

**AN INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION PROGRAM FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL
STUDENTS APPLYING TRUE COLORS**

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The purpose of this study was to create an Interpersonal Communication (IC) program for middle school students to (a) obtain knowledge of personality traits and communication skills and (b) to assess the program effectiveness. The IC program identified the communication skills (such as listening, starting a conversation, asking for help), personality types (how they think and behave), and interpersonal conflicts (communication conflict such as yelling) among middle school students. The program helped students identify what knowledge and skills they acquired at the end of the program. The IC program increased prosocial communication for middle school adolescents and helped students discover their personality types, strengths, and values.

Introduction

Adolescence is a challenging and confusing time for youth as well as for the parents, educators, and other adults who work with youth. Most adolescents pass through this developmental period with success; however, others engage in maladaptive behaviors and thus experience challenges that damage their ability to maintain successful interpersonal relationships with others. In middle schools, adolescents are attending schools unprepared to perform within the social norms at the school, and most educators find it difficult to engage adolescent students. Their challenge is to instruct students

effectively and at the same time correct antisocial behavior in the classroom, and many are unable to find class time for effective interventions for students who are disengaged (Arwood-Barton, Morrow, Lane, & Jolivet, 2005; Maag, 1995). As educators struggle to find ways to connect with adolescent students, this population is losing interest in school, engaging in high-risk behaviors, and some are dropping out of school (Caram, 2001).

Middle school students' limited communication skills create misunderstandings and interpersonal conflicts with adults and peers. These limited communication skills may lead to problems in personal relationships and may affect school academic performance. Adolescent students who fail in school often do not feel they fit in the educational and social norms. For example, the traditional school culture embraces time schedules and rules while many adolescents seek freedom from such restrictions, take risks, and debate and challenge authority. In addition, low performing adolescents are in greater danger than their achievement-oriented counterparts because many have limited communication skills and cannot effectively and appropriately express their needs and emotions. In the traditional educational settings, the needs of adolescents are not being met, so they engage in high-risk behaviors that will get some of their needs met.

Various programs have attempted to help adolescent youth stay in school, make smooth transitions from school to work, and transition from adolescence to adulthood. Still, some adolescents continue to lose interest in school and eventually drop out. Many social skills training programs attempt to ameliorate behavioral maladjustments exhibited among many adolescents; however, many have overlooked the biological and psychological development of adolescents. Social skills trainings that emphasize

psychological and biological challenges can help improve adolescent interpersonal communications, behavior, and motivation if students are given the opportunity to explore what is happening to them biologically and psychologically while they are trying to find their fit in the mainstream of school, relationships, and the social environment.

Social skills training and understanding of personality can assist educators in creating roadmaps for adolescent students to consider as they move from dependence to independence and make decisions that will affect the rest of their lives. Educators and parents working together in school and community settings can guide adolescent students in understanding their personal characteristics by learning about themselves from biological, psychological, and social perspectives. A comprehensive understanding can help guide decision-making for adolescents as they learn, grow, and give back to a community that nurtures their development.

Kise and Russell (2004) point the problem back to the traditional and antiquated school environment that mismanages the behavior and personality conflicts of adolescents. Continued misunderstandings, conflicts, and social maladjustments can cause major problems for adolescents and society. Adolescents can find themselves engaged in crime, teen pregnancy, drug use, school dropout, and dependence on state welfare systems. The problem for society is that crime rates can increase, causing prison systems to create more room to hold juvenile inmates, thus passing tax assessments onto the working class. Hospitals may find their emergency rooms filled with more adolescents because of high-risk activities. In addition, schools may experience more student alienation that can lead to suicide and a higher incidence of on-campus crime. Appropriate social skills and personality development are crucial for adolescents because

these skills will help them become functional individuals that can contribute to society. Adolescent students will be able to socially communicate with others, expressing their identity and sharing their strengths and hidden talents to a community that is still unsure of how to connect with them.

