ABSTRACT

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SOCIAL SKILLS INSTRUCTION ON PRO-SOCIAL BEHAVIORS IN AN ELEMENTARY, ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER POPULATION

by Amanda Lotycz & Sarah Seaman

This paper reports on a study that examined the effect of participation in a tier two social skills program and the relationship between language proficiency and social skills acquisition in an ELL (English Language Learner) population. The participants were fourth grade students identified as ELL and who meet the English proficiency standards. This study also included non-ELL fourth grade students who teachers consider “leaders” in the classroom. A related samples, pre-post test research design was employed and results were analyzed via use of nonparametric measures including the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks and Spearman’s Rho tests. This analysis was used to (1) examine the effects of the tier two social skills intervention and (2) explore the relationship between language proficiency and social skills. Results are discussed within the context of best practices in school psychology and interventions for English Language Learners. Study limitations and directions for future research are also included.
THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SOCIAL SKILLS INSTRUCTION ON PRO-SOCIAL BEHAVIORS IN AN ELEMENTARY, ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER POPULATION

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Miami University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Education Specialist
Department of Educational Psychology
by
Amanda L. Lotycz and Sarah M. Seaman
Miami University
Oxford, Ohio
2012
Advisor ____________________________
   Dr. Michael Woodin
Reader____________________________
   Dr. Susan Mosley-Howard
Reader____________________________
   Dr. Doris Bergen
Reader____________________________
   Dr. Geralyn Timler
Table of Contents

Abstract..................................................................................................................

Title Page............................................................................................................

List of Tables .....................................................................................................iii

List of Figures .................................................................................................. iv

Introduction .................................................................................................... 1

Review of Literature.......................................................................................... 4

Design/Methods.............................................................................................. 20
  Subjects ............................................................................................................ 20
  Materials ......................................................................................................... 20
  Procedures ...................................................................................................... 22

Data Analysis .................................................................................................. 25

Results............................................................................................................ 26

Discussion ....................................................................................................... 32

Protection of Human Subjects............................................................................ 38

Timeline.......................................................................................................... 39

References....................................................................................................... 40

Appendices...................................................................................................... 46
List of Tables

Table 1 Statistically Significant Mean Pretest Posttest Rankings of Language Measures…….. 26
Table 2 Pretest Posttest Rankings of Language Measures Not Statistically Significant……… 27
List of Figures

Figure 1. Mean CASL scores of the participants………………………………26
Figure 2. SSIS pre and post test scores. .............................................. 28
Figure 3. Initiating a Conversation..........................................................29
Figure 4. Asking for Clarification.................................................................29
Figure 5. Saying No Assertively.................................................................29
Figure 6. Disagreeing Appropriately..........................................................30
The Effectiveness of Social Skills Instruction
On Pro-Social Behaviors in an Elementary, English Language Learner Population

Challenges facing today’s educators are significant and persistent, especially with the inception of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 and the 2004 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) reauthorization (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 2008; H.R. 1350—108th Congress: Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, 2003). Schools are now under intense pressure to increase students’ academic achievement and to address mental health and behavior problems in their classrooms. One barrier to effective teaching and learning in school is social/emotional problems experienced by students. In March of 2007, Dr. John Desrochers, school psychologist, addressed these barriers at a congressional briefing on school based mental health services. He described this issue in the following words: “Behavioral and mental health issues are the 600-pound gorilla in the middle of our classrooms. They exert tremendous influence on our teachers’ ability to teach and our students’ ability to learn, yet our laws pay relatively little attention to them, Desrochers said (Skalski, 2007, para. 3).” This demonstrates the necessity for mental health advocacy and awareness in the school setting. Failing to examine the context in which academic problems surface is ultimately a disservice to the student.

As mentioned above, the pressure to excel academically to meet No Child Left Behind (NCLB) standards leads many educators to focus their limited resources on academic and cognitive preparedness, and in turn neglect the importance of children’s social-emotional development (Raver, 2002). While it is understandable that educators would focus on academic achievement, research consistently confirms that there is a strong link between academic achievement and the social-emotional-behavioral dimensions of child development (Cartledge & Milburn, 1995; Ogden, Sorlie, & Hagen, 2007). Children are more likely to achieve academically when they have positive self-esteem, the ability to develop positive relationships, and can identify, express, and manage their emotions (Raver, 2002).

One group whose mental health needs have been particularly overlooked is the ELL (English Language Learner) population (Xu et al., 2008; Garcia & Cuellar, 2006; Spomer & Cowen, 2001). Due to a push for students to reach academic standards, little service has been directed to meeting the mental health needs of these students. Addressing mental health needs is an issue for all children, but it is especially critical to this population. For instance, Spomer and
Cowen (2001) asserted that, “School adaptation can pose problems for children learning to speak English as a second language. For ELL children who are also immigrants, the challenges of school adjustment may go beyond those imposed by language deficiencies to include adapting, both in school and other settings, to the culture of the new country and its associated norms, customs, and beliefs (p. 70).” This demonstrates that the unique needs of this population come about as a result of factors related to their particular cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Unfortunately, our schools have not risen to the challenge of meeting the needs of this diverse population, even though it has grown significantly in the past decade (Garcia & Cuellar, 2006). Estimates in 2007 showed that 11 million elementary and secondary students (21% of all students), spoke a language other than English at home (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2010), but the number of practitioners with expertise and background in working with an ELL population is relatively low (Delgado Rivera & Rogers-Adkinson, 1997).

Social competence has been linked to improvements in peer relations, academics, and mental health (Dowd & Tierney, 2005) and is of utmost importance for ensuring successful functioning in school and community environments (Delgado Rivera & Rogers-Adkinson, 1997). ELL students are considered an at-risk population for those with low social competence due to cultural differences in behavior and misinterpretation of such behaviors by those administrators or teachers within the schools. Discrepancy in social behavioral expectations between school and home place these children in a potentially frustrating and conflicting situation. (Delgado Riviera & Rogers-Adkinson, 1997).

Social skills training can be a useful intervention to use with students from specific target populations as well as those who fail to respond to school-wide positive behavior supports (PBS). When developing a social skills program, it is important to take the socio cultural context of the children in the group into consideration. A child’s socio cultural context strongly influences attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviors (Rivera, 1995). Therefore, understanding behaviors within the cultural context will allow practitioners to facilitate more effective relationships with students of diverse backgrounds, and to differentiate between social skill deficiencies and differences.
In general, social skills are made up of abilities that help the student perform social tasks effectively. More specifically, “Social skills are the tools that enable people to communicate, learn, ask questions, ask for help, get their needs met in appropriate ways, get along with others, make friends and develop healthy relationships, protect themselves, and generally be able to interact with anyone and everyone they meet in their journey through life (Dowd & Tierney, 2005, p. 1).” Lack of social skills can place a child at risk for academic, social and relationship problems, and psychopathologies. Without intervention, these deficits can lead to problems in adolescence and adulthood. Therefore, early identification and treatment within the schools is imperative (Elliot et. al, 1995; Delgado Rivera & Rogers-Adkinson, 1997).

Comparatively, there has been a lack of focus on social skills training for language minority students, with much of the emphasis being instead placed on cognitive, language, and academic skills (Li, 1994). It is this paucity of prosocial interventions with this unique population that has led to the development of the current study. This study examines the effect of participation in a prosocial and/or tier two social skills program and examines the relationship between language proficiency and social skills acquisition in an ELL population.
Review of Literature

English Language Learners

Definition.

There are many terms used to describe English Language Learners. Some of the most common terms include: Limited English Proficient (LEP), English Language Learners (ELL), English as a Second Language (ESL), and English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). These terms are often used interchangeably, and refer to a student whose proficiency in English is limited, and does not allow them access to the full benefits of academic instruction (Garcia, Jensen, & Scribner, 2009). The U.S. Department of Education defines ELL students as individuals who were not raised in a dominant English-speaking environment and lack the necessary competence to learn in an English-only environment. To qualify for ELL services a student must have been raised in an environment where English is not the primary language (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006).

Students with limited English proficiency come with diverse histories, traditions and varied educational experiences. The term 'limited English proficient' has been defined in Title IX of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act “as an individual—

A. Who is aged 3 through 21
B. Who is enrolled or preparing to enroll in an elementary school or secondary school
C. (i) who was not born in the United States or whose native language is a language other than English;
   (ii) (I) who is a Native American or Alaska Native, or a native resident of the outlying areas; and
   (II) who comes from an environment where a language other than English has had a significant impact on the individual’s level of English language proficiency;
   or
(iii) who is migratory, whose native language is a language other than English, and who comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant; and
D. whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language may be sufficient to deny the individual -
(i) the ability to meet the State's proficient level of achievement on State assessments described in section 1111(b)(3);
(ii) the ability to successfully achieve in classrooms where the language of instruction is English; or
(iii) the opportunity to participate fully in society (No Child Left Behind Act, Title IX, Section 9101(A), 2001)”

A large number of children from immigrant families are considered English language learners at some point (Garcia, Jensen, & Scribner, 2009). The term 'immigrant children and youth' means individuals who—
“(A) are aged 3 through 21;
(B) were not born in any State; and
(C) have not been attending one or more schools in any one or more States for more than 3 full academic years (No Child Left Behind Act, Title III, Section 3301(C), 2001)”

In the methods section, the authors will later offer their own hybrid definition of the term ELL as it pertains to this study.

