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DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 155 583

CG 012 704

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TITLE   A Social Problem Solving Intervention and
                Consultation Program.
PUB DATE   77
NOTE   33p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the
                Southeastern Psychological Association (Hollywood,
                California, May 4-7, 1977)

EDRS PRICE   MF-$0.83 HC-$2.06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS   *Consultation Programs; Elementary Education; Higher
                Education; *Intervention; *Problem Solving; Program
                Descriptions; *Program Development; Public School
                Systems; *Social Problems; *Systems Development

ABSTRACT

        This document describes a university-related program
to teach social problem solving skills to sixth graders at a
predominantely black middle school, which evolved to become a systems
linkage intervention. The development of the Social Problem Solving
program (SPS) is discussed. The following stages are included: entry
into the school system, needs assessment, building of a research
team, securing permission of the ethics committees and parents,
development of curriculum, training of teachers, development of
assessment tools, and classroom training sessions. Further discussion
identifies the systems which have been linked with the project and
relates the strategies and rationale for the linkages. These systems
include the families of the students, the school psychology system,
the teaching and administrative staff, and linkages with the
university staff and students. (Author)

A Social Problem Solving Intervention and Consultation Program*

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In F. Medway (Chair) New directions in school mental health consultation.
Symposium presented at the meeting of the Southeastern Psychological Association, Hollywood, Florida, 1977.

Running head: Social Problem Solving

A Social Problem Solving Intervention and Consultation Program

This paper reports on the initiation, delivery and evaluation of a program for positive mental health carried out in an urban public middle school from the Spring Semester, 1976 to the Spring Semester, 1977. Specifically, this project involved the addition of Social Problem Solving Training to the curriculum of sixth grade students.

Briefly, Social Problem Solving (SPS) is the application of general problem solving strategies to interpersonal situations, according to Goldfried and Goldfried (1975, p. 104):

The general goal in problem-solving training is not to provide

individuals with specific solutions to specific problematic

situations, but rather to provide general coping strategy, so

that they may be in a better position to deal more effectively

with a wide variety of situational problems.

Our model of the social problem solving process can be outlined in five steps (Allen, Chinsky, Larcen, Lochman & Salinger, 1976; Goldfried & Goldfried, 1975; McClure, 1975):

a. Orientation to problem solving - acquiring the attitude that indi-

viduals are capable of solving their own problems.

b. Problem identification - identifying problems and defining them in

specific terms.

c. Generating alternative solutions - brainstorming for the purpose of

identifying the maximum number of possible solutions.

d. Consideration of consequences - evaluating available solutions in

terms of their probable outcomes.

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e. <u>Elaboration of solutions</u> - specifying the steps necessary to carry
out the chosen solution.

This paper is designed to describe the process of entering the school
system, developing the intervention and devising the techniques of measure-
ment and maintanence of the project. Research findings on the effects of
this project with sixth graders are not included in the present paper but
will be published at some future time.

This paper is arranged into five major sections which are chronologically
ordered. The first section is a historical overview dealing with the background
of the project, entry into the school system, initial environmental assessment
of the system and system maintanence procedures. Part II is a discussion of
the three types of training carried out as part of the project: teacher train-
ing, in class pupil training, and undergraduate assistants' training. The
evaluation methods are included in Part III; the process of linking resources
is described in Part IV. The final section deals with the family intervention
strategy which evolved at the end of the school intervention project. A
calendar which the formation of the project's components is presented in Table 1.

<center>PART I - HISTORICAL OVERVIEW</center>

<center>Background</center>

Prior to initiation of the project the middle school had been the subject
of much local concern. Parents charged that students were not being educated
in an acceptible social or psychological environment. It is difficult to por-
tray the unhappiness and anger many of the parents expressed over the manner
in which the school was being run. Parents, on an individual basis and in
groups, went to the Superintendent of Schools demanding that the principal
and some members of the administrative staff be removed from the school. The

following is a list of some of the parents' concerns which were presented

to the School Superintendent:

a. Black students were rejected by white teachers.

b. White students were looked down upon by teachers because they

    continued to recieve their education in the public school system.

c. Teachers lacked morale, competence and professionalism.

d. Although the school had a student population that was 90-93% black

    it had no black administrative staff.

e. Discipline measures used in the school were ineffective and antiquated.

f. Six and nine-tenths per cent of all white children were suspended

    and 14.9% of all black children were suspended during the 1972-1973

    school term.

