AN INVESTIGATION OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS TRAINING
ON THE EFFECT OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS'
SELF-CONCEPT SCORES AND BEHAVIOR

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An Abstract

Presented to the

Graduate and Research Council of

Austin Peay State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science

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by

Heidrun M. Dalton

June 1987

ABSTRACT

A review of the literature indicated that inappropriate behavior tends to be the result of ineffective communication with significant others. This study sought to test the effect of a skills training in reflective listening, assertion, and problem solving on the measured self-concept scores of 24 adolescent high school students identified to communicate ineffectively with at least one teacher. Behavior defined as aggressive or passive constituted ineffective communication. A second comparison was made to determine if the passive and/or aggressive students' self-concept scores were significantly lower than the general population. A third general analysis was employed to measure behavioral improvements in the classroom as observed by the respective teachers.

The findings in the present research indicate that the passive and/or aggressive students' self-concept scores did not significantly increase following the communication skills training. However, the students' measured self-concepts were significantly lower than the Tennessee Self Concept Scale (TSCS) norm group. Also, the results indicated that some aggressive students intensified their aggressive behaviors following the training phase. In-class acquisition of the reflective listening, assertion, and problem-solving skills were achieved by most of the students. No aggressive and/or passive behaviors during

the on-going group sessions were recorded after the second half of the training.

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Heidrun M. Dalton

June 1987

To the Graduate and Research Council:

I am submitting herewith a Thesis written by Heidrun M. Dalton entitled "An Investigation of Communication Skills Training on the Effect of High School Students' Self-Concept Scores and Behavior." I have examined the final copy of this paper for form and content, and I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in guidance and counseling.

Linda Rudolph
Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Susan Krupick
Second Committee Member

John D Martin
Third Committee Member

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William H. Ellis
Dean of the Graduate School

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The home constitutes the first and foremost psychological environment that exposes the developing child to cultural transmissions (Glasser, 1969; Schneider & Schneider, 1983; Berkovitz, 1985). The school and the relationships at school constitute a second major influence which provide an opportunity for the child to internalize valued attributes such as feelings of competence, adequacy, and control over environmental events identified to be crucial in the formation of mature personality traits (Berkovitz, 1985; Glasser, 1969). School curricula, however, researchers point out, are primarily based upon the assumption that psychological requisites have been provided, and that the student is receptive to prescribed instructions (Bruner, 1966; Ogburn, 1983; Brickell, 1980). The problem of the marginally functioning, maladjusted student remains unresolved although "lack of discipline" was singled out in the 1975, 1980, 1983, and 1984 Gallup Polls as this nation's paramount concern in regard to educational issues (Swick, 1981; Gallup, 1983, 1984).

In an analysis of four national education reform proposals developed by leading educators, Herr (1984) found that today, as in the past, human development and those forces that impact upon the learner such as interpersonal communication, decision-making skills, and

management of affect are largely ignored. Carkhuff, as quoted by Anthony (1985), states, "We simply have not trained people in the most human of functions: to think!"

A review of the literature published in the journal, "Adolescence," between 1976 and 1981 summarized by Stefanko (1984) shows a predominant number of articles addressing the issue of maladjusted behavior. Discipline problems generally, and delinquent behavior specifically, were singled out as the highest cause for concern in educational issues.

Explanations for deviant behavior abound. Dreikurs (1964) theorizes that all behavior is purposive. He believes that the socially and personally ineffective youngster seeks to gratify his or her needs through four basic inappropriate behavioral patterns: attention, power, revenge, and displays of inadequacy or withdrawal. Seligman (1975) contends that when outcomes of behavior are not affected by one's attempt to control them, helplessness is learned. When children lack personal resources in dealing effectively with their environment, aggressive and/or regressive modes of behavior may lead to apathy and loss of self-respect (Frostig & Maslow, 1973). A study by Werner (1984) shows that the degree of adjustment and the resiliency to retain mental stability in a given environment appear to be proportional to confidence in

the effectiveness of one's own actions. Bronfenbrenner
(1973) indicates that chronic, unsuccessful communication
with people who matter results in alienation and isolation.
Subsequent lack of direction and ignorance of boundaries
render the individual susceptible to deeper social resigna-
tion and deviance. Dinkmeyer and Dreikurs (1963) refer
to this phenomenon as "retreat into illness," a behavior
that has been adopted through futile attempts to find
an acceptable place in society. Schneider and Schneider
(1983) state that the behavior of deviant youth can be
characterized as "resistive," "anti-social," and "self-
exploitative." These youngsters tend to feel discouraged,
angry, revengeful, and helpless.