**Demographics.**

The U.S. Department of Education estimates that 10% of the K-12 population (over five million) students are designated as ELL (National Clearing House for English Language Acquisition, 2006). Among the races or ethnicities comprising this group, approximately 69% of Hispanics and 64% of Asian elementary and secondary students spoke a language other than English at home (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2010). The largest percentage of children in immigrant families (40%) has origins in Mexico, with those from the Caribbean and East Asia making up 10-11%. In addition, individuals from Central America, South America, Indonesia, and West Asia each constitute 5-7%. Children from immigrant families are the fastest growing population in comparison to other groups of children (Hernandez, Demon, & Macartney, 2008). For example, ELLs in the K-12 setting increased by 95% from 1991-1992 through 2001-2002, whereas total enrollment only increased by 12% (Padolsky, 2004).
Camarota (2001) found that more than 1.2 million legal and illegal immigrants settle in the United States annually. The percentage of immigrants has tripled since 1970; the high percentage of immigrants living in the United States is unmatched when comparing historical trends. As their population grows, so does the number of immigrants without a high school education, and this population accounts for 30% of individuals who are without a high school education (Camartoa, 2001).

Garcia & Cueller (2006) discuss the disproportionate number of immigrants from East and South Asia with high levels of education, and the drastic difference from immigrants of Latin American countries who have little schooling. This shows how diverse the needs of the ELL population are, and gives educators another component to consider. There has been a recent push for research focusing on ELL students from other major ethno-linguistic groups, because the majority of the research in the past has focused on Hispanic populations. Some of the groups suggested for future research and directed attention include those with Vietnamese, Hmong, Cantonese, and Korean backgrounds, because they are the next most populous groups of ELL students (Kindler, 2002).

There has also been research conducted regarding the socio-economic status of the ELL population and immigrants. One study found nearly 25% of children of immigrants live below the poverty line (Suarez-Orozco & Todorova, 2003). Across the United States, 37% of children of immigrants are lacking the resources for food and were more than four times as likely to live in crowded housing conditions than their native born peers (Suarez-Orozco & Todorova, 2003). Students from families without a high level of education have been shown to be more at risk for health concerns, depression, low self esteem, aggression, and underachievement (Canino, Early, & Rogler, 1980).

**Mental Health and ELL**

Spomer and Cowen (2001), in a comparison study between ELL and non-ELL students found that “exposure to a new language, culture, peers, and other school unknowns predispose ELL children to anxious/withdrawn behaviors (p. 72).” Students who exhibit such anxious/withdrawn behaviors may experience problems with acceptance from peers. ELL students have more problems with school adjustment, being shy or anxious, and exhibit more
peer interaction and social skill deficits than their non-ELL peers (Spomer & Cowen, 2001). In addition, children from diverse backgrounds are frequently referred to as over compliant, timid, indecisive, and lacking leadership (Leung, 1990). As a result, many people consider ELL children socially incompetent on a broader context, while overlooking the cultural context of the children, that some of the ELL children’s behaviors may be expected and rewarded in their culture (Cartledge & Milburn, 1995).

Culturally and linguistically diverse students also have higher rates of office referrals, suspensions and expulsions from school (Cartledge et al., 2002). Likewise, language minority students have higher rates of dropout and special education or lower ability group placement than English natives (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000). In particular, Buchanan and Smokowski (2009) conducted a study on how culture factors may affect Latino Adolescents’ mental health, they found that “low acculturation, language difficulties, and lack of a connection to cultural groups may be risk factors for fear of victimization and self-directed violence (p. 740).” Another problem for many Latino ELL students includes acculturation stress. Buchanan & Smokowski (2009) discussed current literature that links acculturation stress and mental health in Latino adolescents, including suicidal ideation, drug use, delinquent behavior, and behavioral problems.

Finally, ELL students who have recently migrated to the United States may experience adjustment problems for a short amount of time. Adjusting and learning rules and expectations of their new culture requires time (Wilen, 2004). Furthermore, some ELL students may have endured traumatic events at a young age such as war, political conflict, separation from family, uprooting, hunger, poverty, or refugee camps that are overpopulated. Research has demonstrated that those exposed to traumatic events are more likely to develop stress disorders (Wilen, 2004). All of these culturally unique factors stress the importance of schools meeting the mental health and social skills needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students.

**ELL socialization barriers.**

Mainstream classrooms reflect the competitive nature in which American society function. Students from cooperative societies (e.g. Hispanic American and Asian American) may find it difficult to adjust to the competitive nature of the classroom (Riviera, 1995). Cooperative societies emphasize family and work group goals, which clashes with the mainstream individualist culture that emphasizes personal achievement at the expense of group goals. Therefore, students from cooperative cultural backgrounds may find it difficult to establish and
pursue individual goals, which the mainstream curriculum stresses (Delgado Rivera & Rogers-Adkinson, 1997).

Research demonstrates that bilingual students may have communication abilities in one language that they have not developed in another (Cobo-Lewis, Pearson, Eilers, & Umbel, 2002), which means that expressive language skills in English may be much lower than in their home language (Yates et al., 2008). Therefore, effective social skills training must consider the expressive language level of the children when seeking to support the child’s adaptation to the school’s social setting.

There are also many other cultural variables that influence the social behaviors displayed by ELL students. One variable is the concept of time. In the mainstream culture an emphasis is placed on promptness and using time efficiently, but different cultural groups hold various views about the use of time that can place a child from a diverse background at a disadvantage (Delgado Rivera & Rogers-Adkinson, 1997). For example, the Hispanic and Latino cultures are generally thought to be more relaxed about time and punctuality. Along the same lines is the difference between present versus futuristic thinking in mainstream and diverse cultures. In school, the mainstream culture stresses the need to master goals for future rewards like college and careers; however, more collectivist cultures stress mastery of each day in the present and children from these cultures may become confused about the purpose of future orientation goals (Delgado Rivera & Rogers-Adkinson, 1997).

ELL students have also been shown to exhibit differences in the use of nonverbal and verbal communication in their social interactions. With nonverbal communication, the mainstream culture maintains distance during conversations unless they are familiar with the other person, but this interaction style varies in other cultures. Hispanic and Latino Americans interact at closer proximities and a lack of close contact during conversations with mainstream adults and peers maybe be interpreted as rejection (Delgado Rivera & Rogers-Adkinson, 1997). On the other hand, Asian Americans prefer less physical contact and more distance during interactions. For instance, hugging, backslapping, or hand shaking in Asian cultures is viewed as disrespectful. With verbal communication, children from Hispanic, Latino, and Asian cultures are at a disadvantage because they are taught to limit their verbal expression towards authority
figures; whereas, the dominant culture, especially in a school setting, emphasizes verbal expression (Delgado Rivera & Rogers-Adkinson, 1997).

The use of eye contact also varies between cultures. The mainstream culture values eye contact and views it as a sign of trustworthiness, sincerity, and directness (Lynch & Hanson, 1992). However, Hispanic and Latino American children avoid eye contact with an authority figure, especially when being scolded and Asian Americans view eye contact with strangers as disrespectful (Harry, 1994; Delgado Rivera & Rogers-Adkinson, 1997). Also, Anglo Americans use a lot of facial expressions when communicating emotions to others, but Hispanic, Latino, and Asian Americans often do not use facial expressions to convey emotions (Lynch & Hanson, 1992). These differences between the mainstream and minority cultures make it even harder for children from diverse backgrounds to succeed academically and socially.

In the Hispanic American culture, children are expected to give unquestioned obedience and respect to parents and authority figures (Rivera, 1995). In this culture, children are raised to display “proper demeanor,” which is expected of a socially competent adult and is used to define who you are as a person and how others will respond to you (Harwood, Miller, and Irizarry, 1995). The skills encompassing “proper demeanor” is a child who is *educado* (well taught, well brought up), *tranquilo* (calm), *obediente* (obedient), and *respetuoso* (respectful) (Delgado Rivera & Rogers-Adkinson, 1997, p. 76).” Proper demeanor in the Hispanic culture is crucial for community acceptance, otherwise it will reflect poorly on the individual and the family as a whole; therefore, Hispanic American children are raised to be well mannered and passive. These children tend to have less conflict with peers, due to the passive style emphasized in their home, but Riviera (1995) suggests that passivity can harm a student who needs assertiveness to function in the classroom because making friends and avoiding victimization both require assertion.