Eventually the principal was given a higher level appointment, removing

him from the school. However, the parents were concerned that the problems

in school were not going to be eliminated by the removal of one individual.

Because of this concern several parents were looking for programs which might

benefit the school.

L. McClure, Ph.D. presented a colloquium in the Spring of 1975 at the

University of South Carolina on Social Problem Solving (SPS). Dr. McClure's

findings indicated that the SPS training had the potential of improving the

social functioning of individuals receiving the training. Shirley Fitz-Ritson,

the PTA president who was also a psychology graduate student was present at

the coloquium and later discussed this presentation with the District Super-

intendent in charge of middle schools and with the new principal at the school.

Both expressed an interest in meeting Dr. McClure if he came to work in South

Carolina.

Subsequently in January 1976, Ms. Fitz-Ritson arranged a meeting with the new principal, Dr. McClure, and herself. The outcome of the meeting was the enthusiastic support of the principal for initiating a SPS project in the school.

The original research team was formed in February 1976. The team consisted of Dr. McClure and five students (one of which was PTA president) in the Clinical-Community Psychology graduate program. Initial team meetings were spent in orienting the team to SPS as an intervention strategy and developing our team objectives. Undergraduate students joined the team as assistants in various aspects of the program. By the Spring semester (1976) thirteen university undergraduates were involved. Most were psychology majors and all received academic credit in psychology for their participation.

Entry and systems maintanence

Two questions frequently asked by school researchers are "how do I get into the system?" and "how do I stay in?" These were the questions we asked ourselves as we developed an action plan and proceded to begin our intervention.

Entry.

Our objectives for this entry stage were not only to gain permission and support to introduce a social problem solving curriculum in a middle school; but also we aimed for an attitude of ownership and collaboration on the part of the students, parents, teachers, and school administrator. We wanted them to feel responsible for and excited about the project and we wanted them to take their rightful place in the project, as experts in the workings of their own school environment.

Our method to reach these objectives can be broken down broadly into three basic ideas: a) "go through the front door" - be open about payoff,

and goals and what we could offer in return b) assess the needs and concern's of the system, in order to understand the school environment and to tailor the problem solving program to the specific needs of this school, and c) enter slowly enough to pilot methods, and be flexible enough to use feedback and reactions.

From the onset of the project, an attempt was made to establish a good relationship between the research team and the school staff members. In an early meeting with the teachers two points, noted by Allen, et.al. (1976), were emphasized. We focused our project on their school not as a criticism of the handling of educational tasks, but because the school setting provides a unique setting for preventive interventions. The school personnel constitute a group of concerned and approachable individuals willing to provide for more than academic needs. The other point emphasized was that although we claimed expertise in general principles of behavior management and intervention technology, the teachers were seen as the experts on the setting where the principles were to be applied.

With these objectives and methods in mind we began to assess the school environment. Important considerations were political stresses on the school, racial make-up, neighborhoods which made up the school population and who were the key figures in administration and parents' organizations.

As we entered we collected more information such as - how children are assigned to classes, experience level of teachers, and resources in the school.

Official gatekeepers. The next step was to encounter the official gate-keepers: University Research Committees, the School Board and the Principal. Official university permission to do research in the school was obtained through established University Committees. We began at this time to also

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check out other resources within the University which could help us in

or project - notably, funds available for equipment and materials available

for training. The School District was approached with the advice of a Uni-

versity faculty School Psychologist who worked closely with district officials.

Once we received approval of the district we could use this endorsement in

our future public relations work.

