

**The Importance of Social Skills Training
as it Relates to Students
with Learning
Disabilities**

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this literature review was to help people become more familiar with students with learning disabilities and the social skill deficits some of those students may face. Five main topics were reviewed to better understand the concept of learning disabilities. They include the history of learning disabilities, the characteristics that students with learning disabilities tend to possess, the appropriate social skills that some students with learning disabilities tend to lack, the importance of social skills training with students with learning disabilities, and various social skills trainings that are most effective for students with learning disabilities in the classroom and at home.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Knowing how to appropriately interact with others is important for a variety of different aspects in a person's life. Students' ability to successfully interact socially will impact their success in school, their career paths, their lifelong relationships, and many other areas. Getting the opportunity to interact and communicate with others is a huge reason why most students enjoy coming to school. However, for students who have a learning disability, understanding and demonstrating social skills can be a hard skill to master.

Students with learning disabilities typically display a short attention span, difficulty following directions, difficulties with sequencing, disorganization and other sensory difficulties, and have difficulty discriminating between/among letters, numerals, or sounds. This population of students also tend to have poor reading and/or writing ability, have eye-hand coordination problems; are poorly coordinated, and have a poor memory (Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2007).

Students with learning disabilities can also have difficulties with verbal expression, comprehension and retention of material, and with phonics. These students also typically have poor organization and time management (Wren, 1985). Not only do some students with learning disabilities experience these difficulties, but they may also have trouble using appropriate social skills.

Of the 4 to 6% of students with learning disabilities in our nations public schools, 75% of those students exhibit social skill deficits (Elksnin & Elksnin, 2001). Students with learning disabilities tend to lack appropriate social skills due to a variety of reasons. This population of students have difficulty interpreting verbal and non-verbal communication, especially with

reading facial expressions. These students have trouble holding conversations with others, mainly in the areas of initiating a conversation, transitioning from one topic to another, and asking questions. These students also have difficulty with problem solving. According to one study, students with learning disabilities were less proficient than students without learning disabilities on a variety of social problem-solving tasks (Schneider & Yoshida, 1988).

Students with learning disabilities tend to be socially less accepted by their peers and are more likely to be socially neglected and rejected by their peers than students without learning disabilities (Kavale & Forness, 1995). This not only affects the student during his or her school years, but also as an adult. Johns, Crowley, and Guetzloe (2005) found that students with learning disabilities tend to have a poor social adjustment, mental health problems, delinquency, and low self-concept if they do not obtain proper social skills while in school.

Even though students with learning disabilities face many challenges, there are many things they can successfully accomplish. Some examples include, playing sports, employment, acting in plays, and the list could go on and on. It is very common for many students with learning disabilities to excel in one subject area and have difficulties in another subject area. For example, a student may comprehend and do very well in Mathematics. However, that same student may have trouble understanding basic reading skills. It is important to remember that not all students with learning disabilities will experience the same difficulties. Every student is unique and has different needs that educators need to accommodate.

Educators should be properly trained to better assist students with learning disabilities who have social skills deficits. The first thing educators need to keep in mind is that parents or guardians are a key element in obtaining an effective social skills intervention. The student needs to be able to generalize across settings the skills learned. Therefore, parents need to be

familiarized as to what is being done in school to help the student improve his or her social skills.

Educators can also incorporate social skills training into their instruction. Social skills training is “A proactive, positive intervention designed to replace negative behaviors with more desirable ones and to teach students more constructive, socially rewarding ways to behave” (Council for Exceptional Children, 2001, p. 42). Furthermore, studies have found that social skills training is extremely beneficial for students with learning disabilities. According to Elksnin and Elksnin (1998), social skills instruction is crucial for students with learning and behavior problems. As a group, these students tend to exhibit social skills difficulties more often than their normally achieving peers (Elksnin & Elksnin, 1998).

Most importantly is that the educators need to be advocates for their students and teach other non-disabled individuals about students with learning disabilities. People are not going to learn about it unless someone tells them. If other individuals become more familiar with learning disabilities, they are going to be more welcoming of those students and focus more on the person and not the disability.