Passivity, obedience, and respect for authority are also traits of Asian Americans (Cartledge & Milburn, 1995). Many researchers found possible explanations for the perceived reticence and passivity of Asian English learners. Research has attributed reticence in the Asian population to be a result of anxiety or fear of making mistakes, possibly stemming from a desire to be right and perfect (Liu & Littlewood, 1997; Jones, 1999). Also, Cortazzi and Jin (1996) found that the Chinese educational system is influenced by Confucianism, which stresses passivity and reticence as indicators of respect for teachers. In general, reticence and passivity in the dominant U.S. school culture inhibit social competence development; therefore, social skills
training should focus on teaching Asian English learners appropriate assertiveness in a school environment while still respecting the Asian culture.

**Social Skills**

Social skills have been defined as specific behaviors that predict important interpersonal outcomes for students. These skills represent a specific set of competencies. The competencies include, “(1) facilitating, initiating, and maintaining positive social relationships, (2) attaining peer acceptance, and developing friendship, (3) achieving satisfactory school adjustment, and (4) coping with and adapting to the demands of the social environment (Gresham, Van, & Cook, 2006, p. 364).” Some typical social tasks students may engage in are participating in a peer group, having a conversation, making friends, and playing a game with peers (Elliott & Gresham, 2007).

Vygotsky (1978) asserted that learning is a constructed social process, and that social interactions are essential for cognitive development. His socio cultural theory suggests that it is imperative to study the social and cultural environment surrounding a child to understand his/her development. In comparison to cognitive or academic behavior, social behavior is more related to culture and the situational context (Li, 1992). Therefore, it is important to be culturally aware in social skills interventions with diverse students.

An individual’s socio cultural context influences the social behaviors they exhibit across settings. Therefore, it is important to consider cultural influences on the child’s behaviors including specific cultural values and beliefs when assessing social skills (Delgado Rivera & Rogers-Adkinson, 1997; Cartledge & Loe, 2001; McGoldrick, Giordano, & Garcia-Preto, 2005). Due to this cultural impact on social skills, some ELL children may be in need of extra help in social settings. Research demonstrates that school environments tend to worsen, rather than help students from diverse backgrounds, indicating further need for remediation (Cartledge & Loe, 2001). Therefore, a social skills intervention for this population should focus on maintaining many of their own significant culturally linked behaviors while aiding in the development of skills to function successfully in the mainstream culture (Delgado Rivera & Rogers-Adkinson, 1997; McGoldrick, Giordano, & Garcia-Preto, 2005).
Benefits of social skills training include improving one’s ability to get along with other people, maintaining self control, learning to regulate emotions, improving academic success, and increasing self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-efficacy (Dowd & Tierney, 2005; McGoldrick, Giordano, & Garcia-Preto, 2005). Development of social skills allows a child the opportunity to generalize and internalize his/her newly learned skills, but also serves as a foundation for further understanding, and for opportunities to learn more advanced social skills that will help the child function in society (Dowd & Tierney, 2005; McGoldrick, Giordano, & Garcia-Preto, 2005). It is important to ensure generalization as Merrell and colleagues (2010) discovered that many social skills training programs are inadequately authentic and do not promote functional transfer of skills outside of the narrow training provided.

According to McGrew’s (1972) “newcomer” hypothesis, the newcomer “tends to be initially inhibited, shy, and fearful on the first day of school (as cited in Li, 1992, p. 68).” In line with this hypothesis, as new immigrant and minority children generally take longer to develop social relationships in school, these relationships are a prerequisite for further social interactions (Leung, 1990). This demonstrates the potential vulnerability of some ELL students and why a pro-social focus in social skills interventions would prove beneficial.

Gresham, Van, & Cook (2006) in a review of the literature, found that a number of students who are “at risk” fail in social relations with three of the most important people in their lives- peers, teacher and parents. The need for ELL students who are at risk to receive adequate social skills training when lacking is necessary for success in the classroom. Gresham et al. (2006) conducted a study that involved intense social skills training in a small group setting with four elementary students who had social skills deficits. In this study the students were given direct social skills instruction involving coaching, modeling, rehearsal of the learned behaviors, and feedback/reinforcement. The high level of intensity for these students compared with peers proved beneficial for these individuals. With three of the four students showing an increase in pro-social behaviors, the results of this study seems promising.

Elliott and Gresham (2007) asked teachers to rate more than eighty social skills on a three-point Likert scale (0=not important, 1=important, 2=critical). The authors found that teachers consistently chose “top 10” social skills across early childhood, early elementary, and middle school as being the most important for classroom success. Those ten social skills included: 1. Listens to others, 2. Follows directions, 3. Follows the rules, 4. Ignores peer
distractions, 5. Asks for help, 6. Takes turns in conversations, 7. Cooperates with others, 8. Controls temper in conflict situations, 9. Acts responsibly when with others, and 10. Shows kindness to others. It’s crucial that students identified as ELL are able to meet these social standards in the classroom for academic success.

**Language proficiency and social skills.**

Children’s social-emotional competence is often linked to language proficiency (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Research has shown that children who do not have a high level of English language proficiency can show delays in social emotional development and difficulties with peer play (Chang et al., 2007; Lee & Walsh, 2003; Tabors, 2008). Furthermore, ELL children’s limited communication abilities can interfere with getting their needs met, which can lead to engaging in more challenging behaviors than their mainstream peers (Crosnoe, 2004; Dawson & Williams, 2008).

Many ELL students go through a cross-cultural adjustment process and language competency is often a resource during this process. Research has documented the positive correlation between language ability and socio cultural adaptation, in which those fluent in the mainstream language experienced fewer social difficulties (Sano, 1990; Ward & Kennedy, 1994). In a study conducted by Felix Neto (2002), the strongest predictor of social adaptation was fluency in the local language and the more language proficient immigrants had less acculturative stress and higher overall self-esteem and life satisfaction.

Possessing strong English oral language skills is vital to the social success of ELL students (Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2005). As oral language proficiency increases, ELL students are more likely to use English and interact and establish friendships with non-ELL peers (Strong, 1983, 1984). These friendships with native, fluent English speakers provide additional opportunities for ELL students to use English and develop more complex learning strategies that allow them to more effectively interact with others (Chesterfield & Chesterfield, 1985). Some complex strategies learned include the ability to monitor their own and others language use, request clarification, and appeal for assistance to maintain and/or repair communication with others (Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2005).
Although much research has shown some linkages between language proficiency and social skills, it is important to verify and extend such research across differing populations and settings. In order to generalize such findings in this area, it has been convincingly argued by others that additional studies are needed (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). To address this need, the current authors propose to examine and analyze the relationship between language, language proficiency, and social competence in a diverse ELL population.

**Consequences of social skill deficits.**

Many researchers have studied the negative consequences that stem from poor social skill development. Marjorie Montague, Craig Enders, and Marcello Castro (2005) did a study examining whether early ratings of behavior would be predictive of later ratings of behavior. Their findings showed that teacher behavioral ratings of primary grade students were predictive of students’ behavioral ratings by middle school teachers. The continuation of problem behaviors into adolescence could have dire consequences such as drop out or school failure (Montague et al., 2005). Furthermore, Gresham, Van, & Cook (2006) described some consequences of students who do not develop the necessary social competencies, including peer rejection, psychological disorders, school drop-out, criminal activity, loneliness, and poor academic performance.

ELL students not only struggle with limited English skills, but also have the mediating influence of a distinct cultural background. These cultural differences may cause conflict in social interactions. Peer acceptance is highly predictive of psychological adjustment both in the present and the future. Social behavior is an important component for peer acceptance as a child (Berk, 1999). Research has shown that children who are popular tend to exhibit sensitivity, friendliness, cooperation, and appropriate levels of assertiveness. In contrast, children who are rejected display numerous negative social behaviors (Garfinkle & Schwartz, 2002; Ivory & McCollum, 1999). This demonstrates the necessity for intervention to ensure students of diverse backgrounds are able to interact appropriately with their peers.

**Inclusion of non-ELL peers.**

This study, as mentioned previously, is a replication and extension study of previous research on social skills interventions (Behrle, 2010; Gebhardt, 2009) conducted in the area of school psychology. The previous studies focused primarily on “at-risk” populations and examined such factors as office referrals, teacher referrals, and antisocial behavior data. Because of our prosocial focus and in order to honor and meet the needs of the unique population to be
studied, the approach of the current study is to integrate non-ELL peers, who are considered “leaders” from teacher referrals, into a fourth grade group. This particular grade level was chosen, because the researchers believed this age group to be appropriate to the cognitive level required for understanding and learning the prosocial skills in the intervention.