Teachers. We met with teachers to introduce ourselves, explain our

general goals and get their suggestions. Their initial response was cautious

and skeptical. We attribute their "wait and see" attitude to their previous

experience with projects, either governmental or university research, over

which they had little control or input. Also it appeared as if participation

in the project was an extra burden that the principal was giving the teachers

without much enticement or reward for co-operation.

Our reaction to these problems was a) to make our motivation and payoffs

clear - we let it be known that we were variously expecting to get research

credits, publications, fulfillment of course requirements, assistantship

requirements, and so forth, b) we offered alternative, optional payoffs for

teachers who would become involved as members of our research team, such as:

graduate credit hours, State Education Department credit units, and relief

from resource room duty in return for attending workshops during their regular

planning period, and c) we attempted to meet their expressed needs and concerns,

to validate their ideas as important and meaningful to us.

All regular sixth grade teachers were interviewed individually during

their free periods. The purpose of the interview was to get an idea about

what problems of the children come to the attention of these teachers, and

to understand how teachers felt about the problems confronting these children. During the interviews a variety of problematic behaviors were mentioned by teachers (such as rough language, hitting, fighting, stealing, and lying). Home problems were frequently mentioned. Half the teachers identified cultural (Black/White) differences as a source of problems for these sixth grade children.

Parents. We wanted parents to be involved and supportive of our program so we focused on making them aware of our project and its significance. We also felt it was important to become identified as members of the school community. We attended PTA meetings, open house, and the school spaghetti supper to become familiar faces and to demonstrate our intentions and be available to talk with parents and teachers.

During open house we demonstrated our teaching materials and handed out descriptions of our program and again, made ourselves available for questioning. In addition, that spring we sent a descriptive letter home to parents of sixth graders, along with a permission blank to be signed. Pre-testing this permission blank proved to be important. We learned that the title of our program: Social Problem Solving drew a defensive response from some parents ("My child doesn't have any problems"). We changed the title to Social Effectiveness Training when we sought parental permission the following fall. To counteract parental apathy we phoned parents who did not respond to our request for permission and answered any questions they had about our program. We felt that the phone calls emphasized the program's importance and that it was a regular part of the school program carried out with the regular classroom teacher. Unfortunately a significant portion of the

children's homes had no phone so we sent a letter home with the student.
An additional attempt to obtain permission slips was made by holding an
assembly for sixth graders to stimulate their interest in the program.

An assessment of family approaches to problem solving was developed
and administered to a sample of parents. Although not very successful in
collaborating with the Parents' system at that time, we did manage to gain
the support of the most influential people in this group. We were not blocked
in our efforts to implement the program. Since that time this aspect of
the project has been readdressed with more successful results.

Students. Our contact with the sixth graders themselves during Spring
1976 involved both piloting our training materials and evaluating the types
of problems these children actually have in school. The informal talks with
the children were conducted with two classrooms. First the children were
asked to list problems they have in the sixth grade. Next, children were
divided into small groups and were interviewed by a team member.

From the written exercise we discovered a low level of literacy skills
which precluded most written work in the program. In the written exercise,
however, fighting and teasing were the most frequently named problems. Main
problems mentioned in small groups were (in order of frequency): physical
violence (fighting, bullying, "picking at", blackmail),problems with the
teacher, verbal aggression(fussing at, cursing, namecalling), environmental
and family problems. While we were present in the school to conduct the
interviews informal observation verified these reports from teachers and
children and we began at this point, to develop a behavioral assessment
instrument which would give us information on the problem solving interactions
between students and teachers.

The overall picture from the students' perception seemed to be that the school was a scary place to be a sixth grader. Older children pick on the sixth graders, the youngest members of the middle school. Children often gave money to older children to avoid confrontation. Children were generally disappointed in the response of their teachers to these problems. Teachers were perceived by kids as indifferent and non-supportive of their requests for help.

Systems maintenance.