Statement of the Problem

Given the need for more information and research regarding social skills training as it relates to students with learning disabilities, this literature review is warranted.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to document the importance of teaching social skills to students with learning disabilities. The information will be collected through a literature review during the Summer and Fall of 2007.

Rationale

As a whole, our society lacks knowledge about learning disabilities and how it may affect students with learning disabilities. This literature review is necessary because it may help people become more familiar with students with learning disabilities and the social skills deficits some of those students may face. It also may help people become more aware of the importance of social skills training for students with learning disabilities. The literature review may be beneficial for educators and parents in that they will learn effective ways to implement social skills training in and out of the classroom.

Objectives

At the completion of this literature review, the following objectives will be attained:

1. The readers will have a better understanding of the history of learning disabilities.
2. The readers will understand what a learning disability is and some of the characteristics that students with learning disabilities tend to possess.
3. The readers will have a better knowledge of why students with learning disabilities tend to lack appropriate social skills.
4. The readers will become familiar with the importance of social skills training with students with learning disabilities.
5. The readers will identify what social skills trainings are most effective for students with learning disabilities in the classroom and at home.

Definition of Terms

For clarity of this research, the following terms are defined:

Cooperative Learning - According to Mercer & Mercer (1998), cooperative learning is “a peer- mediated instructional arrangement in which small groups or teams of students work

together to achieve team success in a manner that promotes the students' responsibility for their own learning as well as the learning of others" (cited in Wolford, Heward, & Alber, 2001, p. 161).

Emotional Intelligence (EQ) - used to "describe a person's ability to understand his or her own emotions and the emotions of others and to act appropriately based on this understanding" (Thibodeaux & Bond, 2007, n.p.).

Intelligence Quotient (IQ) - a score derived from one of several different standardized tests attempting to measure intelligence (Wikipedia Online Encyclopedia, 2007).

Learning Disability -

A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2007, n.p.)

Social Skills - According to Gresham and Elliott (1993), social skills are defined as, "Socially acceptable behaviors that enable a person to interact effectively with others and avoid socially unacceptable responses from others" (cited in Denham, Hatfield, Smethurst, Tan, & Tribe, 2006, p. 34).

Social Skills Training - Denham, Hatfield, Smethurst, Tan, and Tribe (2006) defined social skills training as, "Interventions that aim to develop socially acceptable learned behaviors in children who show deficits in their social skills" (p. 34).

Assumptions of the Study

It was assumed that the researcher did a thorough search, collecting a variety of research available on social skills training with students who have learning disabilities. It was assumed that the research used for this literature review was of high quality and recent. It was also assumed that social skills training and learning disabilities were well defined in the research.

Limitations of the Study

A limitation of the study was the author's own opinion, which may have limited the amount of research completed on the topic. Another limitation was that for this research, only students with one diagnosis were included. Students with emotional behavioral disorders and cognitive disabilities were not included.

Chapter II: Literature Review

The following literature review will include information on the history of learning disabilities, what a learning disability (LD) is, the characteristics associated with this disability, as well as explain the social skill deficits of students with LD. In addition, this chapter will discuss the importance of social skills training with students with learning disabilities. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a variety of ideas educators and parents can use in and out of the classroom to help their students or children learn appropriate social skills.

History of Learning Disabilities

For many years, there have been people with learning difficulties. However, it was never properly identified or understood. It was not until the 1960's that the term learning disability was introduced. Many people thought that individuals with learning difficulties had a low intelligence quotient (IQ) or were "mentally retarded". Learning disabilities should not be confused with other disabilities such as mental retardation/cognitive disability (LD Basics, 2007). The distinguishing difference between a learning disability and a cognitive disability is IQ. With a learning disability, an individual normally has an IQ of 85 or above (Department of Public Instruction, 2003). A person is said to have a cognitive disability if he/she has an IQ of under 70 (National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, 2004). Learning disabilities and cognitive disabilities are two separate disabilities. In 1969, legislation was passed for learning disabilities and the Children with Specific Learning Disabilities Act was created. For the first time federal law mandated support services for students with learning disabilities.