The decision to integrate non-ELL students who are considered to be class leaders was made in considering recent push for inclusion of ELL peers in academic settings to benefit not only language acquisition, but also adjustment. (“AYP Handbook,” n.d.). In addition, researchers such as Xu et al. (2008) stress that there is a lack of research examining the social interactions of ELL students with English proficient peers and state that “Educators need an appropriate instructional method in the general education setting to increase and improve the social behaviors of ELL students (p. 618).” It is anticipated that the current study on prosocial inclusion will shed more light on how to effectively implement what the researchers above suggest. Though there has been a plethora of research on the positive effects of peer tutoring on a wide variety students, little research has focused specifically on those from an ELL population (Xu et al., 2008).

Kilman (2009) interviewed a kindergarten ELL teacher, Bessie Alexopolus, a former ELL student herself, who expressed experiencing feelings of value, acceptance, and pride while learning alongside English proficient peers. Barbara Hruska, a teacher in a New England kindergarten, discussed observance of friendship formations in her classroom with Kilman (2009). Hruska found ELL students “name-dropping”, and recruitment of friendships to fall below that of their English proficient peers. She hypothesized that pull-out time away from peers led to some of this difference, as well as lack of play dates scheduled between non-English speaking and English speaking peers. She then asked the question, “How long will students of any age continue to participate in educational settings that do not offer supportive social relationships (Kilman, 2009, p.17)?” The social skills intervention utilized in the present study will allow such co-constructed interactions with ELL and English proficient peers and in the process, will hopefully help to abate this issue with the fourth grade ELL students who participate.
Research identifies the importance of interpersonal interaction for ELL student development. Interactions are essential for success in multiple domains, not simply the classroom. Classroom interactions that are essential for course content are learned simultaneously with those necessary for expression and communication in social relationships (Verplaetse, 2000). The literature describes the effect of interactions on social role development, with increased interaction leading to a higher level of group co-membership (Zuengler, 1993).

Fry and Li (1982) completed a study on enhancement of self-perception and social interaction combining mostly Caucasian peers with Asian immigrant children, grades one to five. The interactions between the ELL and non-ELL students during the 12-week program lead to an increase in peer ratings and a reduction in peer-rejection scores for Asian and Caucasian students in the 3rd-5th grades. In addition, Riviera (1995) found that low-income Hispanic-Americans had limited opportunities for extracurricular activities, a lack of internet access at home, and were likely to live in a homogenous area; therefore, limiting interactions with native English speakers. As researchers we examined the inclusion of non-ELL peers with limited English proficient peers, and whether this leads to an increase in social skill development.

Classroom learning environments have also been shown to impact ELL and non-ELL student engagement. Doherty and Hilberg (2007) reported that ELL students experienced increases in achievement with the use of classroom strategies that included small group collaboration, cooperation, and chances to discuss assignments and work goals with teachers. Since the group researched had opportunities for engagement via the social skills intervention that were utilized, it is anticipated that such inclusion with non-ELL peers will exert beneficial outcomes and impacts upon the target population.

Ellen Riggs, a teacher interviewed in “Lonely Language Learners” stated eloquently, "When so many problems of late seem to be the result of not knowing each other and not listening to one another, the social inclusion of ELL students seems an obvious route to embracing otherness (Kilman, 2009, p.20).” As educators, we have the opportunity to promote unity amongst students and inclusion of English speaking peers with ELL students in this program is a step in that direction.

**Boys Town teaching model and social skills.**

Boys Town is a nonprofit organization that serves children and families throughout the United States. An initiative of this organization is to provide students with the tools needed to
succeed later in life. The Boys Town organization advocates teaching social skills to children because “Social skills hold the key to unlocking the potential for good that every child possesses (Dowd & Tierney, 2005, p. 2).” Therefore, according to the authors, it is important that all children learn these skills.

Boys Town has adopted a self-help model of teaching social skills, where the child is an active participant in their teaching and learning. This method not only teaches the child positive behaviors, but also how to use them in a variety of situations. The goal of this approach is to help children become independent and take control of their lives.

One effective format for teaching social skills is in a group setting. This setting, as opposed to one-to-one counseling, provides an immediate social environment for children to practice their new skills. Bandura (1989) stated that most social learning occurs through observations of others and their resulting consequences. Dowd and Tierney (2005) emphasize that social skills interventions done in the school setting may be an ideal place for generalization of skills learned. Furthermore, Gresham (1995) states that learning prosocial skills in a school environment more immediately prepares students to deal with social and academic challenges.

The Boys Town Model utilizes a specific method for teaching social skills in a group setting. The traditional components and structure of the group teaching format include: “1. Start the group session. 2. Introduce the topic or skill. 3. Define and model the skill. 4. Role-play the target skill. 5. Have youth earn positive consequences (Individual/Group). 6. Give a generalization assignment and prompt (Dowd & Tierney, 2005, p. 40).” Our social skills intervention, titled Blazing Braves, is an adaptation and extension of Boys Town teaching model as published in the book *Teaching Social Skills to Youth* (Dowd & Tierney, 2005). Multiple studies conducted in a variety of settings have implemented the Boys Town Model to teach social skills and have consistently shown positive results (Duppong Hurley & Hyland, 2000; Thompson, Nelson, Spenceri, & Maybank, 1999; Furst & Thompson, 1998; Thompson, Ruma, Nelson, & Criste, 1998).

**RTI and social skills.**

Schools have begun to create and implement interventions aimed at decreasing student problem behaviors and encouraging positive student behaviors. Positive behavior support
provides a continuum of services and addresses problem behavior in a preventative and positive manner in tier one (Sugai & Horner, 2006). The second tier provides additional small-group interventions to students who may be at risk, those who have a specifically targeted need, and those who have not shown progress from the universal supports for all students. The last tier provides more intensive and individualized support, and is for a small percentage of students who have been unresponsive to the behavioral interventions of the first and second tiers.

One solution to combating the negative outcomes for students who go without support in schools is to implement the Positive Behavior Supports (PBS) model within a multi-tier RtI framework. PBS is a problem-solving model focused on creating and sustaining a positive school environment for all by teaching and reinforcing appropriate behaviors (OSEP Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports, 1999). PBS addresses the role of the environment as it applies to behavior problems and offers a range of interventions that are applied to students based on demonstrated need. The PBS approach also promotes academic achievement and social development goals (Sprague & Walker, 2005). Although, RTI is most commonly used to provide academic support, it can be used to provide social behavior supports as well.

Ogden, Sorile, & Hagen (2007) used a positive behavior support program called PALS on an immigrant population in hopes to lower problem behaviors and increase prosocial behavior. In this study, teachers reported that students involved in the PALS program were significantly more socially competent than their counterparts. It is our hypothesis that the Boys Town model, which includes PBS components, will have a positive effect on our ELL population as well.

**Tier 1 definition and description.**

The first tier in RTI consists of universal supports that all students receive within the general education classroom (Simonsen, Sugai, & Negron, 2008). When applying social skills training to the primary tier, general social skills are taught on a school wide basis without specific skills being targeted. This tier’s focus is on developing a positive school climate (Dowd &Tierney, 2005).

Any school-wide behavioral interventions applied to reinforce positive behavior and reduce negative behavior and result in some data collection are considered Tier 1 behavioral interventions (Bender, 2009). Overall, Tier 1 supports are universal, taught to all students in all
settings, and are preventive and proactive. About 80 to 90 percent of students succeed in behaving appropriately with this level of intervention.

**Tier 2 definition and description.**

Once a student has been identified as needing additional support, they are placed in Tier 2, which advocates for evidence-based interventions requiring minimal time and resources, as well as progress monitoring of students in those interventions (Glover & Vaughn, 2010; Clark & Alvarez, 2010; Bender, 2009; Johnson, Smith, & Harris, 2009). These interventions are targeted to a small group of students that did not respond successfully to the universal interventions. Secondary interventions are more specific in their goal of helping youth, with emphasis on a specific set of skills such as self-control or problem solving (Dowd & Tierney, 2005). It is estimated that about 15 percent of a school’s population requires Tier 2 services.

**Tier 3 definition and description.**

Tertiary interventions are detailed and individually targeted to the 1 to 5 percent of all students whose behavioral problems are so intense that neither Tier 1 or 2 interventions can correct them (Bender, 2009; Fairbanks et al., 2007; Kemp & Eaton, 2007; Simonsen, Sugai, & Negron, 2008). To be classified as a Tier 3 behavioral intervention, it must be research-based, targeted for a specific child, and the results of the intervention should be able to be monitored through daily assessment for specific behaviors (Bender & Shores, 2007).