    "Difficult to get along with" and "lack of attachment"
were two other salient features found to be dominant
in studies conducted by Stefanko (1984) and Spillane-
Grieco (1984). Most of the delinquents in their research
were reported to have a reputation for "being in trouble"
long before the deviant episodes. Loeber's (1982) review
of precursors of delinquency concurs with these latter
findings. He also notes that chronic offenders display
antisocial conduct at an early age and in various social
settings such as the home and the school. Glasser (1969)
emphasizes that when needs of self-worth and acceptance
are not accommodated in the preadolescent stage, motivation
will be destroyed and a failure identity will be assumed.
Pathways of love and self-esteem will be abandoned in

favor of the only alternatives left open: withdrawal and/or delinquency.

Some adolescents appear to become deviant because of a direct need for control, attachment, support, desire to show competence, or because of ignorance as to what is expected of them (Hoffman, 1984). Hoffman concludes that such demonstrations of independence of mind are often misinterpreted by adults who are unable or unwilling to recognize normal developmental behaviors. Defensive reactions and/or punitive measures by such authority figures tend to intensify alienation between the two populations. Schneider and Schneider (1983) echo this position and point out that such students will continually strive to gain validation for the belief that they are highly rejectable and can only find a negative place with the teacher.

Assumptions of inferiority, humiliation, disgrace, and deficiency are signified by Dinkmeyer and Driekurs (1963) to be the most threatening dangers to the sense of personal value and status. They write that "What one believes him/herself to be is the basis for action" (p. 35). "People fail when they have lost confidence in their ability to gain approval through socially acceptable means. Discouragement is a fundamental determinant for all deficiencies and failure" (p. 42). This view is also consonant with Thompson and Poppen (1979) who believe that low self-concept formation is primarily derived

from unproductive work activities, poor interpersonal relationships, and the inability to form satisfying bonds with significant others. Individuals high in social avoidance and distress, in turn, were shown to possess significantly lower self-esteem, less self-confidence, and less need affiliation than those low in social avoidance and distress (Geist & Borecki, 1982). In his extensive work with delinquent girls, Glasser (1969), too, determined that this population had no confidence in themselves, possessed no confidence that they would succeed in the future, and were devoid of warm, constructive relationships with families or with teachers. They had resigned themselves to a life without important human interactions.

By the time the child reaches adolescence, Berkovitz (1985), as many other researchers, has determined that most attitudes toward family, school, and authority figures appear to have been formed "but not entirely foreclosed" (p. 162). He believes that remedial programs can be implemented by concerned school personnel to provide an opportunity for the adolescent to overcome detrimental environmental forces. Glasser (1969) and Ogburn (1983) posit that it is the foremost responsibility of the school to foster learning from within, and that the formation of a positive self-concept should not be left to chance.

Instrumental social incompetence and interaction deficit have been linked to maladjustment by all of the aforementioned researchers either directly or by implication.

A recurring, pervasive theme concomitant with the phenomenon
of maladjustment is the marked inability for young people
to be able to communicate with the environment in such
a way as to gain, ameliorate, or enhance self-worth,
competence, and control. Bolton (1979) believes that
ineffective communication is one of the leading problems
in today's society. He further espouses the view that
a breakdown in verbal interaction may result in loneliness,
physical illness, psychological stress, vocational incompe-
tence, and even death. In his estimation, approximately
ninety percent of all crucial communication is impeded
by road blocks which increase the likelihood of impaired
understanding, detrimental relationships, anger, and
dependent behaviors counterproductive to the unfolding
of psychologically healthy and mature individuals. Communica-
tion is believed to be the basis for relationships that
enable another to learn, grow, solve problems, become
more productive, and move toward psychological wellness
(Rogers, 1958; Shostrom, 1967; Glasser, 1969; Harris,
1973; Gordon, 1975; Boser & Poppen, 1983; Zechnich, 1983).

The 1978 Education Act identified and recognized
the value of oral communication and incorporated this
competency into the "Back to Basics" mandate. Specific
training in this new discipline at the elementary and
secondary school levels, however, is largely non-existent.
According to Ridge (1984), English teachers, themselves
inadequately trained in oral communication, have been

assigned the task of instructing in a subject area that has not yet been clearly defined and that lacks the methodology from which to direct a course of study. To simplify the task, attempts have been made to analyze and subdivide this multi-dimensional phenomenon into various subskills. Preliminary investigations and studies are in progress but no conclusive research in regard to this issue appears to be available at this time.