To show that we were committed to keeping up communication between the project and the school staff the role of project - school liaison person was established. Susan McCammon spent time at the school by attending faculty meetings and two days per week being in the teachers' lounge during the planning period (which also served as a break for the sixth grade teachers). Through this contact Ms. McCammon was able to perform the following functions by tapping both the formal and informal communication networks: a) public relations, b) rumor control and early warning to the project of problems at the school, and c) scheduling coordination. The liaison person legitimated herself to the teachers by working as a substitute one day when a sixth grade teacher of a particularly disruptive class was absent. Research team members occasionally ate in the school cafeteria.

In the system of this school the rapport building and liaison work was vital. The school is a chaotic place; there are constant changes in policies and schedules. Without being present in the school as much as we were, we would not have been aware of the constant shifting of schedules and children's classroom placement. We would also have been unable to understand the situation of the teachers and could not have

gained their trust.

Included in the measures we took to insure that we were allowed to
remain within the school's system are points which Phyllis Elardo of
Project Aware (1975) calls "factors responsible for success". The points,
as we applied them, were the following: a) there was a need indicated for
some type of intervention (described in the history section), b) we had
the support of educational leaders (see entry section), c) a dramatic
change was not required at the onset of the project, d) we had the support
of the teachers and the principal, particularly because we were willing
to work directly with the children and were involved in the classroom train-
ing. A curriculum and a workshop were produced and training the teachers
and group leaders was an important part of the program. We met for training
meetings during school hours at the convenience of the teachers. It was
arranged so that the teachers had extra incentives for their involvement
(i.e. credits needed for promotion). e) The teachers and principal were
required to take some responsibility in the project; meeting our objective
of establishing an attitude of ownership and collaboration on the part of
the school staff was a difficult and continuing task. f) The teachers
workshops and the classroom training were held at regularly scheduled times,
g) There was continuity in that the group which first served as a control
also recieved the training and we worked at maintaining communication with
parents to inform them of the project and familiarize them with it. h)The
project was always in the process of development and was open to creative
additions. We were flexible to the expressed needs of the teachers. It
was through our attention to these factors that we ensured the tolerance

of the school for our involvement in its system and avoided the rejection

phenomenon experienced by many who would intervene in a school.

PART II - TRAINING

Since Ms. Fitz-Ritson had past experience in developing training modules,

she took primary responsibility for the training component of the project.

Previous research in this area had very limited training components, there-

fore, it was felt that an expanded training program would enhance the over-

all treatment effect. The training component of the project had three major

divisions: an in-service workshop for the teachers and research team members,

a workshop for the undergraduate assistants (who led the second series of

in-class sixth grade training) and the actual training of the sixth grade

students.

Training teachers and graduate students

The training for the teachers and graduate students began in the Fall

1976, ran for 18 weeks, and was divided into three segments. During the first

eight week segment, Dr. McClure presented a series of short lectures on the

SPS strategy. Readings (a list of which is available from the authors) were

assigned to the group which covered the following areas: the importance of

building a trust relationship with the sixth graders, other SPS research,

the five stages of SPS, and the importance of internality versus externality

in SPS. Some of the materials (Problem Solving Measure, SPS workbook and

poster) were co-developed with the teachers. The teachers were also asked

to make suggestions as to the appropriateness of the video tapes for their

students. (Selected tapes from the Inside/Out series were used.)

The goal of the second segment of the workshop was to help the teachers

develop specific behavior management strategies for students who needed more than a primary prevention program. Dr. McClure and research team members used lectures, group exercises and assignments to introduce behavior modification as a classroom management technique.

The last four weeks of the workshop the teachers assessed their individual and professional goals for the school and looked at conflict within the system which had an indirect bearing on the project. It was felt that the conflicts among teachers, administrators, and between teachers and administrators have strong implications for any future systems intervention.

Training undergraduate research team members.

The second major division of the training was the undergraduate workshops. Nine undergraduate students were trained to be group leaders for the Spring semester 1977.

