he was upset about not getting an award. I explained to him that not every student will get an award at every award ceremony, but will get an award at some point during the school year. This scenario is one reason why I chose to incorporate a social group time into my curriculum this school year.

During the six-week study, I had many opportunities to explicitly teach students about subjects that related to their social skills deficits. I discovered student deficits mostly through observations. I then created scenario cards that had a social situation that I noticed a student had a difficult time navigating. One social scenario that was focused on was: You are at an assembly and another student gets an award, but you do not. What can you say or do to your friend to make them feel happy? When we first started to have a discussion about this social scenario, the students did not want to talk about it. Student 3 asked, "why do we have to talk about it"? I responded with how it is important to know how to handle it if you do not get an award. So some students started shouting out answers by saying, "good job" or "congratulations". I then asked another question about this specific social scenario.

Miss. Kier: Do you think it is okay to be sad about not getting an award?

Student 4: No it not.

Miss. Kier: Why is it not okay to feel sad?

Student 4: Because it not okay.

I took this as an opportunity to help the students understand that it is okay to feel upset if you don't get an award. It is important how the student reacts when they do not get an award. After the students and I came up with a list of things we should do and shouldn't do during an awards ceremony. Many of their answers revolved around using kind words and being happy for other students. There was even an answer about not running out of the auditorium if you feel upset. We had a conversation about if a student was feeling upset, he or she can ask for a break and a teacher can walk with them to take a break in the classroom. In February, the school had another student recognition assembly. Before walking down to the auditorium, I reminded the students of their strategies and how if they felt the need to leave they can use their words and ask

for a break. When student 3 did not receive an award, he leaned over to me and asked if he could leave. The student was able to resolve the problem by using his oral language skills successfully.

Another scenario that was discussed in week 4 of the study was Physical Education class. Physical Education class can cause great anxiety for students with oral language or social deficits. The environment is not as structured as a classroom is and there are twenty or more students in each block of Physical Education. Through observations, I noted that many students had a difficult time understanding and following the rules. Another trend I quickly noticed through observing Physical Education class is students were unsure how to respond to a peer when that peer was not following the rules. In my field notes, I noted that one student who was upset about a peer not following the rule during a "knockout" basketball game became aggressive with a peer to the point where the Physical Education teacher had to intervene. Both of these trends helped me to think about some social scenarios the class and I could work on during social group. The social scenario that was discussed and acted out in class was: You are in P.E. class and you are playing game with a friend and that friend starts to break the rules. What could you do or say? I read the scenario out loud to students and this conversation is what transpired:

Miss. Kier: You are in P.E. class and you are playing a game with a friend and that friend starts to break the rules. What could you do or say?

Student 3: (yelling) STOP!

Miss. Kier: Do you think yelling will get them to stop?

Student 1: No. You should say please stop. Use nice words.

Miss. Kier: What if they don't stop?

Student 4: Go tell the teacher.

Miss. Kier: Perfect! Is there anything else you could do to solve the problem?

Student 4: You can leave.

After beginning the lesson with a discussion, the students acted out the scenario. The students and I talked about the concept of ignoring negative behaviors. Sometimes it can be hard to ignore the behaviors but it is okay to walk away from someone who is not following the directions. The students loved acting out this scenario because all students greatly enjoy going to Physical Education class. My hope is that in the future, the students will feel more confident in handling situations that arise in that setting.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of the study was to develop primary aged children's expressive oral language within various social situations. The qualitative study I conducted over the course of six weeks focused on one research question:

- *How might I promote primary aged children's use of expressive oral language in social situations?*

Over the six-week study, I was able to watch my students' social skills transform. Through the activities and social scenario role plays, the students were able to gain more knowledge about social skills as well as generalizing that knowledge outside of the classroom. The students showed that through explicit teaching of various social skills, they were able to gain skills that they will use for the rest of their lives.