In 1975, Congress passed Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. With this law, learning disabilities finally achieved official status as a category

eligible for funding for direct services. The definition that was given to a learning disability was “A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations. This term includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. This term does not include children who have learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities; mental retardation; or environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage” (Knoblauch & Sorenson, 1998, n.p.). Over the years, the criteria for diagnosing a learning disability has changed. However, the definition of a learning disability has not changed since the original Public Law 94-142 . In 1997, Public Law 94-142 was renamed to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA 1997 required that students with disabilities must have access to the general education curriculum (Nyman-McMaster & Fuchs, 2002). In 2004, IDEA was once again reauthorized and the name changed to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA). The IDEA definition of a learning disability still stands today.

The reauthorization of IDEA in 1997 has contributed to the increase in the number of students with disabilities served in regular education classrooms (Nyman-McMaster & Fuchs, 2002). Of all the disabilities, students with learning disabilities are the most likely to be placed in the general education classroom. According to the U.S. Department of Education, “Nearly one-half of all students with learning disabilities spend at least 80% of the school day in the regular classroom, and four out of five students with learning disabilities receive at least 40% of their education in the regular education classroom” (cited in Wolford, Heward, & Alber, 2001, p. 161).

Characteristics of Students with Learning Disabilities

Compared to cognitive disabilities (CD) and emotional behavioral disorders (EBD), learning disabilities (LD) is the most prevalent of the diagnoses in special education. About half of the students with disabilities have a learning disability. According to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction website, during the 2005-2006 school year, 45,083 students were being served in Special Education for learning disabilities (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2007). Currently, there are between 4 to 6% of all students classified as having specific learning disabilities in our nation's public schools (Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2007). Furthermore, there are many more students who are undiagnosed or misdiagnosed, which makes the percentage even higher (Sternberg & Newman, 2004).

There are three main types of learning disabilities, which include dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia. Dyslexia involves deficits in reading and/or language, dysgraphia is difficulty with writing or fine motor skills, and dyscalculia is a learning disability in mathematics (Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2007).

Of those three types, there are seven main areas of a learning disability. These areas are basic reading skills, reading comprehension, math calculation, math reasoning, written expression, oral expression, and listening comprehension (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Lloyd, 1999). Most students do not have deficits in all of these areas. Typically a student with a learning disability will have difficulties in one or two subject areas and excel in other subjects.

In the area of reading, some students with learning disabilities confuse similar words and have problems reading multi-syllable words. These students tend to have a slow reading rate and they can have difficulty comprehending and retaining reading material (Wren, 1985). Difficulty with basic reading and language skills are the most common learning disabilities. Around 80% of

students with learning disabilities have reading problems (LD Basics, 2007). However, many other students have writing difficulties.

On the subject of writing, students with learning disabilities tend to have poor grammar. This population of students can omit words, have many spelling errors, reverse letters, as well as have trouble forming letters. Students with learning disabilities also find it difficult to copy from the board or the overhead, so taking notes is obviously troublesome. These students also have difficulty with spacing, capitals, and punctuation (Wren, 1985). Some students may find writing challenging, while other students have trouble in math.

Regarding the subject of math, students with learning disabilities can have difficulty memorizing basic facts and they tend to confuse or reverse numbers. These students can also have trouble with number sequence, or grasping the concept of operational symbols. Since many of these students have difficulty with reading, math word problems can be a challenge for them (Wren, 1985). Some of these students not only have problems in various subject areas, but they can also have trouble communicating with others.

The main difficulty students with learning disabilities experience in oral language is the ability to effectively communicate ideas. These students can also have problems describing events or stories in proper sequence. Memorization of basic facts can also prove to be a difficult task for these students (Wren, 1985). Not only do students with learning disabilities struggle academically and/or with oral language, they also have difficulty appropriately socializing with others.