Since several of the undergraduate assistants expressed concern over their inability to understand what the lack students were saying Claudette Felder and Ms. Fitz-Ritson developed a training module to help the group leaders develop an awareness of the phonetic and structural differences in black english and standard english. Readings, discussion, and viewing unedited videotapes of conversations of black children from the community (who were not involved in the research) were used in the training.

Since the socio-economic and cultural background of the undergraduate assistants and the middle school students were very different a local substance abuse counselor conducted a three hour workshop on Values Clarification. The workshop stressed the importance of the undergraduates being aware that their value system might not be the same as that of the sixth graders with whom they would be working and the importance of accepting,

while not necessarily embracing, the values of the students.

During the initial weeks of the undergraduates' training, the characteristic behaviors of sixth graders, potential problems, and the behavior management responsibilities of the assistants were discussed to prepare them for their role as group leaders.

The last six weeks of the undergraduates' training were focused on the in-class training. During the workshop sessions, the lecture for each unit was discussed; the video tapes were viewed; leading the discussion groups was role played; the role play exercises for the students were discussed; and the closure procedure for each unit was reviewed. Group leaders were encouraged to share experiences (problems and successes) from the previous week's in-class training.

In addition, the undergraduates were trained to administer and score measures which were used in the evaluation of the project.

Approximately 160 sixth graders were involved in the project. The children's training involved exposure to videotapes; mini-lectures on the five stages of the SPS strategy and three lessons on integrating the five strategies, group discussion; role play activity; creative expression of the SPS steps (SPS workbooks, posters, and videotapes of their role play activities).

PART III - PROGRAM EVALUATION

The children (N=160) were randomly assigned to either experimental (trained) or control classroom groups. Teachers (N=6) were used as the primary change agents and introduced the experimental students to the SPS curriculum through a sequence of in-class SPS lessons (e.g. problem identification, generating alternative solutions, consideration of consequences).

The program's impact was assessed on the individual, small group, and classroom level. In addition, the mediating influence of teacher-student interactions, the teacher's work environment and the children's family environments were assessed.

Individual measures.

Program impact on the individual was assessed in several ways. As part of the formulative evaluation process the effectiveness of each particular lesson was monitored weekly by means of an In-Class Measure (ICM). These were quizzes or exercises designed specifically for each lesson and introduced as games. In addition, lessons were critized by teachers in the weekly in-service training. By monitoring the extent to which material was assimilated, weak areas could be re-emphasized and remedial help could be given when needed. These measures also demonstrated how the curriculum would be changed "next time" to make it better.

There were two individual measures of overall impact of the program: an indivudual Problem Solving Measure (PSM) and a locus of control measure. Pre - and post- treatment PSM's were given to all sixth graders individually by trained undergraduate students.) These measures consisted of several short vignettes, each vignette described a problematic situation which could happen to a sixth grader. Different stories were included in the PSM's administered after the SPS curriculum. The usefulness and scoring technique for the PSM's have previously been demonstrated (McClure, 1976).

The Internal-External Locus of Control measure (Norwicke-Strickland) was administered (pre- and post-) in classroom groups. A graduate student read the items, and individuals marked their own answers.

Small group measures.

After the experimental group completed their problem solving train-
ing, a behavioral measure of group problem solving was administered to all
sixth graders. The purpose of this measure was to assess ability to uti-
lize problem solving skills in the context of a small group. This measure
was called "Satan's Club" (after the school mascot) and was presented to the
children as a television game show. Groups of children were instructed to
set up a club. During the organizational process the group was faced with
several problems (e.g. not enough chairs, not enough club offices for
everyone to have a title, etc.) The reactions and problem solving strategies
of the children were videotaped, as part of the ruse and as a record to
score the effectiveness of their problem solving. This structured behavior
assessment had previously been used and validated in a study of social
problem solving (McClure, 1976).

School environment.

The mediating influence of the school setting on the child's coping
behavior was assessed with social climate scales and classroom behavior
observations. The Classroom Environment Scale and the Work Environment
Scale (Moos, 1974) were both used in the assessment. A behavioral class-
ification system was devised specifically to record the observed teacher-
student problem solving interactions.