Subskills of Communication

According to Webster's Third New International Dictionary (1961), to "communicate" denotes "to transmit knowledge, information or feeling so that it is satisfactorily received or understood," (p. 460). It is here that the discrepancy arises. Before any message can be correctly received, it must first be understood. In order for a message to be understood, it must be confirmed for accuracy by the sender. Reality differs from this ideal. Leaders in the field of human interaction agree that most people do not communicate well (Gordon, 1975; Harris, 1973; Bolton, 1979; Carkhuff, as quoted by Anthony, 1985). Most people make assumptions about what has been transmitted based on their own background, personal disposition, or immediate needs, and not on what actually has been asserted. Human interaction requires seeing things from the other person's perspective. Only when this foundation has been established can transactions achieve the desired purpose. Following accurate decoding of a message, the

receiver must be able to convey his or her needs to the sender so that an exchange of ideas and/or a solution satisfactory to both can be obtained (Bolton, 1979; Gordon, 1975; Harris, 1973; Pearson, 1983).

Listening skills. Ridge (1984), an advocate for teaching listening skills at the high school level, contends that "no one doubts that listening is the most used tool for learning" (p. 3). She believes that listening competence employs both knowing and doing. One must know that people communicate for different reasons and respond accordingly; knowing what is expected helps a person to realize when to speak and when to be silent; knowing when the speaker is looking for empathy helps the listener to fulfill that role; and knowing our own biases and those of the speaker are important variables to consider in making judgments. Ridge adds that merely knowing about these elements of competent listening does not provide the feedback needed to verify that the assumptions made during listening are correct. Not until covert thoughts are verified through appropriate overt comments and questions can such competence be claimed. Effective listening takes practice. To draw verbal conclusions, to hear facts and to guess at the mood of the speaker are skills which are the product of listening. The process of listening does not change, she continues, but the purposes to which we put our listening skills differ. For example, judgment in persuasive messages call for the same analytical process as empathically listening to a friend who needs assistance

in decision making. Ridge contends that "various aspects of each message are given different weights but the process of attending, concentrating, remembering, and cognitively structuring is the same" (p. 5).

Swanson (1984) espouses a four component approach to teaching listening skills to adolescents. The first unit focuses on the physical aspects of an effective listener who communicates attention to the speaker. Eye contact, body language, and meaningful sounds conveying congruence are characteristics indicative of the good listener. Lesson number two addresses attitudinal road-blocks and presents techniques designed to overcome these barriers. Lesson number three focuses on the speaker's input: the manner in which the message is delivered, the intent or purpose of the message, vocal patterns, and so forth. All require cognitive application from the listener that must be practiced. Quizzes and performance reports serve as instruments of reinforcement and self-evaluation as outlined in the fourth component. A simple, five-point performance scale for each student ranging from zero, denoting absent listening skills, to five, indicating consistently active listening behavior, is suggested as a convenient device for objective measurements of progress. Swanson concludes that "when students learn to listen, they will be able to listen to learn" (p. 12).

Problem solving skills. Heppner and Anderson (1983)

examined the hypothesis that problem-solving ability
is positively related to psychological adjustment. Their
study not only substantiated this assumption but brought
to the fore another related variable: self-appraisal.
When informal self-evaluations were compared with the
General Index of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality
Inventory, those individuals who rated themselves low
in ability to analyze and evaluate situations and events
also scored negatively on the General Index of Psychological
Adjustment. Ineffective problem-solvers appear to have
more personal dissatisfaction as well and report more
severe levels of both short- and long-term depression
(Heppner, Baumgardner & Jackson, 1985). Self-appraised
effective problem-solvers by comparison claim to be more
socially comfortable and generally more in charge of
their lives. Concomitant attributes reported are: satis-
faction, few self-doubts, greater personal adequacy,
resourcefulness, and perseverance (Duckworth, 1979).
The implication of such findings are summed up by the
authors who emphasize the need for intervention strategies
either administered concurrently with or prior to the
problem-solving skill training. Without altering the
person's deep-rooted feeling of inferiority and incompetence,
the efficacy of a problem-solving skills training will
be weakened.

Rogers (1983) adds some general guidelines to the
teaching of problem solving. The message in problem-solving

must be simple, concise, and match the mental maturity
and general knowledge of the student. The key is to
understand the whole problem before attempting to solve
it, Rogers claims. Questions such as "What am I expected
to do"; "What information is necessary to identify the
problem"; and "What key ideas will harness the essential
components necessary for correct analysis and evaluation"
are designed to help students to think more flexibly
and critically. Successful problem-solvers delay initial
judgments until the entire situation has been examined
and evaluated. By means of this strategy, the underlying
issue is uncovered and extraneous factors are eliminated.
The problem is then restated into a simple, pertinent,
and manageable format and divided into further substeps
for easier resolution.