Social Skill Deficits as it Relates to Students with Learning Disabilities

Effective social skills means being able to initiate and respond appropriately to others. According to a study done by Forness and Kavale, approximately 75% of students with learning

disabilities received lower social skills ratings compared to their peers without learning disabilities (Forness & Kavale, 1996). Students with learning disabilities lack appropriate social skills due to a variety of reasons. According to Elliott and Busse (1991), there are five main groups of social behavior: cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control (cited in Denham, Hatfield, Smethurst, Tan, & Tribe, 2006). Many students with learning disabilities have difficulties in all five of these areas, which is why they lack appropriate social skills.

The first main group of social behavior according to Elliott and Busse is cooperation, which according to them refers to helping other people, sharing, and abiding by the rules. Being able to cooperate with peers is especially important in a school setting. However, students with learning disabilities sometimes have difficulty in this area. “Children with learning disabilities have been rated as less cooperative and as having less developed leadership skills than children without learning disabilities” (Wiener, 2004, p. 25). Helping others, sharing, and following the rules are some of the most common deficits regarding cooperation (Denham, Hatfield, Smethurst, Tan, & Tribe, 2006). One aspect that has been found to have a positive effect on students with learning disabilities is cooperative learning.

“The most promising method of instruction for encouraging positive interaction between regular-education and special-education students is cooperative learning” (Putnam, Markovchick, Johnson, & Johnson, 1996, p. 742). Cooperative learning groups can provide students with opportunities to practice social skills while engaging in academic tasks (Wolford, Heward, & Alber, 2001). Cooperative learning can also increase student engagement and achievement (Wolford, Heward, & Alber, 2001). With proper training and support, students with learning disabilities can be successful in cooperative learning groups. In a study done on the effects of cooperative learning, the researchers found that the “special-education students in

the cooperative condition enjoyed their cooperative experiences and viewed them as valuable in helping them learn, gain peer acceptance, make friends with regular-education classmates, and improve their behavior in the classroom” (Putnam, Markovchick, Johnson, & Johnson, 1996, p. 751).

The next main aspect of social behavior according to Elliott & Busse is assertion. This aspect involves initiating behaviors, asking for things, and responding to people. Students with learning disabilities also find it challenging to be assertive with others. One example of this is starting and having conversations with others. It is difficult for students with learning disabilities to initiate a conversation with someone. A study was conducted in which the researcher videotaped children with and without learning disabilities working together to build an object. The researchers found that children with learning disabilities initiated less communication than children without learning disabilities (Wiener & Harris, 1993).

Another key piece to having a successful conversation with another individual is being able to ask that person questions. Unfortunately, many students with learning disabilities have a difficult time asking questions and transitioning from one topic to another. This could create interpersonal problems because much of conversation with people is based on asking questions and moving from one topic of conversation to another. A study was done by Bryan, Donahue, Pearl, & Storm (1981) which consisted of students with and without a learning disability completing a “TV Talk Show” role-playing procedure (cited in Wiener, 2004). The researchers found that as hosts, students with a learning disability asked fewer questions. They also found that most students with learning disabilities asked questions that only required a yes or no response. Overall, the study found that initiating and keeping the conversation flowing were less efficient for students with a learning disability compared to those students without a learning

disability (cited in Wiener, 2004).

The third aspect of social behavior is responsibility, which includes communication with adults and demonstration of care (Denham, Hatfield, Smethurst, Tan, & Tribe, 2006).

Responsibility is an important quality to possess for appropriate socialization. Everyone is responsible for their own actions and because of responsibility, people decide how they are going to respond when socializing with others. Based on societal rules, students with learning disabilities tend to respond in an inappropriate way because they do not understand the concepts of appropriate socialization. Stereotyped behaviors of students with learning disabilities are seen as inappropriate and a barrier to both learning and socializing with others (Nind & Kellett, 2002). “When students feel respected for who they are, not what they should be, they gain a sense of belonging; then they are free to develop their potential” (Evans, Corsini, & Gazda, 1990, pg. 53).