Theoretical Framework

Personality trait theory, adolescent development, and social learning theory drive the development of this research study. These theoretical frameworks have also grounded the development of many social skills training programs (Borus-Rotheram, Bickford, & Milburn, 2001; Gresham, 1986; Maag, 1995; Wise & Bundy, 1991). In addition, concepts such as behavior, ability, and environmental factors have been included in various social skills studies (Ogilvy, 1994). Social skills training helps children and adolescents with poor social skills by providing the opportunity to improve social adjustment, peer acceptance, prevent severe consequences, and reduce antisocial behaviors. Thus students exhibit fewer problem behaviors and are more ready to learn (Arwood-Barton, Morrow, Lane, & Jolivette, 2005; Borus-Rotheram et al., 2001; Bullis, Walker, & Sprague, 2001; Frankenberger-Bebe, Lane, Bocian, Gresham, & MacMillan, 2005; Kaser, 2006; LaGreca, 1993; National Association of School Psychologists, 2006; Smith & Gilles, 2003).

A program evaluation by the Center for Educational Policy (2003) showed a reduction in student discipline problems, improved interpersonal communication between students and staff, and enhanced student self-awareness through a program using the components of True Colors. Harris (2000) found that use of True Colors allowed teachers

to identify the personality-based learning needs of their students, which reduced stress and conflicts in the classroom.

Educational Importance of the Study

This study presents significant findings to educators and adults that work with middle school students in schools and non-school settings. Results from the study might influence others to use an intervention program that is well received by adolescents and provides positive approaches to self-awareness and interpersonal communication.

Traditional school environments concentrate on testing, schedules, evaluations, and reports. For the most part, standard lesson formats and school protocols overlook the inner experience of students. Yet social, personal, and biological variables affect the outcome of student success in the school, home, and community environments. Variables such as behavior, personality, family parenting, cognition, and motivation can all affect the success or lack of success in teen academic performance (Lerner & Galambos, 1998).

The researcher's argument is that many middle school students are experiencing interpersonal conflicts and misunderstandings when communicating with adults and peers. Middle school students' limited communication skills create misunderstandings and interpersonal conflicts with adults and peers. These misunderstandings can damage relationships with school personnel and thus may affect academic performance. Middle school adolescents do not understand how to connect with adults, while adults and parents are left perplexed and frustrated as they try to gain some understanding of adolescent behavior. Adolescents continue to display social and personality maladjustments, and many educators lack understanding of how to effectively motivate adolescent students. If nothing is done to understand and alleviate interpersonal conflicts

and misunderstandings among middle school students, many will continue to have unsuccessful communication with others. They will engage in behaviors that will lead to an increase in school problems such as dropout, defiance, lack of motivation, and lack of participation. Educators have tried to identify who is at risk, to better connect with adolescents, and to recommend ways to help. Research has shown that students who are low achieving lack academic knowledge and communication skills that help them function appropriately at school, work, and in relationships (Caldwell, 2004; Deen, 2005). Middle school adolescents, both high and low achieving, need a communication program that will give them a clear roadmap and guide toward effective interpersonal communication that can be used at school, with peers, at home, and with other adults.

Many attempts at promoting personality understanding have not been successful because many students are not able to grasp the concepts and apply the skills to their personal lives. True Colors has an advantage over many personality type descriptions in that it is simple to use and students quickly understand the four-color concept, yet it is based on research and has the benefit of face-validity as well.

Personality knowledge can benefit students in several ways: it can assist students in eventually selecting careers that compliment their personality type, it can help them develop self-awareness, and it can enhance communication skills. Communication skills can benefit students in work settings, school settings, and in personal relationships. Utilization of the IC program can help with the problem of miscommunication and conflicts among middle school students, parents, educators, and students' peers. Adults and educators working closely with adolescents can help direct successful academic performance among teens if they can integrate cognitive and emotional development into

their work with teens. Dahl (2001) suggests that such integration will help teens understand social rules, strategize for goal setting, maintain self-control over emotions and behavior, and help discover the long-term consequences of their actions.

Research Methods

This qualitative study utilized an action research design. The researcher used classroom participation and several types of observations, as appropriate for action research. Data collection methods were action-oriented, participatory, observational, and descriptive. Exploratory techniques such as student focus groups and parent surveys were used. Observational techniques, such as the student journals and descriptive notes from two research assistants, were also used to answer the research questions.

As a participant observer, the researcher taught a series of 18 lessons that blended True Colors Personality concepts and language arts lessons. Each lesson was 4 hours long with a half-hour break after the first 2 hours. Topics of lessons included (a) how communication skills affect school, home, and peer relationships; (b) self-discovery of personality type; (c) appreciation of personality differences; and (d) discovery of biological and psychological challenges that affect communication.