These interventions typically involve a functional behavior assessment (FBA) that measures and documents a problem behavior’s antecedents and consequences. The goal of an FBA is to determine how that behavior functions to provide emotional support for the child (Eber et al., 2008; Fairbanks et al., 2008). Once the function of the behavior has been determined, teachers can develop an intervention to produce the desired behavioral consequences.

Typically, to implement these interventions correctly, a lot of time and resources must be spent, which schools do not often have. Therefore, it is imperative that schools catch the students at-risk for behavioral disorders early and spend their time and resources on universal prevention programs and targeted group intervention programs.
Another purpose of this study is to add to the current knowledge of effective social skills interventions and techniques by replicating and extending previous studies (Behrle, 2010; Gebhardt, 2009) through a targeted focus upon an ELL youth population. The social skills program used in this research has been carried out in a small sample of students from a limited population and an urban, primarily African American, population. Replicating the intervention in the research with an ELL population will add to the generalizability of the Boys Town Model as an effective social skills intervention. The resulting information will also add to the current ELL literature on social skills, which is limited in nature.

**Research Question**

The present study was designed to address the question of whether participation in a social skills training program will increase measures of prosocial behavior in a targeted group of ELL students. To address this question, this research measured the effect of a social skills program, Blazing Braves, on prosocial skills in an ELL population. Our first hypothesis was that the social learning facilitated by a hybrid application of the original Boys Town model will reduce the risk factors impacting ELL students, and will contribute to their development of social competence. The second hypothesis was that the inclusion of English proficient peers will serve to facilitate and increase prosocial development, and thus there will be a positive relationship between students progression in language skills and the development of prosocial skills.
Methods

Subjects

This study consisted of participants from the fourth grade from a rural elementary school located in a Midwestern city. Staff nominations based upon established criteria resulted in identification of five ELL students and four English proficient peer models. Criterion for participation as an ELL required that English was not the students’ primary language and that the student met the English proficiency standards. English proficiency standards are determined by the school’s ESL coordinator, which is based on the students’ OTELA (Ohio Test of English Language Acquisition) scores. Peer models were selected from teacher referrals for students who are deemed “leaders” in the classroom. Parental consent (Appendix A & B) and child assent (Appendix C) was obtained for each participant before they participated in the study. One parental consent form was for the parents of the fourth grade ELL students (Appendix A) and another for the parents of the peer models (Appendix B).

Materials

The researchers used the Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS) to measure social skills outcomes of the program. The SSIS Rating Scales (SSIS-RS) is a multi-rater (teacher, parent/caregiver, and student) assessment that documents the frequency of social skills and competing problem behaviors in individuals and small groups (Gresham & Elliott, 2008). The SSIS-RS can be used in children and adolescents ages 3-18 years old, but teacher and parent forms can also be added for a more comprehensive assessment of skills across setting. This test measures social skills, problem behaviors, and academic competence; however, the researchers only used the social skills domain, which contains only 46-items. The items on the social skills domain measure a variety of skills, such as communication, cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, engagement, and self-control. Students are expected to circle the response that describes how true the statement is to them. The items are based on a 4-point Likert scale. The responses range from “not true” or “N” to “very true” or “V.” The value 0 is assigned to “N” while the value 3 is assigned to “V.” A lower score is associated with a social skills performance or acquisition deficit. The Total Social Skills domain has high levels of internal consistency, Teacher = .93-.94, Parent = .87-.90, and Student = .83 (Yates et al., 2008),
and high levels of reliability: split-half estimates from .62-.68 and test-retest estimates from .81-.84 (Gresham et al., 2010). Although participation in the study required that ELL students have adequate language proficiency, we read the questions aloud to the students and offered an opportunity for clarifications to ensure there were no misunderstandings as per the recommendation of those serving on the present authors’ thesis committee. The students’ teacher also filled out a survey before and after the intervention.

The Comprehensive Assessment of Spoken Language (CASL) was used to measure the students’ overall language proficiency before and after the program. The CASL is a norm-referenced, comprehensive assessment of an individual's oral language skills (Carrow-Woolfolk, 1999). Data obtained from the CASL “is useful in determining the English language competence of students who are learning English as a second language (Carrow-Woolfolk, 1999 p. 3).” The CASL can be used for children and young adults aged 3-21 years and takes between 45-60 minutes to administer. This battery of 15 tests measure comprehension, expression, and retrieval in four language categories: lexical/semantic, syntactic, supralinguistic, and pragmatic (Carrow-Woolfolk, 1999). The CASL is divided into Core and Supplementary tests, where the Core tests measure the most representative aspects of each language category for each of the six age bands and the Supplementary tests provide additional information for various analyses (Carrow-Woolfolk, 1999). The age band used in this study is 7-10, with Antonyms, Syntax Construction, Paragraph Comprehension, Nonliteral Language, and Pragmatic Judgment making up the Core tests for that band. A Core Composite score was calculated from the administration of the five Core tests. A composite Syntactic, Receptive, and Expressive Processing Index score was also aggregated for the purposes of this study. The Syntactic Processing Index is comprised of the Syntax Construction, Grammatical Morphemes, and Grammaticality Judgment tests. The Receptive Processing Index is comprised of the Synonyms and Paragraph Comprehension tests and the Expressive Processing Index is comprised of the Antonyms, Syntax Construction, Grammatical Morphemes, and Grammaticality Judgment tests. The following statistics are reported for the 7-10 age band. The CASL has high levels of internal reliability for all 15 tests (.76-.94), the Core Composite (.95-.96), the Receptive Processing Index (.85-.90), and the Expressive Processing Index (.95-.96) (Carrow-Woolfolk, 1999). This battery also has high levels of test-retest reliability for the five Core tests (.74-.95), the Core Composite (.93), the
Syntactic Processing Index (.91), Receptive Processing Index (.90), and the Expressive Processing Index (.94) (Carrow-Woolfolk, 1999).

A daily behavior report card (DBRC) was used as a second assessment of social skills outcomes as well as an intervention support. The DBRC is a monitoring and/or intervention method for behavioral assessment in which a specified behavior is rated daily and that information is shared with at least one other person (Chafouleas, Riley-Tillman, & McDougal, 2002). DBRC’s are a simple and inexpensive method of providing frequent feedback to students and parents. Furthermore, DBRC’s are flexible in nature and can vary according to the behavior to be rated, type of rating system, rating frequency, rater, target of rating, frequency with which information is shared with another person, consequence utilized, and setting of delivery of the consequence (Chafouleas, Riley-Tillman, & McDougal, 2002). The researchers used a DBRC to rate behavior using a daily checklist filled out by the teacher and student with a small-group focus (Appendices F-I). The information collected from the DBRCs was shared with the researchers on a weekly basis and positive and negative reinforcement was delivered weekly in the school setting. DBRC’s have high levels of inter-rater reliability, with estimates from .78-.90 (Schumaker, Hovell, & Sherman, 1977).

In addition, as a qualitative measure, the researchers asked a series of questions pertaining to the students’ perceived acquisition of skills and overall enjoyment. The questions included: (1) What did you like about the Blazing Braves program? (2) What did you dislike about the Blazing Brave program? (3) Do you think you’re a better leader because of the program? Why or why not? (4) Would you participate in the Blazing Braves program again? Researchers also will observe students informally throughout the duration of the program.

**Procedure**

After consent was received, baseline data was collected using the SSIS subtests and the CASL. The study was implemented using a pretest posttest design. Three phases occurred throughout the treatment process: (1) Social skills training; (2) Role play; and (3) A debriefing session to evaluate prosocial skills learned and to provide the opportunity for students to grant awards to fellow Blazing Brave members. The program lasted for five weeks, with the first week
used for rapport building, and the last four weeks as the treatment phase. Each session lasted for 50 minutes.

After speaking to multiple teachers, the ESL coordinator, and the administrator at the school it was determined that there was limited availability for the intervention. This time constraint was due to the students’ receiving intervention during class, ESL pull out services, and after school tutoring commitments. Given their schedule and school constraints, it was determined that recess was the optimum time available for the intervention. Students received social skills training during their lunch and recess periods on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays for approximately fifty minutes during the treatment phase.

Baseline.

The groups’ baseline data was collected. The pretest scores on the SSIS (from both teacher and student) and the CASL (student) were determined at this time. Baseline data was not collected for non-ELL peers. No aspects of the Blazing Braves program were implemented during this time.

Blazing Braves.

During the first component of the Blazing Braves program the researchers taught the children four social skills using a method published by Boys Town titled, “Teaching Social Skills to Youth” (Dowd & Tierney, 2005). The four social skills taught were: (1) Initiating a conversation; (2) Asking for clarification; (3) Disagreeing appropriately; and (4) Saying “No” assertively. The Boys Town model of teaching social skills is where the direct instruction component comes from in this program. Research favors direct instructional approaches for culturally and linguistically diverse groups (Cartledge & Loe, 2001).