Empathizing, or showing concern over the feelings of others, is another social skill area students with learning disabilities tend to lack. These students seem very one-dimensional and have difficulty seeing others point of view. Students with learning disabilities do not show great concern over the feelings of others, which can make it hard to interact with these students. Bruck & Hebert, 1982; Horowitz, 1981 commented that children with a learning disability found it challenging to predict what other children might think or feel (cited in Wiener, 2004).

Finally, According to Elliott and Busse (1991), self-control refers to the “ability to respond appropriately to conflict or feedback from others” (cited in Denham, Hatfield, Smethurst, Tan, & Tribe, 2006, p. 34). Students with learning disabilities tend to be very quick to react to things. These students have a difficult time processing information. Due to this, they tend to say what they think without thoroughly thinking through their actions. This often gets them in trouble and creates a lack of friendship for these students. According to Vaughn, Bos, &

Schumm (1997), the goal is to teach students to identify their problems and alternative strategies for effectively solving their problems (cited in Johns, Crowley, & Guetzloe, 2005). If students were able to better manage their feelings, they would have the ability to stay on task, to focus, to think, and to produce (Liff, 2003).

Another example of a poor social skill these students have is the inability to read non-verbal communication, such as reading body language, including facial expressions. People with learning disabilities who have social skill deficits have “difficulty interpreting the behaviors of others, particularly in nonverbal communication such as reading the facial expression of others” (Cartledge, 2005, p. 179). Another study done by Maheady & Sainato (1986) found similar findings in that children with learning disabilities find it difficult to interpret nonverbal information (cited in Wiener, 2004).

There is also another explanation for the social difficulties of students with learning disabilities. Gresham and Elliott (1989) believed social-skill deficits are “from neurological dysfunctions similar to the dysfunctions that are responsible for academic problems” (cited in Meadan & Halle, 2004, p. 71). Furthermore, Bender & Wall (1994), Culbertson (1998), Spafford & Grosser (1993), emphasize that neurological factors which affect academic skills also may affect social and emotional perceptions and interpretations, which then may impair social, emotional, and behavioral skills of students with learning disabilities (cited in Al-Yagon, 2007). No matter what the explanation is for social difficulties of students with learning disabilities, learning appropriate social skills is important.

Importance of Social Skills Training

According to Strain and Odom (1986), “social skill deficiency in early childhood was the single best predictor of significant problems in adulthood” (cited in Elksnin & Elksnin, 1998,

n.p.). Furthermore, Daniel Goleman (1995) stated that emotional intelligence (EQ) is more important in predicting life success than Intelligence Quotient (IQ) (cited in Elksnin & Elksnin, 1998). Only 50% of academic achievement is based on traditional intelligence; the rest lies within the areas of social and emotional intelligences (Liff, 2003). Having a good EQ is very similar to demonstrating appropriate social skills. EQ is a fairly new topic. Dr. John Mayer, Ph.D., and Dr. Peter Salovey, Ph.D., introduced the term "emotional intelligence" in the early 1990s. The term is used to "describe a person's ability to understand his or her own emotions and the emotions of others and to act appropriately based on this understanding" (Thibodeaux & Bond, 2007, n.p.). Furthermore, EQ encompasses areas such as understanding the feelings of others, regulating one's own emotions, and putting others at ease (Elksnin & Elksnin, 1998).

Children who do not possess adequate social emotional skills are more likely to be rejected by their peers, experience difficulties in school, drop out of school, suffer mental health problems, and be underemployed or unemployed during adulthood (Elksnin & Elksnin, 2001).