The lessons incorporated a variety of activities, including many hands-on activities and assignments requiring students to participate in cooperative or competitive groups. Examples of learning activities included the following: worksheet word scrambles, group creation of verbal and non-verbal short skits, listening to directions then repeating the directions in writing from memory, creation of autobiographical poems with the opportunity to read them to the class, student-to-student interviews and reports on the findings of the interviews, activities requiring a physical response (such as standing up or

remaining seated) as an answer to the teacher's questions, using descriptions of famous personalities to exemplify traits, guest speakers, documentary films, games, verbal debates between teams, journal writing, and field trips.

Participants

Sixteen middle school students transitioning from the seventh grade into the eighth grade for the upcoming school year, during a summer session, participated in the research study and the IC program. All 16 students were of Hispanic Heritage, 10 students were males and 6 were females. The average age of student participants was age 13. Students attending the summer academies were students who (a) have average or above average scores on the California Standards Test (CST) and (b) are identified as Hispanic, and may have English as their second language. The number of participants to the program was unique due to the student teacher ratio. There were four teachers to one student, which allowed the researcher (an experienced middle school counselor) and research assistants to maintain rapport with each student participant. The citizenship grades of the student participants during Trimester 3 reflected average students with citizenship grades ranked on the satisfactory scale. Student participant's academic grades during Trimester 3 were average and included C and B grades.

Student grades revealed that participants had some level of competence and understanding in their core academic subject areas. The teachers previously identified students to participate in the language arts/science class. Student participants included in the program were those referred by their teacher to attend summer session because they needed to improve their academic and social performance. Student participants also received permission from their parents to attend the summer session in this particular

class taught by the researcher. Student participants excluded from the study were students who were not referred by a teacher to attend the summer intersession and/or, their parent(s) did not permit them to attend the summer intersession.

Data Collection

The researcher was hired to teach a 4-week language arts class for the summer intersession and the IC program was taught within the class. While teaching the language arts class, the researcher used the following five instruments to gather data for this study:

- True Colors Character Cards. This personality tool developed by Lowry in 1978 was selected as the most appropriate psychological tool for this research because it provides an easy way to understand human psychology and explore how individuals communicate and interact with others (True Colors, 2006, ¶ 2 & 6).
- Student behavior questionnaire. The student behavior questionnaire was used to measure the extroverted and introverted behaviors of each student participant.
- Student journals. The journals were used by students to record their personal experiences and reflections.
- Focus group interview questions. Pre and post student focus group interviews were used to capture the verbal responses, thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs about students' perceptions of their communication.
- Pre and post parent surveys. These surveys were used to discover parents' feelings and beliefs about their child's communication with others and to see if there was a change in behavior after participating in the IC program.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this action research study was to create an Interpersonal Communication (IC) program for middle school students to (a) obtain personality and communication knowledge and skills and to (b) assess the program effectiveness. Four research questions were considered for this study:

1. What are the personality types of middle school students?
2. How do middle school students communicate with others?
3. In what areas are middle school students having interpersonal conflicts?
4. What knowledge and skills do student participants acquire by the end of the program?

Analysis of True Colors revealed that seven students (44%) exhibited the primary Orange personality trait that generates energy, flexibility, fun, and action. Five students (31%) represented the Blue personality of loyalty, tranquility, and sensitivity. Three students (19%) reflected the Gold personality of structure, organization, and tradition. Only one student (6%) expressed the Green personality of persistence, intelligence, and research. Further, 73% of student participants expressed extroverted behaviors rather than introverted behaviors. This finding can be interpreted that students in this study who exhibited extroverted Orange personality types were most likely to be referred to summer intercession because they needed additional academic and personal support before transitioning into the fall academic year.

Analysis revealed that student participants acquired new knowledge and skills in the areas of communication, personality, and other knowledge and skills after participating in the IC program. Communication knowledge and skills were mentioned frequently by students at 79%. Personality knowledge and skills were reported 72% of

the time, and other knowledge and skills were mentioned at 70% of the time. Furthermore, student participants' written reflections in their journals noted their excitement of identifying their own personal characteristics through movies, famous people, and Sesame Street characters. Students mentioned how much fun they had communicating in a structured debate with their classmates (on the topic of adopting a school dress code). Lastly, students mentioned how much fun they had participating in the two field trips that allowed them to leave the campus and visit sites that engaged their visual and physical senses. Students also discussed in their journals what they had learned from participating in the two field trips. This finding can be interpreted that students in this study understood the concepts of the IC program and were able to describe in their journals the lessons and activities they enjoyed the most.