Praise and feedback for being in the program was given at the beginning and throughout the duration of the program. Praise is a very important part of the intervention; the students chosen for the program may not receive praise in the school frequently due to their language and culture barriers. Each skill (one of the four) was taught separately. The skill was explained to the children and described how it could be used in a variety of settings and situations. The students were given multiple opportunities to practice the skill and received feedback and reinforcement. Reinforcement was provided in the form of “Blazing Bucks,” which were fake dollars the students received for displaying a skill that they could turn in for game time at the end of a session if they collectively had 5 total bucks. Once the students demonstrated knowledge and
understanding of the new skill they practiced skits exhibiting their new skill. Later, the students performed these skits for other members of the group. Both groups of students tracked their behavior using Daily Behavior Report Cards during this phase of the program, teacher’s rated ELL students’ behavior using the same scale. During the final component of the Blazing Braves program, participants received a debriefing regarding the skills learned and awarded their fellow members for putting their newly learned prosocial skills into practice.

**Post test.**

After the program ended, students returned to their original routine and the social skills training was discontinued. The effectiveness of the Blazing Braves program was evaluated by examining students’ post-test scores on the SSIS (teacher ratings and student ratings) and daily report card ratings (teacher and student). Language proficiency scores from the CASL were also analyzed in comparison to social skills development.

**Treatment integrity.**

Two treatment integrity measures were included to ensure proper implementation of the program. The first is a checklist of the steps necessary to complete the Boys Town social skills training (see Appendix D). The second is a checklist of the steps for the classroom skits (see Appendix E).
**Data Analysis**

Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS. Because of the small sample sizes attained for this seminal study, a nonparametric statistical analysis was chosen. The Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test was used to examine the related sample effects this intervention had on the students’ prosocial skills. Individual results were also graphically recorded using the dependent variables, daily report card and SSIS data for the three phases of the current study: pretest, progress monitoring, and posttest. Visual analysis of the data points was used to interpret the intervention effects by examining the differences in the trend and level of the data points between phases. If changes did occur when the intervention is introduced, and these changes continue to follow the same trend throughout the program, it can be reasonably assumed that the changes were due to the independent variable.

A one-group pretest-posttest design was also used to examine the correlation between language proficiency and social skills. The Spearman’s Rho test was conducted to examine the relationship between the variables. The data was graphically recorded using the dependent variables, SSIS data and CASL. Visual analysis of the data points was used to interpret the correlation strength by examining the differences in the trend and level of the data points between phases. If a strong correlation is depicted and this strength continues to follow the same trend throughout the school year, it can be reasonably assumed that language proficiency and social skills are highly correlated.
Results

Hypothesis 1:

Below are results from the first research question that was analyzed. It was hypothesized that there would be a positive relationship between the student’s progression in language skills and the development of prosocial skills.

A Spearman’s Rank Order correlation was run to determine the relationship between the change in CASL scores and the change in SSIS self-rated scores. There was a moderate, negative correlation between the change in language skills and the change in social skills, which was not statistically significant ($r_s(3) = -0.564, P=0.322$).

**Figure 1. Mean CASL scores of the participants.**

![Graph showing mean CASL scores for pre and post intervention.]

**Table 1**

*Statistically Significant Mean Pretest Posttest Rankings of Language Measures*

Also, a Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test was conducted to offer a fine-grained analysis of the difference between overall language skills scores, the syntactic processing index, the receptive processing index scores, the expressive processing index scores, the nonliteral language subtest, and the pragmatic language subtest scores before and after the social skills intervention. This
supplemental analysis indicated a statistically significant change in overall language skills scores, syntactic processing index scores, and expressive processing index scores for ELL students (Z= -2.032, P= .042). Indeed, the mean ratings in the areas of overall language skills, syntactic processing, and expressive processing were very similar across pre and posttests (see Table 1). These findings indicate that the students' overall language skills, syntactic processing skills, and expressive processing skills following the intervention were significantly greater than before the intervention.

Table 2  
Pretest Posttest Rankings of Language Measures Not Statistically Significant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean Ranking</th>
<th>Pretest</th>
<th>Posttest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Receptive Processing</td>
<td>91.20</td>
<td>99.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonliteral Language</td>
<td>88.80</td>
<td>98.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pragmatic Language</td>
<td>97.00</td>
<td>101.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Even though the aforementioned language areas showed robust improvement, the present analysis did not indicate a statistically significant change in the receptive processing index scores (Z= -1.761, P= .078), nonliteral subtest scores (Z= -1.483, P= .138), and pragmatic subtest scores (Z= -.813, P= .416) for ELL students. Although analysis of the data determined there was no significant change in receptive processing, nonliteral, and pragmatic language skills for the students, the mean ratings on these CASL measures showed an increase in language skills after the social skills intervention (see Figure 1). The mean ratings for receptive processing, nonliteral language, and pragmatic language ratings were very similar when examining pre and posttest data (see Table 2).  

Hypothesis 2:
The results of the second question are below. It was hypothesized that social learning would be facilitated by a hybrid application of the Boys Town model, and would reduce the risk factors impacting ELL students, thereby contributing to their development of social competence.

Overall, two out of five students reported that they had an increase in prosocial skills (40% had an increase in social skills, 40% had a decrease, and 20% had no change). In addition, two out of five teachers reported an increase in students’ prosocial skills (40% reported an increase, and 60% reported a decrease).

**Figure 2. SSIS pre and post test scores.**

A Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test showed that an 8 week prosocial skills intervention did not elicit a statistically significant change in social skills on the ELL students’ self report (Z=0.00, P=1.00). Indeed, the mean social skills rating was 111.40 before treatment and 107.00 after treatment. Rankings indicated that two of the pre-post comparisons were positive, two negative, and one remained unchanged from pre to posttest.

A Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test also showed that the prosocial skills intervention did not show a statistically significant change in social skills on the teachers’ questionnaire (Z=0.00, P=1.00). The mean social skills rating was 142.20 before intervention and 142.40 after the
intervention (see Figure 2). Rankings indicated that two of the pre-post comparisons were positive, and three were negative. Thus we accept the null hypothesis that students’ prosocial skills will not increase with the application of a hybrid Boy’s Town model.

**Figure 3. Initiating a conversation**

![Graph showing student data for initiating conversations](image)

**Figure 4. Asking for clarification.**

![Graph showing student data for asking for clarification](image)
Student progress monitoring data displayed an upward trend in the first two areas: (1) Initiating a Conversation, and (2) Asking for Clarification; whereas, the last two, (3) Saying no Assertively and (4) Disagreeing Appropriately, did not (see Figures 3-6).

Teacher progress monitoring data brought the validity and reliability of results into question due to data missing, untimely recording of behaviors, and blatant inaccurate scoring. Due to this, the results from the teacher’s progress monitoring were considered to have been invalidated. Likewise, posttest data from teacher’s SSIS rating scales is similarly impacted.
The series of qualitative questions, however, shed light on some of the benefits that the prosocial intervention had on the students that participated. All students, including their English-speaking peers said that they enjoyed the program. One ELL student stated that he liked the program for the “Friendship and working together.” Another English Language Learner said that she enjoyed, “the activities and skills.” Eight of the nine students felt that the program had helped them become a better Leader. The student who said he didn’t become a better leader stated, “No, because I didn’t do everything.” Some of the other comments included: “I learned skills that will help me a lot!” “They taught me new leadership skills and I improved on them.” The only dislike of the program was that it took place during recess.
Discussion

Hypothesis 1: Summary of results

This study yielded a number of important findings, cautions, and procedural implications in doing prosocial skills research with ELL populations in the schools. Ultimately, the data collected for the present study showed no statistically significant relationship between language and social skills. Therefore, the increase in language skills exhibited after the intervention could not fully explained by the social skills intervention itself. This could be due to limitations regarding the social skills measure used. In addition, the social skills intervention used was shown to lack statistical significance for teaching the students prosocial skills. Overall, the data did not support the hypothesis that an increase in social skills would relate to an increase in language skills. A fine-grained analysis of the findings attained points to the possibility that there were procedural flaws with regard to student ascertainment, scheduling, and flaws within the instruments used to assess the students.