The drop-out rate is much higher for students with learning disabilities than it is for students without learning disabilities (Dunn, C., Chambers, D., & Rabren, K., 2004). Furthermore according to the 23rd Annual Report to Congress, 27.1% of students with learning disabilities drop out of school (Dunn, C., Chambers, D., & Rabren, K., 2004). "Students who have academic difficulties experience increasing frustration, low self-esteem, and loss of motivation for learning as they progress through school" (Daniel, Walsh, Goldston, Arnold, Reboussin, & Wood, 2006, p. 508). If these students are taught proper social skills, they are going to be more likely to acquire and retain a job. According to Goldstein & Morgan, 2002; Wehman, 1992; Wehmeyer, 1992, "Some students just need more direct instruction and opportunities to practice social skills in developmentally-appropriate vocational and educational

settings” (cited in Kamens, Dolyniuk, Dinardo, Rockoff, Forsythe, & Corman, 2004, p. 24). Furthermore, Johnson and Johnson (1990) reported that 90% of job loss was related to social problems (cited in Elksnin & Elksnin, 2001). On the other hand, children with strong social networks and good friendships tend to perform better in school and on the job (Elksnin & Elksnin, 2001).

Friendships are very important for all students, especially students with learning disabilities. A study found that children with friends had higher measures of self-concept and self-worth than did children without friends (Vaughn, Elbaum, & Boardman, 2001). Therefore, obtaining appropriate social skills helps students with learning disabilities interact better with their peers, which in turn aids them the opportunity to create friendships with others.

“Because making friends involves social interaction and requires the skillful use of social perception and self-regulatory behaviors, children with learning disabilities may find making friends with their non-disabled peers difficult” (DeGeorge, 1998, n.p.). It has been found that children with learning disabilities have fewer mutual friendships and have friends two or more years younger than children without learning disabilities (Wiener, 2004). “Furthermore, the friendships of children with learning disabilities in grades 4-6 are less stable than those in children without learning disabilities” (Wiener, 2004, p. 22). “Making friends is a skill that must be taught directly to many students with learning disabilities if they are to succeed in school” (DeGeorge, 1998, n.p.). These students can also benefit if the social skills are taught clearly through daily lessons that incorporate a variety of experiences.

Social skills training is important to incorporate into the classroom. According to Erwin (1994), “A meta-analysis of 43 studies of social skills training effectiveness showed that social skills training produced significant improvements in children’s level of social interaction and

cognitive problem-solving abilities” (cited in Denham, Hatfield, Smethurst, Tan, & Tribe, 2006, p. 35).

Social Skills Training Strategies for Teachers to Incorporate in the Classroom

According to Susan Ward, there are many things educators can do to enhance the social skills in students with learning disabilities. Teachers can start by working with the student on self-awareness and being able to identify his or her own feelings, emotions, needs, and interests (cited in Frengut, 2003). Self-aware students have responses and behaviors that are more likely to be appropriate and rational (Liff, 2003). According to Linehan, Goodstein, Nielsen, & Chiles (1983), “students who can discern the etiology of their feelings have a better chance at containing reactions, rather than pervasively overwhelmed” (cited in Liff, 2003).

Teachers can also allow the student to practice verbal and non-verbal language skills when interacting with others. Some examples of verbal language skills are introducing yourself, taking turns, and resolving conflicts. Examples of non-verbal language skills include body language, eye contact, facial emotions, and personal space. Evidence suggest that teachers need to allow students to practice all of these skills as much as the students needs. Allowing the student to practice is going to give him or her more confidence, which will help improve the social skills of the individual (Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2007).

Teachers cannot assume that their students with learning disabilities know and understand appropriate social skills. Based on the research, teachers need to effectively demonstrate the social skills they want their students to acquire (DeGeorge, 1998). Teachers need to instruct students on how to appropriately behave and how to appropriately interact with others. One huge component of that instruction is to have teachers model what they expect of their students because children learn by what they see and experience (McArthur, 2002).

Students benefit from having a guide or an example to work from, which is usually the teacher or something the teacher gives the students. “Teacher modeling and self-regulated use of the procedure lie at the heart of good instruction” (Pressley & Harris, 1990, p. 32).