Conclusions

The following conclusions were drawn from the research findings and are limited to student participants who are similar to those who participated in this study (i.e., middle school students of Hispanic heritage with satisfactory citizenship marks and average academic grades of C and B).

Conclusion 1. Student participants benefited from the IC program because there was an increase in self-awareness of personality, a decrease in negative communication, a decrease in interpersonal conflicts with peers and family, and an increase in lesson knowledge and skills following the IC program. This conclusion of self-awareness of personality is supported by the finding that each of the students was able to identify with the assessment of personality based on the True Colors assessment. In addition, findings from the student journals, student focus group interviews, and teacher notes indicate there

was an increase in understanding of self through learning about personality. Student participants learned how to describe their personality traits. Students reported:

- Today I learned about my personality. I learned about my color groups. My colors are gold, blue, green, and orange. This is how my personality works. I learned about myself (Student participant 14, journal entry, July 9, 2007).
- Me, I'm orange (Student participant 4, personal communication, July 26, 2007).
- I learned that I am green because of my knowledge and I think about things (Student participant 7, personal communication, July 26, 2007).
- Students seem interested to learn about themselves and their particular personalities. . . . emphasize their inner self (Research assistant 2, personal communication, July 26, 2007).

Kise and Russell (2004) assert that learning about personality temperaments helps students and teachers understand themselves and each other. Awareness of personality types can produce exchangeable communications as each individual learns to appreciate the strengths and differences others contribute to the group. Researchers who used the concept of True Colors with elementary, middle, and secondary school students reported a reduction in student discipline problems and a reduction of interpersonal communication conflicts between students and staff, and enhancement of student self-awareness (Center for Educational Policy, 2003). Using the IC program can help middle school students achieve (a) identification of personal strengths, (b) awareness of other personality types, and (c) awareness of how to develop better interpersonal communication.

Student participants benefited from the IC program because there was a decrease in disrespect and showing emotional dissatisfaction with others. The conclusion that negative communication decreased is supported with the data findings that indicate there

was an improvement on how students in this study communicate with others. Student participants were asked to comment on how they communicate with others. Their responses from the student focus group interviews revealed negative communications such as disrespect, hitting, and showing emotional dissatisfaction. However students also revealed positive communication that encouraged smiling, talking friendly and using humor with others. Before participating in the IC program, students expressed 13% of negative statements on how they express themselves with others. After participating in the IC program, student participants' negative statements on how they express themselves with others decreased to 10%. This is a small decrease due to the 4-week time frame for this research study.

Reduction in negative communication behavior among student participants is supported by the social skills literature. There are benefits in helping children and adolescents obtain pro-social skills. Some researchers have revealed improvements in interpersonal relationships with adults and peers, as well as academic performance. Because of social skills training, there are less problem behaviors and students are better prepared to learn (Bullis et al., 2001; Frankenberger-Bebe et al., 2005; Kaser, 2006.; NASP, 2006; Smith & Gilles, 2003). According to Thompson and Bundy (1996) adolescents who have participated in social skills training have increased their self-esteem and problem solving skills. A reduction in negative communication behavior can be interpreted that specific negative behaviors among middle school students can be changed to positive communication behaviors using this IC program.

Student participants benefited from the IC program because there was a decrease in interpersonal conflicts such as not listening, arguing with parents, and ignoring rules.

The conclusion that interpersonal conflicts decreased is supported with the findings from the student focus group interviews. Findings reveal that before participating in the IC program students made 38 negative statements about interpersonal conflicts of not listening and arguing with others; however, after participating in the IC program, the number of negative interpersonal conflict statements among student participants was reduced to 11 negative statements.

Though this study was short, results do show a beginning for students to have better communication if they had more time to participate in the IC program. A longer 3-year study conducted by the Center for Educational Policy (2003) supports this reduction of interpersonal conflicts. Researchers from the Center for Educational Policy produced a school safety and conflict reducer program using the components of True Colors. The 3-year program was implemented at 77 schools that included elementary, middle, and secondary students. Each school was responsible to give a report on the effects of the program. Results of the study revealed a reduction in student discipline problems, improvement in interpersonal communication between students and staff, and enhanced student self-awareness. A reduction of interpersonal conflicts can be interpreted that specific conflicts among middle school students can be changed to positive conflict resolution using this IC program.