Through coding and examining the data, three findings emerged. The first finding showed that students diagnosed with a speech and language impairment had a more difficult time contributing to the activities during social group time. Bakopoulou and Dockrell (2016) state, "Difficulties in using language to express oneself (expressive language ability) have been

associated with increased difficulties in socio-emotional functioning” (p. 356). The next finding that was discovered is that students were able to generalize the knowledge taught in social group to other settings throughout their school day. Andrés-Roqueta, Adrian, Clemente and Villanueva concluded that, “intervention programmes should include SC (social cognition) dimensions when early social problems are detected, to prevent worse social scenarios from appearing during later childhood and adolescence” (p. 228). Andrés- Roqueta et al. found that it is imperative to provide students the social skills training to prevent difficulties in the future. The researchers determined that it is beneficial for students to be exposed to social skills. The final finding that emerged was that social development and oral language development have a direct relationship with each other. Casillas and Frank (2017) state, "Children's early, turn-structured social interactions are presumably a critical pre-cursor to their later conversational turn taking, establishing the protocol by which children come to use language with others” (p. 234). A child's ability to interact socially with others at a young age will have more opportunities to develop their oral language skills as they get older. It is imperative that educators help students to develop both their social skills and oral language skills together.

## **Conclusions**

### **Explicit teaching of social skills increases students' knowledge about social skills.**

Throughout the six-week study, students were given the opportunity to learn social skills through the explicit teaching model. I wanted to provide students with a different way of learning the material. Archer and Hughes (2011) describe explicit instruction as:

A structured, systematic, and effective methodology for teaching academic skills. It is called explicit because it is an unambiguous and direct approach to teaching that includes

both instructional design and delivery procedures. Explicit instruction is characterized by a series of supports or scaffolds. (p. 1)

The researchers describe explicit teaching as a direct approach. My goal was to provide the students with the most direct and individualized instruction possible. The effects of explicit instruction of social skills are positive. By the end of the six-week study, the students showed more knowledge about social skills through this specific teaching style. After reflecting on the results of the study, it was evident that the students were able to gain more from the activities and ultimately acquired skills and knowledge to use for years to come.

### **Hands on learning increases meaning making by students.**

Across the school day, I give students many opportunities to use various tools to take a hands on learning approach when engaged in academic centers. During social group time, students would typically listen to me read a book or watch a video about a specific social skills topic. After, the students and I would have a conversation about what they had just read or watched. When I was planning the activities for the study, I decided to include social scenario role plays to give students more of a hands on approach to learning about social skills. Another way to describe hands on learning is kinesthetic learning. Golding, Boes, and Nordin- Bates (2016) claim that movement plays an important part in cognitive development. Giving students an opportunity to include movement as a way to learn can be very powerful. Golding, Boes, and Nordin-Bates (2016) also address the “theory of Accelerated Learning” (p. 236). “The principles of AL can be summarised as the promotion of deeper and faster learning than that expected using conventional teaching techniques” (Golding, Boes & Nordin-Bates, 2016, p. 236). Accelerated Learning is when an educator adds movement to the lesson or activity to promote learning. Prior to the study, I was using more conventional practices when teaching social skills. During the

study, I was able to incorporate Accelerated Learning through the role playing activities. I used Accelerated Learning techniques when the students were asked to act out social scenarios. The students got up and moved around the classroom which allowed them to make meaning through their movements, gestures, and language. The students found the social scenario role plays to be fun and looked forward to social group every day. Many of the students would ask me when social group was and if we were going to “act out stuff”. I was happy to see that the students found the activities so engaging.

After the study was over, the students showed growth in their knowledge of social skills. The students also generalized the information taught in social group into other areas of the school day. The improvements the students made in such a short period of time proves that when given students opportunities to participate in hands on learning, the results are positive. I plan to continue to give students more opportunities to explore multiple modalities of learning such as kinesthetic learning.

### **Implications**

#### **Students should have the opportunity to learn about social skills.**

In the district that I work for, there is currently no social skills curriculum that teachers have access to. The primary focus for a child's day is to learn the academic curriculum. There is little to no emphasis on a child's social development. Through implementing the social group into my school day, students are learning skills that they need to be able to function in society. Pekdoğan (2016) implemented a social skills curriculum into a Pre-Kindergarten classroom. The results were “proven successful” (Pekdoğan, 2016, p. 314). Pekdoğan (2016) also discussed that it is important to expose children to this type of program early on in life.

From a teaching perspective, I believe in the importance of teaching social skills to students. Sometimes it can be difficult for students to completely focus on an academic task if their mind is focused on why a peer won't talk to him or her. "Children's early, turn-structured social interactions are presumably a critical pre-cursor to their later conversational turn taking, establishing the protocol by which children come to use language with others" (Casillas & Frank, 2017, 234). Children need to be given the opportunity to practice turn-taking with peers in order to build the skills for later on in life.

Students also need to be given opportunities to learn about feelings and how to cope with those feelings among many other topics. I will continue to work on creating a positive atmosphere for my students within the school setting.