Assertiveness skills. Assertive skills training
for adolescents is virtually non-existent. One study
by Waksman (1984) examines the relationship between social
skills training, of which assertiveness skill acquisition
is a major part, and self-concept. Twenty-three high
school students participated in a four-week intervention
program that showed statistically significant improvements
between pre- and post-evaluation scores on the Piers-
Harris Children Self-Concept Scale and the Intellectual
Achievement Responsibility Questionnaire.

Waksman (1984) stressed the difference between assertion
and aggression, emotional defusing, and personal needs

and rights as part of the didactic instructions. Role
playing, modeling, and behavior rehearsals offer opportuni-
ties for students to exercise each newly acquired concept.
Presence or absence of the objective was checked on a
behavior list following the modeling vignettes. Students
were not identified for their poor self-concepts; the
entire class learned new assertive skills as part of
their regular curriculum. Socially more adept students
were able to demonstrate socially acceptable behaviors
and served as role models. The group setting itself
presented the opportunity for peer support and positive
reinforcement, a necessary component in most learning
situations. The more withdrawn students were able to
learn through observing the role models. Due to lack
of comparable studies, the results of this training program
are tentative.

A realistic working model implementing problem-solving
skills and assertiveness has been advanced by Schneider
and Schneider (1983). Subsumed under the affective
curriculum module of a three-unit program designed to
re-educate emotionally disturbed students, these subskills
are taught within the framework of Adler's (1964) teleo-
logical prototype.

In an atmosphere of responsibility, respect, resource-
fulness, and responsiveness, the students are exposed
to therapeutic challenges to understand, alter, and
redirect their lives toward personally and socially

rewarding ends. The affective process is divided into four basic phases: relationship, analysis, interpretation, and reorientation. The relationship phase involves the integration of the maladjusted students into the social group where they experience a caring, concerned, firm but fair attitude provided under the leadership of the teacher. Interpersonal interdependence is encouraged by means of cooperative problem-solving and assertiveness practice sessions within the group setting. Students are placed in situations where they must relate and cooperate with each other either by introduction of a personal problem or a group project that requires everyone's input. The analysis and interpretation phase entails examining and questioning the students' goals or purposes of their behavior. The teacher offers non-judgmental interpretive hypotheses as to the motive of such behavior which encourages the students to appraise the unproductive outcomes of their actions in a realistic and rational manner. In the final phase, the students experience the value of the program. Problem solving and assertiveness skills are applied in the group setting and through encouragement and suggestions, irrational convictions and behaviors are modified.

Problem solving is singled out by Schneider and Schneider (1983) as the most crucial technique to be learned. This tool provides the "pay-off" for positive behavior. Assertiveness is instrumental in the protection

and defense of the newly acquired interaction skill within the home and school environment. The internalization of assertive skills involves "being able to ask for and defend ideas as well as being able to cope with the limits on what one can change" (p. 387).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the effect of communication skills training upon high school student's level of self-concept. Effective communication is a skill that will enable adolescents to bridge the gap between past failures and future competencies in dealing with their environments, and a skill that will allow the maladjusted to experience success in relating to others in such a way as to enhance self-esteem and foster maturity. Educationally, the acquisition of such training is intended to render the student receptive to the equally important attainment of subject matter found to be vital in the formation of productive, mature and responsible adults (Herr, 1984).

The entire unit of affective re-education is based upon the fundamental, universal phenomenon toward which self-actualized individuals seem to be striving: to be understood, respected, and accepted. It is from this perspective that the proposed communication skills program was designed, implemented, and evaluated.

Methodology

Subjects

Twenty-four students from a local high school, ages
15 to 17, voluntarily participated in the present study.
Five students were black and 19 were white. There were
six females and 18 males. The criteria for selection
was aggressive and passive behavior displays toward at
least one teacher as evidenced in class interactions.
All but two students lived in homes classified as militar

Materials

The subjects completed the Clinical Research Form
of the Tenenssee Self Concept Scale (TSCS) developed
by Fitts (1964). One hundred self-descriptive statements
indicate the subjective view of physical self, moral-
ethical self, family self, and social self. The total
positive score reflects the overall level of self-concept
This total score indicator, which has a test-retest relia
bility of .92, was used to compare pre- and post-test
results.