Student participants benefited from the IC program because there was an increase in knowledge and skills. This conclusion is supported by statements from the student focus group interviews, student journals, and field notes data. Findings from the student focus groups reveal that student participants made 22 statements about obtained knowledge and skills of communication. Students made 38 statements about obtained

knowledge and skills related to understanding of personality, and student participants made 28 statements about other knowledge and skills obtained from participating in the IC program.

According to the student journals, students reported comments about knowledge and skills from lessons that allowed them to identify True Color characteristics through movies and famous people. Students also wrote about how much fun they had communicating in a mini debate with their classmates (on the topic of adopting a school dress code). Students mentioned how much fun they had watching the teachers role-play skits in front of the classroom. Students noted how they were excited about leaving the school grounds to attend two field trips that engaged their visual and physical senses. Students also discussed in their journals what they learned from participating in the two field trips. These finding can be interpreted that students in this study understood the concepts of the IC program and were able to describe in their journals the lessons and activities they enjoyed the most.

Findings from the observational field notes of two research assistants revealed that student participants were able to learn skills while they were allowed to work within their own color groups. They were able to acquire knowledge from the IC program and connect it to other learning.

- They are working in their color groups. Characteristics are really beginning to illuminate. Verbal communication has increased substantially since week one (Research assistant 1, field notes, July 12, 2007).

- My own interpretation was that the students had acquired the information and connected that information to themselves. They seemed to use their information to label others as a way to categorize persons. They had not yet acquired the skills or emotional knowing to use this knowledge as a means to better understand others and relate to them. However, I believe that they needed more time and activities to utilize the primary colors knowledge to better understand and relate with others (Research assistant 2, field notes, July 26, 2007).

Literature reports that students learning social skills need to be taught how to communicate assertively, engage in active listening, be able to take the perspectives of others, and practice problem solving techniques (Masty & Schwab, 2006). Smith and Gilles (2003) suggested that educational professionals develop a matrix that targets social skills in ways that will allow students to learn skills in different situations. Cooperative learning and interdependence with other students is one way in which Maag (1995) incorporates teaching social skills. Cooperative learning allows students to work as a group, depending on one another in completing tasks in the social skills trainings. An increase in knowledge and skills can be interpreted that teaching personality characteristics and social skills for among middle school students can produce better communication outcomes between students and adults using the IC program.

Conclusion 2. The parents benefited from the IC program, because they became aware of their children's communication skills. This conclusion of parent awareness is supported with the findings from the parent surveys and two personal conversations with the researcher. Before students participated in the IC program, two parents shared with the researcher their concern for their children's communication. Both parents wanted their children to excel in their communication with others and both were happy to have their children participate in the program.

Parents were asked to comment on how their children communicate with others. According to their responses on the surveys, parents reported that before participating in the IC program their children were able to communicate with others in ways that allowed them to daily begin conversations in a calm tone at an average rate of 47%; however, after participating in the IC program, parents reported their children's ways of communicating with others by starting a conversation in a calm tone increased to 90%. Therefore, parents observed a dramatic increase of positive communication behaviors of their children. In addition, students decreased the number of negative statements toward others from 13% to 10%.

Parents reported that before their children participated in the IC program, 60% of student participants were expressing interpersonal conflicts with parents by not listening to instructions and directions one to two times during the past 3 weeks. However after participating in the IC program, parents reported that only 33% of student participants were expressing interpersonal conflicts with parents by not listening to instructions. Student participant responses revealed that after participation in the IC program their interpersonal conflicts of arguing with parents and ignoring the rules at home were decreased by 4% compared to 24% before they started the IC program. This finding can be interpreted as an increase in willingness or ability to listen and follow directions and a decrease in interpersonal conflicts with parents.

An increase in parent awareness and involvement can be interpreted that parents play an important role in the academic and social development of their children. Parent involvement in the IC program can produce better communication outcomes for middle

school students because now students are aware their parents are paying attention to their needs and communicating with them as well.

Conclusion 3. The teachers benefited from the IC program because they became aware of student personalities and understood how using the IC program can be applied within the classroom environment. This conclusion of teacher awareness is supported with the data findings from the field notes and interviews.