There is evidence that teachers also need to be able to give the students feedback on their progress and what they can continue working on to work towards their goal. It has been found that behavior improves as a result of positive feedback (Positive Reinforcement, 2007).

Positive reinforcement is essential, especially with students with learning disabilities. This population of students are constantly reminded of the things they are doing wrong and their weaknesses, and they need to be made aware that they can succeed and accomplish something. When teachers see a student using appropriate social skills, the teacher should acknowledge that student and praise him or her for correctly interacting with others. This aspect will help students with learning disabilities want to continue to improve their social skills. According to Johns and Carr (1995), teachers should never miss an opportunity to focus on the positive things students accomplish. Furthermore, they believe that at least 70% of the comments teachers give students should be positive (cited in Johns, Crowley, & Guetzloe, 2005).

Another idea that will improve the social skills of students with learning disabilities is having them get to know their classmates right away (McArthur, 2002). Teachers can provide their students with various get acquainted activities. This is a perfect opportunity to teach students appropriate social skills, such as, various conversation skills, cooperation, respect, and teamwork (McArthur, 2002).

It has also been found that giving students with learning disabilities responsibility within the classroom improves their social skills. These could be simple tasks, such as taking attendance, taking care of pets, acting as monitors, and keeping the classroom clean (McArthur,

2002). Allowing students to interact with their peers and practice social skills is going to help improve their interaction with others.

Pearl and Cosden (1982) had students with and without a learning disability watch videotaped vignettes. They found that students with learning disabilities were less accurate than students without learning disabilities in their understanding of social interactions in the vignettes (cited in Meadan and Halle, 2004). With regards to this study, Richard Lavoie, who has taught children with learning disabilities for over 30 years, who has appeared in three Public Broadcasting Service videos, and who has written books about how to help children with learning disabilities believes that students need to be allowed to practice reading facial expressions. One technique that students with learning disabilities can practice with, which is similar to Pearl and Cosden's, is having them watch a television program with the sound off and have the student identify how that person is feeling (Lavoie, 2005). Students with learning disabilities are able to visually see and analyze facial expressions, which will improve their social skills.

A major problem with the current social skills interventions is that the lessons are taught through published curricula, regardless of the specific needs of each individual (Cartledge, 2005). Therefore, it is essential for teachers to remember that every student is different, and they will need to tailor the social skills intervention and lessons to meet the needs of each student. What is going to work for one student may not work for another student. Since each student's needs are so different, teachers should work with the student one-on-one as much as possible. Due to time constraints and other students to attend to, individualized instruction is difficult to accomplish, so cooperative learning is also beneficial to help students with learning disabilities learn appropriate social skills.

Cooperative learning should be incorporated into daily instruction. It has been found that successful cooperative learning experiences in classrooms increases students' social development (McArthur, 2002). Cooperative learning activities that facilitate higher-order thinking skills will help students with learning disabilities attain higher levels of knowledge as well as acquire greater social skills (Sonnier-York & Stanford, 2002). Putting students into groups and having them work on a task together helps them learn a variety of appropriate ways to interact with other individuals. According to Johnson & Johnson, 1991, 1999; Kagan, 1990, Wood & Algozzine, 1997, cooperative learning involves holding students accountable for their learning, as well as the learning of their group members (cited in Sonnier-York & Stanford, 2002). Group work is also beneficial when teachers want to use role play in their classroom. Role playing allows students to practice what to say in various situations. This also helps students with learning disabilities understand empathy and another's perspective on a topic, which are two main social skills that many students with learning disabilities lack.

For social skills training to be the most effective, it should be integrated into the daily classroom environment. Having time set aside for social skills instruction has been found to not be as effective as integrating it into the daily instruction (Williams & Reisberg, 2003). Making social skills training a part of the daily lesson plans helps students with learning disabilities generalize the skill across various settings. For example, if someone does something socially inappropriate during the middle of class, the teacher should address the issue immediately and teach the student(s) how to correct the behavior. The student can learn the skill better when it is in context rather than when it is on its own.