Family environment.

Family contributions to the children's coping behaviors were ex-
plored with a sample of families (N=21) using the Family Environment
Scale (Moos, 1974) and family interviews conducted in the home.

PART IV - LINKING

An increasingly important role in the consultation and change agentry of the community psychologist is that of resource linker or liaison. This role entails identifying a problem or need and then facilitating the exchange of appropriate resources within and among relevant systems. These linkages span the range of levels for intervention: they may be between individuals, between individuals and groups, among agencies, or may involve various combinations of levels (for further explanation see McClure, 1977).

The linkages developed during the course of the SPS program constituted an important accomplishment of the project. These linkages have been our vehicle of approaching a primary goal of the liaison specialist, which is "to enable systems to function for people for human development needs" (Dokecki, 1977, p.14). The problems identified in the school were broad in nature. The SPS curriculum, an enhancement and skill building project, was in itself not designed to directly intervene in the current chaotic condition of the school. However, through being involved in the project, gaining the involvement of members of the system and linking various resources we were able to influence the environment containing the SPS intervention. This influence evolved from identifying and approaching problems among the teaching and administrative staffs, helping the School Psychologist to enter the system and increasing her involvement and that of the sixth grade parents.

This section briefly describes the linkages and how they were made. A diagrammatic scheme adapted from Emiley, et al., (1977) presents the linkages prior to and following our intervention. In the original presentation (SEPA, 1977) the diagrams were presented on an overhead pro-

jector and separate transparencies were included for each aspect of the project (i.e. linkages from the viewpoints of the Research Team, School Psychologist, School, parents and PTA, and within institutions). In the interest of conserving space and eliminating repetition of material, only the post-intervention perspectives of the Research Team, School Psychologist, and within institutions are presented in this paper, as they encompass most of the liaisons established throughout the project. Linkages prior to the initiation of the SPS Project are portrayed in Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 about here

The newly formed Research Team (described in History Section) had little access to resources within the University system. The professor involved had some contact with professors in the School Psychology Program. The School Psychologist was a graduate of the University School Psychology Program. Graduate students on the Team were familiar with library resources. Contacts of the Middle School included the School Board and Superintendent's Office, the PTA and through that group more contact with white parents than with black. Weak bonds existed between the Principal and Vice-Principal, the Guidance Counselor and Vice-Principal, sixth grade Teachers and Principal, and the Teachers and Guidance Counselor.

However, by the end of the year of the SPS program many more resources were tapped and annexed (See Figure 2). The initial linkages developed were

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Insert Figure 2 about here

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those which formed the Research Team. Skills brought to the group by each member were reviewed and tasks divided, so that each member ultimately had an area for which she/he had major responsibility. Resources within the University system were employed; faculty members in the School Psychology Program gave consultation and offered opportunities to discuss our progress with other professionals more familiar with working in schools. Undergraduates were screened and joined the project as invaluable classroom observers, small group leaders, and aides in data gathering and scoring. Video-tapes were located at South Carolina Educational Television for classroom training and were recorded for our use by the University Instructional Services Department. Team members contacted and consulted a University computer lab specialist in social science research.

The initial attempts at setting up communication with the parents of the sixth graders were our visits to PTA functions. Parents were also contacted by letter and in some cases additionally by phone to inform them of the project and obtain permission for their children to participate. Further involvement of the parents is detailed in the Family Intervention section.