The six teaching units were comprised of teaching
materials developed by Bolton (1979), Waksman and Messmer
(1979), Thompson and Poppen (1979), and the present
researcher. A lesson plan format was followed that
described the objectives and activities of both students
and teacher. The orientation unit consisted of TSCS

administration, establishment of rules of conduct by the students, and examination and discussion of the communication cycle. Unit Two required discussion of the students' and other people's communication styles within the communication process, why people behave as they do, what consequences ensue when miscommunication takes place, and the student's responsibility within the human communication network. Unit Three outlined the concepts for reflective listening skills such as identifying correct subject and affect of a message. Unit Four was designed to teach assertiveness following identification and correction of aggressive and/or passive communication styles. Unit Five encouraged problem-solving techniques to be applied following correct identification of each student's needs and wants. Unit Six entailed the final phase of the workshop to include TSCS post-test administration and students' responses to the overall effectiveness of the study.

A behavior rating scale composed of 15 items was used to measure transference of learning (see Appendix A). The items and format were selected in part from Burks' (1977) Behavior Rating Scales and from the objectives of the communication skills training lesson plans developed by the present researcher. The level of improvement was measured on a six-point scale ranging from "regressive" to "excellent improvement" on each of the 15 items.

The specific target behaviors were acquisition of reflective listening, assertion, and problem-solving skills. The global behavior evaluated was improvement in responsible behavior as evidenced in improved communication following the treatment phase.

A checklist was used by the present researcher to record the acquisition of the reflective listening, assertion, and problem-solving skills (see Appendix B). A checkmark placed to the right of each student's name on the daily attendance roster indicated ability to perform the task. A circle reflected non-acquisition. Four out of five correctly identified, asserted, and resolved statements, vignettes or problems constituted successful performance. To the left of each name a space was provided to record presence or absence of inappropriate, uncooperative and/or disruptive behaviors as they occurred during the on-going sessions. Such displays were noted with an asterisk placed to the left of the subject's name. The recording of the dysfunctional behaviors was concealed from the students. It was stressed to them at the beginning of the workshop that continuous note-taking by the researcher was a vital part of the study.

Procedure

The teachers were requested to recommend students they found to be communicating aggressively or passively. Forty-two students were referred under these two categories.

During a 30-minute orientation, the present researcher informed the potential subjects of the purpose, procedure and benefits of the communication skills workshop. From the pool of 42 students, 28 obtained parental permission to participate; 24 students completed the study.

Four groups of six students were exposed to approximately 40 minutes of communication skills training for a total of 11 sessions. Total time of treatment was approximately seven hours and 20 minutes. The subjects were assigned to first, second, third, and fourth period based upon their academic performance in those classes they would miss because of participation in the study. Ten minutes was allowed for obtaining homework assignments prior to attending the workshop. One session was canceled. Fifty-five minutes was required for TSCS pre- and post-test administrations. The skills training consisted of six units: Units 1 and 2--Orientation and Factors on Communication; Unit 3--Reflective Listening; Unit 4--Assertion; Unit 5--Problem Solving; and Unit 6--Closure.

The teaching format was a combination of group counseling and didactic instruction. Introduction and explanations of new concepts were followed by probing-style questioning requiring students' cooperative input and demonstration of the skills. Approximately 10% of the total learning phase consisted of written exercises. Lectures consumed approximately 30%, with the remainder being taken up with student activities. The students were challenged

to think about the subject matter, about their behavior
in the group, and about the consequences of verbal and
nonverbal behavior generally. The role-playing exercises
served as practice and reinforcing agents of change.
The group, initially prompted by the teacher, imposed
sanctions upon students not adhering to rules of conduct
predetermined by the group. The atmosphere established
and maintained by the teacher/researcher was characterized
by mutual respect, firmness, fairness, cooperation, and
a positive attitude toward learning. Outside activities
consisted of practice in the skills with significant
others. No homework was assigned.

The present researcher designed and taught the teaching
material used in the present study. A copy of these
instructional units may be obtained from the researcher.

CHAPTER 3

Results

The pre- and post-test results of the Tennessee Self
Concept Scale (Fitts, 1964) were analyzed to determine
if the subjects' self-concept scores had significantly
increased following training in communication skills.
A second comparison was made by evaluating the TSCS pre-
test scores against the test scores of the TSCS norm
group to determine if the passive/aggressive subjects
possessed lower self-concept scores than the general
population. The recording of on-going dysfunctional
behaviors during the group session served the purpose
of measuring effectiveness of training within the group
setting as well as allowing the researcher to determine
if correct verbal and non-verbal behaviors were within
the students' repertoire. The manifestation of skill
acquisition was recorded on the communication skills
checklist to establish competence in the new skills.
A fifth evaluation was employed to identify transference
of learning over .time. This instrument was designed
to measure both long-term presence of the communication
skills and the level of improvement in general maturity
and responsibility.