While the data did not support a significant relationship between the intervention and increased language skills, there were indeed a number of significant increases found within many of the students’ componential language skills. For instance, the mean score from each of the CASL measures used did increase. While not all of the increases were significant, it can be stated that language did show a general trend of positive development across many areas of skill. In addition to the intervention used for this study, there are many plausible factors that could have contributed to the positive increase. One factor is that these students were in school for an additional three months in between their pre and posttest measures. Those three months provided the students with an English language-rich environment five days a week, which could have a large impact on their skill development, especially with syntactic processing. The mean score for syntactic processing, a skill taught in school, increased 5.4 points, which further lends credence to the idea that exposure to three more months of school could be one factor leading to the increase in language skills. In contrast, the mean score for the nonliteral language subtest displayed the largest increase (9.6 points). Nonliteral language is a skill that the majority of English Language Learners would likely struggle with, because this skill requires an implicit understanding of the English language (Palmer, Shackelford, Mille, & Leclere, 2006). One way
to grasp an understanding of nonliteral language is through social interaction, especially with
native language peer models (Goldenberg, 1992; Perez, 1996). Although there was not a
significant relationship between social skills and language skills in this study, this intervention
could have had some effect on the students’ increase in nonliteral language skills. The
intervention was steeped in social activities, with students developing and acting out role plays
together. The students also spent at least ten minutes each intervention period playing games
with each other, which could affect the development of nonliteral language skills.

Limitations

One flaw that may have been inherent in the use of the CASL is that it is relatively
outdated (copyrighted in 1999) and was not normed on an ELL population. Therefore, the scores
attained from this measure may be limited in terms of generalizability, currency, and the
interpretations made. For this study, the pretest and posttest scores derived from the CASL were
only analyzed in terms of how well this group did after the intervention as compared to before
the intervention. The scores were not compared to any general population norms. In the future,
it is recommended that a measure either be intentionally created for such groups and/or that a
more current measure be used that has included ELL groups within the norming sample or as a
special populations sample. Only then can valid comparisons to published norms be made.

Hypothesis 2: Summary of results

Student’s progress monitoring data showed a positive trend in both Initiating a
Conversation and Asking for clarification. As the literature indicates, student from culturally and
linguistically diverse backgrounds often struggle with assertive (Riviera, 1995; Cartledge &
Milburn, 1995). Students’ perceiving a higher frequency in the use of these skills throughout the
program indicates a huge success for the researchers.

In addition, students were asked a series of qualitative questions during our final session
to receive additional feedback regarding the prosocial skills intervention. The findings of the
qualitative data indicate that the net effect of such an intervention may not be as readily or easily
captured by using traditional, norm-referenced measures and surveys. Instead, it may be advised
that qualitative research methods of inquiry may yield more substantial or appropriate results.
This is especially true with the population used, as research has shown this population to be
reticent, and this is a difficult variable to decipher through.
Pre and posttest analyses were not found to be significant for student SSIS rating scale scores on the social skills subtest. There are numerous, viable reasons to explain these findings. The first has to do with the impact of having to complete assessments during an otherwise favorable and desired activity. Unfortunately, the present study suffered from some procedural limitations due to the time that was dedicated to the intervention. The students studied were already pulled from the general curriculum for language support and after-school tutoring programs. As such, the only period left for engagement with the social skills intervention was during recess. Qualitatively, many of the students became somewhat disinterested when they had to complete the necessary assessments. Certainly, as indicated by Anastasi (1988), some students may rush through a test in order to go back to a more desirable activity, and since students were asked to miss recess for the assessment this may be especially true. If possible, future studies should avoid the use of recess time for assessment activity.

During the implementation of the program, the researchers noted a variety of observations. In one observation, the researchers noted that all of the non-ELL peers sat at one table with all of the ELL-peers at another. At the next session, folders were laid out at tables designating new seating for the students (mixing the two groups) this format was used for a one-week period. After this initial week, the researchers no longer assigned seating for the peers, and yet the students no longer segregated between the two groups. In fact, on numerous occasions one of the non-ELL peers saved a seat for his new friend (an English Language Learner). Researchers also overheard one of the ELL peers inviting a non-ELL peer to stay the night that upcoming weekend. It was encouraging to see these relationships form. This will only help further the skills taught in our program, as the students now have established friendships with students who were already skilled at exhibiting these prosocial behaviors. These observations are especially positive given our findings in the literature review on the importance of peer relations.

**Limitations**

While both pre and posttests were given during recess, students’ initial meeting with the examiner was during the pretest. The posttest was subsequently administered by the same examiner after she had spent approximately 15 or more hours with the students in a small group.
setting. Difference in communication patterns between ethnic groups (self-disclosure, personal restraint, views of appropriate behaviors) may have had a greater impact on the initial meeting, as students had not yet developed a relationship with the examiner (delCarmen, 1990).

Another issue to consider in this analysis is the degree to which a subject is familiar or unfamiliar with the examinee. Fuchs & Fuchs (1986) found that rapport can have a significant effect on test performance and this is even more evident in socioeconomically disadvantaged groups. It is plausible that students gave themselves higher ratings for social desirability (audience or social facilitation effect) at the initial meeting, but then were able to give a more accurate reflection once a relationship was developed with the examinee. “Examiner unfamiliarity engenders anxiety in examinees…examiner familiarity is presumed to vitiate examinees’ anxiety (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1986, p.256).” Familiarity with the examiner, and the thesis committee’s pre-implementation suggestion to read the questions to the students may have impacted the reliability of the pre and posttest data for the student’s rating systems (The SSIS allows for this accommodation for individuals with reading difficulties). Therefore, this pattern of concerns may have had the effect of eliminating the opportunity for a private and more accurate self-assessment. Future researchers should consider making the process much more consistent by either having individuals who are already familiar with the student (teacher) administer both the pre and post test, or have someone who they are unfamiliar with administer both tests independent of their participation in the social skills intervention. In short, those who conduct the intervention should not be used to conduct primary assessments or a significant administration bias may result.

Another concern that has come out of the present study is that involving the use of the student form of the SSIS. To be sure, Gresham and Elliot (2008) reported that, “Subtest test-retest reliability coefficients range from 0.59-0.81 (p.68).” These values are lower that reported for the Teacher and Parent forms of the measure, and suggest that students may have a pattern of lower consistency as it pertains to reliability (Gresham & Elliot, 2008). While the present researchers were indeed aware of this finding prior to beginning the study, the hope was that the teacher data would help validate scores. While this was indeed the hope of the researchers, the actual circumstances surrounding teacher compliance and acceptance of the treatment protocol and assessments were not favorable. Even though teachers consented to participate in the study and were made aware of their role and responsibilities, it so happened that throughout the study,
teachers failed to complete assessments, did so in a very cursory manner, and/or shared reservations about students being removed from their classrooms. As such, due to difficulty with teacher acceptance and participation, the ability to use teacher ratings to bolster or further validate student derived scores was not feasible. Future researchers should seek to conduct the study at a time when students do not need to be taken out of class, especially if they are already being pulled for supplementary instruction and/or alternative programming. In addition, alternate means of collecting teacher-based data might be sought.

An additional limitation of the study is the fact that there were no students in the SSIS normative sample who were categorized as ELL or ESL under the Educational Classification sample. This brings into question the validity of the instrument used. Due to the paucity of research on social skills with this diverse group there is a need to utilize instruments that include this subgroup to ensure valid findings.

The variance in student progress monitoring data was likely due to a lack of opportunity to put the last two skills into practice (Saying no assertively and disagreeing appropriately). Many students either had missing data or “Not Applicable” selected on multiple days because they never had the opportunity to practice the skill. Future researchers should consider ways to increase the number of opportunities for practicing or exhibiting this behavior, and should consider focusing on everyday skills that can be monitored in higher frequency when selecting areas to target for research.

**Future research and conclusions**

The current study should be replicated with the limitations taken into account in order to offer additional prosocial integration opportunities for English Language Learners. These considerations may serve as a general starting point, and could benefit future researchers in their consideration of curriculums and assessments for this population, especially in light of the growing ELL population in the United States. The authors main goal for this study was to try to find new and improved ways of supporting ELL students to learn and develop prosocial skills. While there were many complications with the data collection process, the overall effect of the program (based on qualitative findings and progress monitoring) was a positive one. The
opportunity for integration with positive peer models, and friendships formed as a result was a hallmark and strong indicator of the functional success of the program.
Protection of Human Subjects

Approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was received before beginning the recruitment of participants and data collection activities. Consent and assent were obtained from parents of the children and the children involved before beginning this study. These forms were kept separately from other documents. No deception was used with the participants of the study, and no harm to the participants was anticipated. Confidentiality of the participants’ names and information were maintained throughout the study. A qualitative report was given to the participants’ parents, but no quantitative test results were shared. Finally, there was no penalty for opting out of the program and the participants were free to end participation at any time without adverse effects.
### Timeline of the Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Projected Completion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Submit Proposal to IRB</td>
<td>September 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Propose Thesis to Committee</td>
<td>October 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revise/Resubmit Proposal to Committee/IRB</td>
<td>October 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruit School to Participate in Program</td>
<td>August 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>November 2010 - March 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>April 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thesis First Draft submitted to Committee</td>
<td>April 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Draft submitted and defended</td>
<td>May 2011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


Appendix A: Parent/Guardian Consent Form for fourth grade ELL students

October 11, 2010
Dear Parent(s):

Our school is working on a project with Miami University school psychology students to promote the development of leadership and social skills in students with limited English proficiency.