- Overall, the students enjoyed the True Colors personalities program, they had not experienced this activity and are curious about themselves and who they are and what they are like. The culture is group-oriented and they seemed more comfortable, talked more in small group rather than rows of seats. The environment of the program is beneficial in this culture (Research assistant 2, personal communication, July 26, 2007).
- The students grew in awareness and will return to a deeper understanding later (Research assistant 2, personal communication, July 26, 2007).
- Some groups excelled in assignments as they helped each other. They seemed to draw each other out and excel (Research assistant 2, personal communication, July 26, 2007).
- The IC lesson activities were appropriate and beneficial. Students could identify themselves and explain why (Research assistant 1, personal communication, July 28, 2007).

Literature that supports teacher awareness and involvement reports that the best environments to teach social skills are environments where children are interacting with other children (such as classrooms, group homes, youth groups, or camps), because this is where students are developing social competence. In reviewing the literature, most of the social skills trainings have been conducted in the classroom setting because it allows access to more children with social behavioral problems and the classroom setting is a natural environment for children as they discover ways to interact with peers and teachers (Borus-Rotheram, 2001; Grizenko et al., 2000; West, 2004). Educational professionals

such as teachers, counselors, consultants, psychologists, and social workers, depending on the environment, work well in teaching social skills to children, according to Borus-Rotheram.

Researchers and developers of social skills trainings recommended that educators teach social skills just as they would teach regular academic skills (Begun & Begun, 1996; West, 2004). There should be some form of classroom structure with purpose, learning objectives, activities, as well as learning outcomes.

Teacher awareness and involvement with the IC program can be interpreted that teachers saw the importance of teaching middle school students personality and communication skills that encourage self development, and can be applied within the classroom environment.

Conclusion 4. The site and district administrators in charge of curriculum and policy became aware of the Color System as a program to promote student character, especially among extroverted youth who do not achieve in an individual task-oriented environment. The student participants who attended summer intercession were referred because their teachers felt they needed to improve their academic and social performance. Interestingly, the majority, 44% of student participants, showed Orange personality traits, which represent skillfulness, fun, and risk taking, and 73% of students had extroverted behaviors. Literature from True Colors support that students with Orange personality traits do well in classroom environments that are exciting, fun, unstructured, interactive, have an open seating arrangement, and are allowed freedom to move around (Lowry, 1988). This finding can be interpreted that orange personality students generally are the ones that experience difficulties in the traditional school setting. Reason for these

difficulties in the school setting has much to do with the personality type conflicting with the school environment.

Literature supports that classroom or school environment can have an adverse impact for students whose personality does not blend with the traditional culture of the school. In an article written about school culture, it was stated that school culture does affect behavior and achievement of students. School culture can be an obstacle to success and be discriminating to various subgroups (Patterson, Purkey, & Parker, 1986). Students with personality traits that do not fit the school culture may be perceived as disobedient, stubborn, disruptive, and incapable of meeting the standards set by the school. The orange personality of student participants does not match with the traditional norms in regular school environments. Traditional schools demand structure, rules, obedience, schedules, deadlines, and investigating research, which according to True Colors concepts are adapted to gold and green personality traits. On the other hand, students with orange personality traits tend to be very talkative, enjoy getting a laugh, enjoy competition and disregard timeframes, deadlines, rules and boring activities. For these students, it is important to communicate excitement, fun, freedom and variety, which was done in the IC program. This demonstrates how students with orange personality traits have a difficult time communicating in a school environment that does not support their personality and communication style, and can easily be discriminated against for possessing characteristics that radiate energy and excitement.

Literature supports the finding that True Colors is fast, easy way to introduce personality temperaments that can be applied to different settings such as the school, home, and work environments (Harris, 2000; Miscisn, 2001; Najera-Ketterman, 1997).

People who have been exposed to True Colors claim that it was easy to understand the terms and apply them to various areas in their lives, according to Miscisn. School districts officials can see the ease of institutionalizing a program such as the IC program that can help students in their academic studies. One purpose of this research study was to create a program for middle school students to obtain personality and communication knowledge and skills. The True Colors activities and lessons merged perfectly into the language art standards of listening, reading and writing. No special class is needed to teach the True Colors concepts. In addition, True Colors added support to the character education curriculum that had already been implemented at L Middle School. The decrease of student interpersonal conflicts and the increase in student, parent, and teacher awareness showed administrators the IC program is beneficial to middle school students who need additional support and can easily be taught in the classroom by teachers or counselors.