Many people believe social skills training is beneficial to students, as well as to teachers. "When teachers stress social skills in the classroom and create a climate of cooperation and

respect for others, there are fewer discipline problems and less negative behavior” (McArthur, 2002, p. 183). She went on to state, “When good manners are evident in the class, the students' own self-esteem and self-respect increase” (McArthur, 2002, p. 183).

It is important that teachers also be able to work with families as to how they can help their child with social skills while they are not in school. The family is an important influence on a child's performance in school. The parent is a child's first teacher and continues to be a major influence in the child's life. When we relate to a child's family in a positive, productive manner, the situation is always more beneficial for the child” (Montgomery, 2005, p. 54). To create a better teacher-parent relationship, teachers can give parents ideas on how to integrate social skills training into the child's daily routine. This will assist parents in learning how to help increase their children's overall success rate.

If parents are able to work with their child at home, the child is going to be able to generalize the information across settings. What is taught at home will transcend into the school environment and vice versa. Consistency is key to appropriately teaching social skills. When parents and teachers are able to successfully work together to accomplish a common goal, students with learning disabilities have a better chance of being more successful in school.

Chapter III: Summary and Recommendations

In this chapter, a summary of the key points of my literature review will be discussed. Recommendations will also be given for further research into the area of social skills training and students with LD.

Summary of Literature Review

In summary, students with learning disabilities have deficits in the main areas of reading, language, writing, and/or math. On top of those academic areas, some of those students also lack appropriate social skills. Something that is consistent with the research on students with learning disabilities is that these students are socially less accepted by their peers than students without learning disabilities (Kavale & Forness, 1995). If they do not learn proper social skills, they will have difficulties making friends, in school, with future jobs, as well as difficulties in other areas. Educators can make a difference and provide students with social skills training, where they will learn how to demonstrate appropriate social skills.

Social skills training is beneficial for students with learning disabilities. This population of students will have more self-control over their behavior and actions, which will help them improve in academic areas and in their relationships with others. These students will learn how to cooperate better and empathize with others. Their communication skills will also increase, which will help them interact with others better. The biggest factor is that students with learning disabilities will have better relationships with others and have more friends, which will increase their self-esteem and confidence. Friendships are very important for all students, especially students with learning disabilities. A study found that children with friends had higher measures of self-concept and self-worth than did children without friends (Vaughn, Elbaum, & Boardman, 2001). Therefore, obtaining appropriate social skills helps students with learning disabilities

interact better with their peers, which in turn aids them the opportunity to create friendships with others.

Social skills training is important to incorporate into the classroom. According to Erwin (1994), “A meta-analysis of 43 studies of social skills training effectiveness showed that social skills training produced significant improvements in children’s level of social interaction and cognitive problem-solving abilities” (cited in Denham, Hatfield, Smethurst, Tan, & Tribe, 2006, p. 35).

Teachers need to model appropriate social skills. Students look up to their teachers and if their teachers have good social skills, the students are more likely to imitate those skills. Students with learning disabilities need to be taught appropriate social skills as soon as something socially inappropriate occurs. This is a perfect time to teach students how to respond appropriately to various situations (Johns, Crowley, & Guetzloe, 2005). Social skills training should not be held at a separate time. This format has been found to be less effective in teaching social skills (Williams & Reisberg, 2003). Teaching social skills should become part of daily instruction. It is essential that teachers also work with the parents to continue the social skills training in the home as well. When students with learning disabilities learn appropriate social skills, they tend to have more confidence in themselves, greater self-concept and self-esteem, better social adjustment, more friends and more meaningful relationships with those friends, growth in academic areas, and a better chance of being a successful employee.

Recommendations for Further Research

Based on the research examined for this review, there have been many studies completed on students with learning disabilities and social skills training. However, there is limited research on specific age levels and the effects of social skills training. More research can be

done on students with learning disabilities and how their age affects their social skills.

Furthermore, it would be beneficial to see how social skills training affects students with learning disabilities at various age levels.

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