Attached to this letter is a description of the project. Please read this form carefully, and ask me any questions you might have. If you would like your child to participate, please sign the consent form and ask your child to sign it as well. Participation in this study is completely voluntary (that is, you and your child do not have to participate if you do not want to participate). Your child will continue to receive the same services from me even if he/she does not participate in this study.

Thank you for supporting our efforts to make a positive impact on all children in our school.

Sincerely,

______________________________

Linda Bucher
English as a Second Language Instructor
(513) 273-3541
400 W. Sycamore St.
Oxford, OH 45056
PARENT CONSENT FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPATION

Purpose: Your child is invited to participate in a study that will help facilitate leadership and social skills development. The group will involve a mixture of ELL and English proficient peers. By teaching these students new skills, the program will empower them to recognize and encourage the use of positive social skills in all domains, not simply school.

Procedure: Your child will be asked to participate in the program during the school day for approximately 45 minutes a day (during lunch and recess). Before beginning the program your child will be assessed using a social skills and language proficiency measure. These measures will also be used after the program has ended. We will meet for a total of 15 days over a period of five weeks. For the five weeks, your child will have the opportunity to participate in a prosocial skills training program called the Blazing Braves. As a “Blazing Brave,” your child will be taught several social skills which are vital to success in school settings. The “Blazing Braves” will have the chance to demonstrate their new skills to other children by performing skits about social skills to other classrooms and issue “Award” certificates to fellow Brave members. The tutor will rate your child’s behavior each day over the course of the study. We will be collecting this data for about two months. The findings will be shared with other teachers, but no child’s names will be used. All information will be coded so that no one except your child’s teacher will know who participated. Your child’s name will not be placed on any material or records. Once the program is over, a summary on your child’s performance will be sent to you.

Parent’s Rights: Your agreement to allow your child to participate in this project is voluntary. You have the right to refuse participation, or withdraw your child from this study at any time. You may withdraw by contacting the child’s teacher or either contact person listed below. The project director and the primary investigators are also available to answer any questions and to make certain that you understood the program. You may also contact the Office for the Advancement of Research and Scholarship via phone (513-529-3600) or email (humansubjects@muohio.edu) for questions about the subject’s right.

Project Director: Michael Woodin, PhD
Primary Investigator: Sarah Seaman, MS
Primary Investigator: Amanda Lotycz, MS
Dept of Educational Psych: Miami University
Miami University: Oxford, OH 45056
513-529-6635: woodinmf@muohio.edu

I HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE PURPOSE OF THIS PROJECT, THE PROCEDURES INVOLVED, AND MY RIGHTS. I AGREE TO ALLOW MY CHILD TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROJECT.

Parent’s Signature ____________________________________________ Date _____________

At this time I choose to not have my child participate in this project ________ (Please initial)

Please take the time to answer two questions that will benefit the researchers’ study.

What primary language(s) are spoken at home? ___________________ 
How long have you been in the United States? ___________________
Appendix B: Parent/Guardian Consent Form for 4th Grade English Proficient Peers

October 11, 2010
Dear Parent(s):

Our school is working on a project with Miami University school psychology students to promote the development of leadership and social skills in students with limited English proficiency. Your child has been selected to be an English proficient “peer model” for this group. This is a wonderful opportunity for your child to serve as a role model to his/her peers, and to learn/reinforce essential leadership and social skills.

Attached to this letter is a description of the project. Please read this form carefully, and ask me any questions you might have. If you would like your child to participate, please sign the consent form and ask your child to sign it as well. Participation in this study is completely voluntary (that is, you and your child do not have to participate if you do not want to participate).

Thank you for supporting our efforts to make a positive impact on all children in our school.

Sincerely,

______________________________

Linda Bucher
English as a Second Language Instructor
(513) 273-3541
400 W. Sycamore St.
Oxford, OH 45056
Purpose: Your child is invited to participate in a study that will help facilitate leadership and social skills development. By teaching these students new skills, the program will empower them to recognize and encourage the use of positive social skills in all domains, not simply school.

Procedure: Your child will be asked to participate in the program during the school day for approximately 45 minutes a day (during lunch and recess). We will meet for a total of 15 days over a period of five weeks. For the five weeks, your child will have the opportunity to participate in a prosocial skills training program called the Blazing Braves. As a “Blazing Brave,” your child will be taught several social skills which are vital to success in school settings. The “Blazing Braves” will have the chance to demonstrate their new skills to other children by performing skits about social skills to other classrooms and issue “Award” certificates to fellow Brave members.

Parent’s Rights: Your agreement to allow your child to participate in this project is voluntary. You have the right to refuse participation, or withdraw your child from this study at any time. You may withdraw by contacting the child’s teacher or either contact person listed below. The project director and the primary investigators are also available to answer any questions and to make certain that you understood the program. You may also contact the Office for the Advancement of Research and Scholarship via phone (513-529-3600) or email (humansubjects@muohio.edu) for questions about the subject’s right.

I HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE PURPOSE OF THIS PROJECT, THE PROCEDURES INVOLVED, AND MY RIGHTS. I AGREE TO ALLOW MY CHILD TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROJECT.

Parent’s Signature ___________________________ Date ___________________________

At this time I choose to not have my child participate in this project ________ (Please initial)
Appendix C: Student Assent Form

We are doing a study to learn about how much students like participating in the Blazing Braves Program. In the Blazing Braves Program you will learn several skills you can use in the classroom and on the playground. We would really like your help and we hope you will enjoy the program.

If you agree to be in our study we will ask you to join us in a small group, during lunch and recess, to learn some skills that can help you as a student. We will ask you to participate in our group sessions for 45 minutes for 15 days.

You can ask questions about this study at any time. If you decide at any time not to finish, you can ask us to stop.

If you sign this paper, it means that you have read this and that you want to be in the study. If you don’t want to be in the study, don’t sign this paper. Being in the study is up to you, and no one will be upset if you don’t sign this paper or if you change your mind later.

Your signature: _____________________________________________ Date _____________
Your printed name: _____________________________________________ Date _____________
Appendix D: Checklist for Social Skills Training - Boys Town Program

Blazing Brave (student) Name: _________________________
Teacher Name: _______________________
Blazing Chief (social skill trainer) Name: _____________________
Social Skill: ___________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill Step</th>
<th>Blazing Chief completion check</th>
<th>Teacher completion check</th>
<th>Blazing Officer completion check</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Give initial praise.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Identify the skill and give examples.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Describe the appropriate behavior (give the skill steps).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 1 _________</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2 _________</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3 _________</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 4 _________</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 5 _________</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Give a rationale (reason)/Request acknowledgement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Practice.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give feedback.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give a positive consequence.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Schedule a follow-up practice.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date and Time __________</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Offer praise and encouragement throughout.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix E: Checklist for Classroom Skit Development

Blazing Brave (student) Name: _________________________
Teacher Name: _________________________
Blazing Chief (social skill trainer) Name: ______________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skit Development Steps</th>
<th>Blazing Chief completion check</th>
<th>Teacher completion check</th>
<th>Blazing Officer completion check</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Prior to skit development, Blazing Officers have completed Boys Town social skills training.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Identify social skills to be included in skit and review with Blazing Officers.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Introduce Blazing Officer to skit scripts.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Assign roles in script.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Practice skit.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix F: Daily Behavior Report Card - Week 1

Blazing Braves Week 1

Student: _______________________  Date: _______________________
Teacher: _______________________  Classroom: _____________________

Directions: Did the student exhibit this behavior today?

Circle the degree to which the student met the behavioral goal:

1 Never/Seldom  2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Usually/Always

Sometimes
Appendix G: Daily Behavior Report Card-Week 2

**Blazing Braves Week 2**

| Student: ______________________ | Date: __________________________ |
| Teacher: ______________________ | Classroom: _____________________ |

Directions: Did the student exhibit this behavior today?

Circle the degree to which the student met the behavioral goal:

1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9
Never/Seldom  Sometimes  Usually/Always
### Blazing Braves Week 3

| Student: ______________________ | Date: __________________________ |
| Teacher: ______________________ | Classroom: ______________________ |

Directions: Did the student exhibit this behavior today?

**Student Initiated a Conversation.**

Circle the degree to which the student met the behavioral goal:

- 1 Never/Seldom
- 2
- 3
- 4 Sometimes
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9 Usually/Always

---

55
Appendix I: Daily Behavior Report Card - Week 4

Blazing Braves Week 4

Student: _______________________  Date: _______________________
Teacher: _______________________  Classroom: ___________________

Circle the degree to which the student met the behavioral goal:

1 Never/Seldom  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9 Usually/Always

Directions: Did the student exhibit this behavior today?