Conclusion 5. Using True Colors within the IC program helped parents, teachers, and school district administrators increase their awareness on how to help middle school students through lessons and activities with multiple tasks. This conclusion is supported from the data that reports that multiple-task activities attract the attention of students in the classroom and diminish traditional classroom redundancy. True Colors activities allowed students to work in their primary color group and depend on each other to complete team tasks such as creating a floor plan and designing a middle school. Students were exposed to lesson activities that included multi-task activities. These findings are well supported by the student journal writings.

- Today it was fun because we talked about our True Colors. There are four colors blue, gold green, orange. They all have a meaning and we all have our own order of colors (Student participant 1, lesson 5, journal entry, July 9, 2007).

- Today it was fun. We wrote about movies and TV show and what kind they are like horror, comedy, realistic and action. Then we wrote the main characters of Sesame Street and their personality (Student participant 1, journal entry, July 11, 2007).
- It was cool having Mr. H here. He taught us a lesson that everyone is equal and choose equal rights. Even though you do bad things correct your mistakes and make sure you do your best (Student participant 4, journal entry, July 16, 2007).
- Today is a beautiful day we are going to the Getty Center and before we went we had to draw a self-portrait. I looked so ugly but oh well. I think I'm still pretty. Then we went to get some stars and put them all over our face and I drew N and I put her a star and I watched a video on zyx college. Everyone was going crazy drawing their pictures. Ms. B gave us an example that was cool and we were seeking the different careers on E and everything was good (Student participant 4, journal entry, July 24, 2007).

These findings support similar findings from a school wide program conducted by the Center for Educational Policy (2003). This research, termed the Tennessee Study, supports that implementing True Colors school wide resulted in a variety of instructional approaches grounded by learning styles. Parent and community involvement improved while student discipline problems and absenteeism was reduced.

The literature from Bullis et al. (2001) suggests that a comprehensive program of social and personal skills is more valuable than a single subject program. Masty and Schwab (2006) contribute to this idea by promoting multiple-task activities. Students learning social skills need to be taught how to communicate assertively, how to be an active listener, how to see the perspectives of others, and to practice problem solving techniques. Lerner and Galambos (1998) recommend the same multiple-task type of activities. They suggested that programs should be designed to keep teens engaged in school by promoting positive development skills such as self- knowledge, understanding social relationships, and discovering abilities. Social skills booklets of Begun and Begun

(1996) emphasize that social skills should also be taught using teacher-led discussions, programming, role playing, discussion of performance, and including real life situations to provide generalization that can be applied in various environments other than school. Using True Colors within the classroom setting is beneficial for middle school students because it is a simple way to help students understand about themselves and it helps increase the awareness of parents, teachers, and school district administrators.

Conclusion 6. Action research is beneficial to researchers that want to explore or investigate problems within the school environment. For purposes of this study, the use of action research allowed the researcher to directly participate by teaching in the natural setting of the student participants. The researcher was able to observe the natural behaviors of students as they communicated with one another and allowed the researcher to gather student data through focus groups while simultaneously taking notes and recording. This conclusion is supported by the literature that reports action research has been successful in the field of education because it allows for professional development as well as professional and institutional change (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Action research allows the researcher to solve a problem, develop solutions, and improve instruction or student achievement simultaneously in the classroom environment (Ferrance, 2000). What drives action research is improvements in instruction, student performance, techniques, and strategies. The focus is how to do things better and make changes to impact students.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of this study, the researcher supports the recommendations in the following paragraphs.

Recommendation one. True Colors should not be only be taught to middle school students, but also to youth as early as elementary school for specialized groups that are at risk, juvenile delinquents, youth at probation camps, teen parents, foster care youth, and emancipated youth. Teaching these personal social skills allows students to become aware of their personality, understand themselves, and understand how their personality communicates with others. As students become aware of their communication style, they are able to make better decisions on how to reduce communication conflicts when engaged with adults and peers. If youth are not given the skills needed to find out who they are and how they communicate with others, students may continue to be unsuccessful in their attempts to achieve clear communications with others and will not know how to express their needs when they are not met.

Recommendation two. Include parents in the personal social growth programs for youth. Including parents in programs for youth allows parents to become more aware of their children and observe the communication behaviors their children are exhibiting at home. For educators, including the parents produces additional communication between the teacher and parent. The parents are aware of communication at home while the teacher is aware of the communication behaviors at school, and both can work together to help meet the needs of the student. The more the parent can understand their child, the more they can help meet their child's needs. Literature from the social skills trainings state that including parents and or caregivers can be a great asset because it involves the supportive link between home and school, and caretakers are able to participate in developing the new social behavior (NASP, 2006). The parent voice of participation is important in helping students achieve successfully in school. For example, the parent

expectation of their children's behavior is also exhibited in their communication behaviors at school.