The mean total positive score for the TSCS norm
group, as reported by Fitts (1964), was 345.57 with a
standard deviation of 30.7. The mean total positive

score for the passive/aggressive group before treatment was 310.33 with a standard deviation of 11.58. The value of the t-test for independent samples exceeded the critical value of 2.07 at the .05 level of significance. From this analysis, it may be concluded that the self-concepts of the subjects of this study were significantly lower than the TSCS norm group. This determination appears to confirm the hypothesis that adolescents who do not communicate effectively with their environments possess lower self-concept scores than the general population.

No statistically significant treatment effect could be established from comparisons between TSCS pre- and post-test means, however. A t-test for dependent samples yielded a value of 2.03, which did not exceed the critical value of 2.07 at the .05 level of significance. Therefore, it was concluded that the short-term communication skills training was not effective in raising the self-concept scores of the participating subjects.

The number of dysfunctional behavior incidents recorded for the ten aggressive students for the first five class periods was 17. For the same period, the number of passive episodes observed for the 14 passive students was 19. By comparison, two aggressive and zero passive occurrences were noted during the second half of the treatment phase. All but one disruptive occurrence was followed by an apology as agreed upon by the group at the outset of

the study. This change in behavior could indicate that the communication skills training was instrumental in improving functional verbal and non-verbal behaviors of the participating adolescents within the treatment setting, although no statistical analyses were performed.

The communication skill checklist indicated acquisition of basic listening, assertion, and problem-solving skills. Through role play and verbal interaction, each student (100%) demonstrated the ability to identify correct affect and content of messages delivered by fellow students in five different reflective listening vignettes. The problem-solving objective (correctly solve four out of five problems) was met by 19 (79.4%) of the 24 students. Seventeen students (70.8%) obtained passing scores by using appropriate verbal responses when placed in five hypothetical situations that required non-aggressive/non-passive replies.

In addition to the specific communication skills and dysfunctional behavior, long-term attitudinal improvements were measured on a behavior rating scale. Six weeks after the conclusion of the study, 15 participating teachers indicated their observations of the students' behavior on the rating scale to measure transference of learning in both areas.

The rating scale consists of 15 items. Six levels of behavior, ranging from "Excellent Improvement" (Level

5) to "Regression" (Level 0), were used to identify the general and specific target behaviors. Of the 360 possible teacher responses, 120 (33.33%) were noted as "No Improvement," 46 (12.77%) "Very Little Improvement," 103 (28.61%) "Some Improvement," 35 (9%) "Much Improvement," 28 (7%) "Excellent Improvement," and 28 (7.77%) "Regression." Total improvement votes were 212 (56%). From this vote, it may be assumed that for over half of the subjects, the communication skills training resulted in positive gains in verbal and non-verbal communication following treatment (see Appendix C).

The greatest positive gains were made in Criteria #8 and #9, "Student is considerate of other people's feelings" and "Student is non-judgmental of other's actions and words," respectively. These data indicate that two of the primary prerequisites of good communication skills, to tune into the affective part of a message and to refrain from judging others, were present at that time. For some students, the analysis further revealed that the intervention may have had an adverse effect. Lowest improvement behavior was Criteria #5, "Student's grades have improved," with six regressive marks. Eight students showed deteriorated performance in homework completion, grades, and/or general attitude toward school. Furthermore, regression was more dominant in the aggressive than in the passive student category with 23 votes for the former and five votes for the latter subgroup. The passive

students regressed in school-related rubrics only, whereas aggressive students tended to regress across general and specific target behaviors. Of the 28 total regression votes, 18 were reported by one teacher, five were indicative of a suspended student's behavior (subject completed the study), and five were noted by various other teachers. This leads to the following conclusion: School-related performance deteriorated following the communication skills training for five aggressive and three passive students. The three passive students repressed in school-related performance only. Four of the five aggressive students regressed in school-related criteria, general maturity, and specific skills performance learned during training. These four students were rated by a teacher who was the only one experiencing deterioration in both areas. This information suggested that passive students tended to learn more and regress less than aggressive students. Also, there appeared to be a potential relationship between type of student, training, and classroom teacher. Further research is needed before valid conclusions may be drawn.

Specific teacher comments included "citizenship has improved," "overall behavior improvement," (student is) "much happier," "great improvement," "attendance improvement," "much more cooperative," "tries to help much more," . . . "understands problems which has helped me" (teacher), as well as two negative reports: "can't

see any difference," and (student) . . . "is much worse"
by the one teacher who also marked 18 regressive behaviors.

