ABSTRACT

Social skills training (SST) has been used as one approach to deal with increasing delinquency problems in some countries. While the literature shows that acquisition of social skills has generally been found using SST, the generalisation of the acquired social skills from classroom trained situations to non-classroom trained situations has been less consistent. The involvement of peers has been a method that has been used successfully in other areas of training of adolescents, but the use of peers has yet to be closely examined in the context of SST. In this study, the involvement of peers in SST in enhancing skill acquisition and generalisation was examined.

The Skillstreaming the Adolescent programme (Skillstreaming) was conducted with a sample of 36 predelinquents residing in an institution in Singapore. Eighteen of the subjects were trained with peer involvement, while the other 18 were not. The subjects in each group were further divided into learning different types of skills: Initiating Social Interaction, Dealing with Group Pressure, and Expressing Your Feelings. Social skills acquisition was assessed using various measures, including the Social Skills Rating System (Gresham & Elliott, 1990), while generalisation of effects to other behaviours was assessed using the Behavior Rating Profile - 2 (Brown & Hammill, 1990). Pre- and post-test ratings were obtained.

The results of analyses of time of test were generally not significant. However, a more detailed analysis of the data indicated support for an effect of Skillstreaming on skill acquisition. The involvement of peers was not effective: Skillstreaming without peers appeared to be more effective than Skillstreaming with peers. The effect of Skillstreaming was not consistent across the three skills - Skillstreaming was more effective in training the "Expressing Your Feelings" skill than in training the other skills. The implications of these findings are discussed in terms of research using peers in SST, and in assessing SST packages. Cross-cultural issues are also discussed together with the implications of conducting SST in Singapore.