Recommendation three. Encourage teachers to use innovative programs like the IC program within their classrooms. Teachers are able to engage students who are less motivated, students are engaged in the hands on lesson activities, students learn about their personal strengths, the teacher becomes aware of the personality strengths of children in the classroom, the program does not take away from the valuable academic lessons, and the program can be applied within the classroom environment. Academic knowledge is important; however, teachers need a tool that will allow them to teach those most-needed life skills that may not be taught in the home environment. It is important for teachers to provide students with both academic and social personal knowledge that will produce comprehensive learning for the student.

Extroverted Orange personality students will excel in a program that allows variety and freedom to explore, therefore it is also recommended for teachers to incorporate cooperative learning in programs like the IC program. Comprehensive programs that include lessons and activities that promote a cooperative learning environment allow students to communicate, work as a group, and depend on one another in completing tasks (Maag, 1995). It is recommended in changing the seating arrangement into small cluster groups of no more than four to five students per group. Students will identify their group as a team and will work together to complete in class assignments.

The researcher suggests that a comprehensive program such as this one should be scheduled to last longer than 4 weeks to observe the difference in communication

behavior among students. This suggestion is supported by the literature review.

According to the literature, the time frames for many social skills training are too short (3 to 6 months), and there is not enough long-term evidence showing benefits for the child (Bullis et al., 2001; Grizenko et al., 2000; Ogilvy, 1994).

Recommendation four. The IC program should be supported by site and district administrators. Administrative approval of the IC program will enable the program to be institutionalized into schools. True Colors is supportive of various curricula and programs such as language arts and character development. The American School Counselor Association requires for schools to provide opportunities for academic, career, and social development. Personal social development requires that students are developing interpersonal skills that allow them to understand and respect themselves and others. The IC program and can be imbedded in a communications class, chosen as an elective, or included in a summer or after school program.

Recommendation five. Include True Colors into personal development programs for youth. True Colors only takes 2 full days to train and become a certified trainer, True Colors is simple to use, students quickly understand the four-color concept, and True Colors can be applied as a supportive tool to any school curriculum. True Colors helps students identify their personality traits as compared to others in their social environments. Knowledge of personality and school culture is especially useful for middle school students as they move on to high school and pursue college and make decisions about careers. Personality and environment knowledge will allow students to eventually select careers that compliment their personality type. Furthermore it is recommended to colorize using True Colors as a school and community wide program as

did the Center for Educational Policy (2003) for the True Colors school and community program.

Recommendation six. Future researchers could apply the methods of action research to their educational research projects. The researcher found this method the most practical because it allowed the researcher to focus on the immediate needs of the students. The researcher was able to fully participate with the students and at the same time engage in observational evaluations and make field notes. In the case of this action research study, the researcher (teacher) was able to teach lessons in the IC program, observe the communication behaviors of students before and after the program, and evaluate the overall benefits of the program. Action research allowed the researcher to contribute to the personal and social transformation of student participants. The researcher was able to build a relationship with student participants as their primary teacher. In addition, action research allowed the researcher to make the appropriate recommendations for professional development and institutional change, such as teacher training and school district adoption of the program.

Recommendation seven. It is recommended that L Middle School and its teachers should obtain a 3-hour basic awareness workshop to understand and use True Colors in their schools and classrooms. As a result of the workshop, the school can become colorized and teachers can use the tool to better understand and work with the children in their classrooms. Classroom lessons and activities can be created to include all four-personality types; as a result more students will be engaged in the lessons because they are able to use their personality strengths in the classroom. In addition, further advancement of True Colors can be obtained if the school can find at least two teachers

who are willing to become certified facilitators, allowing the school to have qualified on-site facilitators.

Recommendation eight. It is recommended that each classroom within the school receive a parent-child workshop on True Colors so that parents can acquire True Colors knowledge in order to better understand their child, and children can better understand their parents. A 2-hour basic awareness workshop should introduce True Colors, engage participants in activities, and increase True Colors awareness.

Recommendation nine. It is recommend that True Colors be provided to students on a continuous basis during team advisory (homeroom). Teachers can use this time to help students understand aspects of personality and foster a full awareness of personal development. The time recommended for team advisory True colors instruction is 30 minutes each day for about 8 weeks.

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