**Students should have opportunities for explicit, hands on learning.**

Through the six-week study, I was able to see how explicit, hands on learning can be effective for students. The two teaching styles came together to create a safe and positive environment for students. When students were given direct instruction on a specific topic such as friendship, they were able to put all of their attention toward this topic. Archer and Hughes (2011) state that explicit instruction includes scaffolding. Scaffolding is when "students are guided through the learning process with clear statements and the purpose and rationale for learning the new skill, clear expectations and demonstrations of the instructional target" (Archer and Hughes, 2011, p. 1). I used the scaffolding technique to lead students to the end goal which was using oral language within social situations. When reviewing the activities that were conducted during social group, there were clear expectations explained to all students participating in the study. When adding the hands on learning aspect to social group, the students took more ownership over their learning. I have been able to see how much students enjoy

learning about different topics when they are able to have a hands on experience with the material being presented. I plan to continue giving students the opportunity to personalize their learning and let the students learn through multiple modalities. I will also continue to ensure that the students receive explicit instruction across both academic and social topics.

### **Advocate for social skills curriculum within the district.**

“Numerous scholars have reviewed research on the effectiveness of school- based social skills interventions” (Sullivan & Sadeh, 2014, p. 109). After almost one academic year and a six-week study, I have determined that implementing a social skills program into my classroom has been successful. I plan to take my findings from my study and talk to school psychologists, social workers and other teachers about how implementing social group into my daily classroom routines has a positive impact on students. Sullivan and Sadeh (2014) state that social skills relate to many academic behaviors such as “listening to directions, staying on task and asking questions” (p. 109). I will continue to advocate for a curriculum that is school wide so all students can feel successful and learn important life skills.

### **Limitations**

Throughout the six-week study, I determined that there were a few limitations to the study. I concluded that time and the setting of where the study took place were limitations to my study. Over the period of six weeks, the students showed growth in their social skills knowledge and demonstrated their knowledge through their actions. If I could continue to collect data over a longer period of time, I would be interested in seeing how much more growth they would continue to do.

Another limitation of the study was the type of classroom the study took place in. The study took place in an 8:1:1 special education classroom with 5 students. I would like to see how

the implementation of a social skills curriculum would have on a general education classroom with more students.

### **Suggestions for future research**

Based on the limitations of my study, I would suggest to future researchers that they conduct this study over a longer period of time. Although I saw growth in my students over the course of the six-week study, it would be important to see how much growth the students can make over a longer period of time. I also would suggest implementing a social skills program within a special education and general education setting. It would be interesting to see if the program would be as successful in a general education classroom. It also would be important to be able to determine similarities and differences between the two settings. I would also suggest that the researchers conduct this study with a larger pool of participants. I was only able to see how the implementation of a social skills program with five students. If a researcher had more students to observe and conduct activities with there may be different results of the study.

### **Overall Significance**

Based on the results of the study I conducted, I will continue to implement a social group time into my schedule. The study has showed me how important it is to teach students social skills. I will continue to strongly advocate for a social group time among all classrooms in my district as well. Prior to the study, I used activities such as watching a video, or working out of the students' social skills notebooks. During the study I implemented role playing social scenarios. The students loved being able to act out various social scenarios in the comfort of their classroom. By providing a hands on learning experience, the students were able to take their learning into their own hands and make their own meaning. Students are learning skills that will stay with them for the rest of their lives.

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**Appendix A**

Interview Questions

1. Who do you think is a good friend? (If students are not able to come up with an answer, see question #1a, 2a, and 3a)
  
2. What do they do to be a good friend?
  
3. What do they say when they are being a good friend?
  
- 1a. How would you describe a good friend?
  
- 2a. What does a good friend do?
  
- 3a. What does a good friend say?

**Appendix B**

Friendship Survey

Check YES or NO if the following actions are what friends do or do not do.

YES	NO	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>1</b> knowing your friends name
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>2</b> Saying "Hi" to your friend when you see them
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>3</b> Looking away when talking to your friend.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>4</b> Walking away when your friend asks you a question.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>5</b> Listen to all your friend has to say before you start talking
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>6</b> Make eye contact with your friend
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>7</b> Ask your friends questions about themselves
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>8</b> Only talk about yourself
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>9</b> Give your friend high fives
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>10</b> say mean things when your friend makes a mistake

\*adapted from:

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**Appendix C**

Double Journal Entry Template

<b>Observations</b>	<b>Interpretation of Observations/ Reflection</b>