When comparing the aggressive with the passive student
performance ratings, the following statistics applied.

Table 1

Comparison Between Aggressive and Passive Behavior Performance
Ratings

Item	Tallies	Percent
Aggressive		
No Improvement	71	43%
Very Little Improvement	10	6%
Some Improvement	35	21%
Much Improvement	15	9%
Excellent Improvement	11	7%
Regression	23	14%
Passive		
No Improvement	49	25%
Very Little Improvement	35	18%
Some Improvement	69	35%
Much Improvement	20	10%
Excellent Improvement	17	9%
Regression	5	3%

Total aggressive improvement tallies were 71 (43%). Total
no improvement tallies were also 71 (43%). Total regression
marks were 23 (14%).

Total improvement tallies for the passive group
were 141 (72%). Total no improvement votes were 49 (25%).
Total regression votes were 5 (3%). Comparisons of the
two categories indicate a superior gain made by the
passive group in both skills training and mature behavior
displays as well as fewer regression votes. These results
indicate that the beneficial effect of this communication
skills training was more positive for the passive subjects.
The aggressive students increased performance was negated
by the total no improvement and regression votes. In
fact, a deficit balance resulted when regression votes
and no improvement votes were subtracted from improvement
scores. This analysis suggests that the aggressive student
displayed a greater increase in dysfunctional behavior
following intervention than before treatment. Based
on these indicators, a short-term intervention of reflective
listening, assertion, and problem solving with emphasis
on mature behavior may have had an encouraging effect
upon aggressively disposed students to intensify deviant
responses.

CHAPTER 4

Discussion

This study was conducted to determine if communication skills training would increase the self-concept scores of adolescents identified to communicate ineffectively. A second purpose of this research was to test the hypothesis that adolescents who display dysfunctional behaviors such as aggression and/or passivity possess lower self-concept scores than the general population. The results indicated that the short-term training in reflective listening, assertion, and problem solving did not significantly raise the self-concept scores of the subjects although self-reports, reports by teachers, and the implications derived from the behavior rating scale indicate growth in both skill acquisition and responsible behavior.

The second hypothesis was substantiated by the results of the present study. When compared to the sample population included in the TSCS norm group, the measured self-concept scores of the adolescents in this sample were significantly lower. This result is in agreement with the findings of previous researchers in the field of human behavior who determined that ineffective communication with the environment is a correlate of low self-esteem (Glasser, 1969; Thompson & Poppen, 1979; Waksman & Messmer, 1979; Geist & Borecki, 1982).

The checklist of in-class skill acquisition and aggressive/passive behavior displays indicated that learning took place in both areas. Deviant responses had ceased by the fifth group session and the reflective listening, assertion, and problem-solving skills had been successfully demonstrated by most students. The results of the behavior rating scale showed the presence of overall transference of learning in 56% of the group with the most gain having been made in consideration for others and non-judgmental attitude categories. A deteriorated effect was noted in the academic-related rubrics "grade improvement," "homework completion," "class participation," and "school attitude," respectively. These data indicated that while skills training and an increase in responsible behavior were acquired by over half of the subjects, academic performance decreased for five aggressive and three passive students.

The passive students did not regress in the responsible criteria, but only in areas directly related to the school. Four of the five aggressive subjects showed regression in both responsibility and specific communication skills. This result points toward an increase in aggressive episodes in the aggressively disposed students outside the treatment setting. The emphasis on responsibility concurrently taught with the communication skills may not have been sufficiently integrated, overlearned, and/or reinforced in the field. Based on the data from the behavior rating

scale, it cannot be ruled out that the deterioration in responsible behavior may have been an interaction with another unknown variable as only the four students rated by one particular teacher regressed in categories diametrically opposed to the purpose of training.

The results of the study also reflect the inconsistent findings reported in the literature. Olexa and Forman (1984), for instance, studied the effects of social problem solving training on classroom behavior of 32 urban disadvantaged youth. They found that alternative and consequential thinking skills were acquired following eight weeks of training. Learning this skill, however, also seemed to result in an increase in observed aggressive behavior. Almeida and Denham (1984) summarized their findings of an analysis of studies on interpersonal cognitive problem solving with the statement that this kind of education "merely loosens the tongue" (p. 12) of behavior disordered students. This phenomenon was also noted in the aggressive students of the present study.

By contrast, Calsyn and Prost (1983) report positive growth in self-concept scores and behavior after an eight-hour training in affective education designed to improve interpersonal relationships and self-esteem of 25 middle school students. In their encounter with inconclusive and contradictory research findings, they conclude that " . . . it is difficult to explain why some programs

succeed in improving self-esteem while others failed
. . . however, it does seem that programs that were more
intense in terms of either number of contact hours or
integration with the regular school curriculum were more
successful" (p. 60). Their study was not a skills training
as the present study, but a program that focused on both
the interrelatedness with and the unique individuality
of people with emphasis on construction and maintenance
of self-esteem. The fact that the present study could
not be considered "intense" due to comparatively few
contact hours and to non-integration in the regular curriculum
may account for the lack of significant increases in
the students' self concept scores.

Calsyn and Prost's (1983) results are inconsistent
with Coopersmith's (1967) and Rosenberg's (1979) studies.
Their research showed evidence that the general sense
of self-worth tends to remain constant over time and
is only slow to change. Coopersmith (1967) further contended
that assertiveness in children, the confidence in their
own judgment, and actions in social as well as in intellectual
endeavors appear to be a correlate of self-esteem. By
implication, his data would suggest that the higher the
self concept of the child, the more assertive he or she
tends to be. Assuming this kind of reasoning, it would
appear that as the self concept is slow to change the
correlate, assertiveness, too, is slow to change. This

theorizing is also inconsistent with the results of Waksman's (1984) study. His research revealed that short-term training in assertion to improve the self concept of 23 adolescents did result in the desired effect.

The greatest difficulties incurred while conducting the present study were peripheral circumstances surrounding the skills training, not the training itself, although revisions to overcome methodological weaknesses are needed. The students' participation and cooperation after the initial "warming up period" was achieved. Responses to the activities, to the students' opportunity to contribute, and to the advantages gained by the training were positive except for the recurring theme: How to handle teachers, parents, and peers who are sometimes the cause, if not the contributors, to the students' negative attitude toward self and others. As Greenleaf (1982) pointed out, the transference of training is subject to reinforcement outside the laboratory. He contended that the issue of reinforcement "is of particular relevance to the deviant adolescent, as his peer group will often work against prosocial treatment aims by continuing to reinforce the deviant behavior. Essentially, once treatment strategies are terminated, transfer often fails to occur because the intervention does not prepare the person to generalize behavior to new situations and/or there is no incentive to perform the behavior in any situation if reinforcement contingencies are absent" (p. 123). A short-term skills

training is likely to counteract detrimental influences only during the treatment phase, at best. A troubled adolescent, primarily under the control and influence of parents, peers, and school is unlikely to possess the mental maturity, experience, and patience with which to approach a disadvantageous home environment, a negative track record at school and/or the reinforcing impact of peers. A long-term skills training is needed that not only teaches, but also monitors, corrects, and positively reinforces continued efforts to act and speak responsibly. Additionally, under such tutelage, students whose problems are severe could be identified and referred for individual counseling.

Other peripheral limitations of the study were absenteeism and tardiness. Some students missed as many as four of the eleven sessions. Sickness, conflicting work schedules, and expulsion from school in one instance were reasons for non-attendance. The tardiness was in part due to the inherent nature of the study. As the students were removed from their regular classes during the four-week workshop, homework assignments from their respective teachers were obtained immediately before coming to the workshop. The ten-minute allowance for this activity was often extended to 15 minutes, further reducing valuable contact time.

At the conclusion of the workshop, when asked to evaluate the communication skills training, the students

made two recommendations. One was to allow them more
time to speak and the other was incorporation of a skills
training of this kind in the regular curriculum. The
former request would not be possible within a four-week
time span. Careful preparation, monitoring, and guidance
throughout the skills acquisition is essential in learning
these concepts. As the data from the present study suggest,
such supervision is not only imperative during the initial
acquisition phase, but equally essential in the field
where transference of learning is to take place. Without
learning how to speak and behave responsibly, training
of this kind would be counterproductive to the purpose
of this program, and ultimately detrimental to the students.
The latter request would be recommended only if the
methodological weaknesses of the study are corrected,
and if the influence on the regressive effects in the
school-performance and in the increase of the aggressive
behavior for some students have been identified and
controlled.

   Although the results of the present study reflect
the inconsistencies reported in the literature, one argument
cannot be questioned: the need to improve skill deficits
and low self concepts of youngsters displaying dysfunctional
behaviors. Perhaps the state of the art is best described
by Goldstein, Sprafkin, Gershaw and Klein (1980), who
stated that it is not true that nothing works, "on the
contrary, everything works but only for certain youngsters"

(pp. 10-11). For certain youngsters, this communication
skills training appears to have been instrumental in
improving verbal and non-verbal behavior. With more
time and more extensive training, perhaps the self concept
scores, too, will improve.

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