Although our beginning contact with the school was through the principal we didn't rely on her as our main contact person. The basic and most essential contacts were with the sixth grade teachers through our weekly meetings and the students with whom we met weekly in the Problem Solving classes. Our resource exchange with the sixth graders consisted mainly of our providing them with interesting and enjoyable sessions designed to build problem-solving competencies in return for their input into our curriculum and their participation in our study. To their teachers we offered

the opportunity to become familiar with the concept of Social Problem
Solving as an important skill, instruction in how to teach it, and State
Department of Education credits. During the second semester as we trained
the second group of students the emphasis of the teacher workshops shifted,
as requested by the teachers. They felt they were sufficiently familiar
with some of the difficult classroom related problems they faced. These
included large classes, children far below grade level, inadequate texts
and materials, in some cases teaching assignments in fields they did not
feel qualified to teach, and extreme discipline problems in the classrooms.
Behavior modification consultation was provided to improve classroom control.
The teachers' responses to the Work Environment Scale (Moos, 1973) were used
to initiate a focus on the school environment and how problems in that system
were affecting the staff. In return the teachers relinquished their hour
break one day per week for the teacher training meetings. Three of the
teachers actually participated in the classroom training leading a small
group weekly. It required effort on the part of the teacher for their child-
ren to be involved in the classroom training and the assessment measures, as
this disrupted the ongoing routine and complicated their lesson planning in
order to compensate for the spent classroom time. The teachers were over-
loaded by demands from many directions, and although we felt our project of-
fered benefits commensurate to the efforts required it nevertheless was one
more source of demands.

The Vice-Principal proved to be a helpful person. Having worked at
the school many years he gave us historical background and offered a view-
point of the school from a perspective we had not seen. He aided us in
scheduling, locating students for assessment, placing those who did not have

parental permission to participate, and securing rooms for our needs. The teachers worked closely with him especially in the area of classroom discipline problems. He was invited and did attend several of the teacher training ses-sions after the emphasis focused on classroom and school problems. Another important person on the school staff was the Guidance Counselor who also at-tended the later teacher meetings and was involved in the Family component of the project.

It appeared that in addition to our benefits from linkage with resource people in the school, linkages already among those within the school were affected by our project. First, the sixth grade teachers had an opportunity provided to express and share many of their concerns, and seemed to develop an increased sense of being a group in themselves. Also their communication with the Vice-Principal and Guidance Counselor was improved. While their re-lationships with the students would have deepened over the course of the school year regardless of our intervention, through the SPS program the teachers were able at times to see skills in students which did not surface in the regular classroom situation.

The involvement of the School Psychologist was an essential element of linking services to the school, which prior to our intervention had not, re-quested nor received any services from the School Psychologist during the beginning of the project year or recent prior years. As we were asked for con-sultation regarding problematic students in the classroom we established contact with the School Psychologist assigned to our school. An in-service program was set up in which the School Psychologist attended a Middle School faculty meeting, introduced herself, and explained the services she could (and was anxious to) provide. Teachers referred individual problem students to her.

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We included her in our project meetings and worked at problem solving some of the difficulties the teachers faced. She attended the teacher workshops from our project when they covered these problems. In these meetings the Teachers, Vice-Principal, Guidance Counselor, and School Psychologist were frequently all present together, along with two members of our Team as their regular consultants.

This contact aided the School Psychologist in instituting a linkage with these people. It provided a unique opportunity for them to work together in a problem solving approach to difficulties which affected the work of each (see Figure 3). The contact of a school psychologist with teachers had

Insert Figure 3 about here

typically consisted of consultation regarding individual students referred by the teacher as having difficulties. The school psychologist in the district encompassing our school is responsible to five schools, giving him or her a caseload of 1200-1300 children. Realistically this allows daily contact with three referred children and two or three teachers. The SPS Project helped to initiate a linkage with the entire Staff of the school by providing an oppor- tunity for the Psychologist to explain her possible functions and publicize pos- sibilities other than assessing individual students for removing them from the regular classrooms. The weekly workshops provided an opportunity to attempt to modify six classroom environments by teaching management techniques to the teach- ers. Relationships among the School Psychologist ant the Guidance Counselor and Vice-Principal were strengthened. The potential for contacts with the home and family was increased. Through involvement with the Project the Psychologist

could act on a programmatic rather than on an idividual case level. These contacts provided a basis for her to exercise a wider range of skills than those of testing and program planning for individual students.

PART V - FAMILY INTERVENTION

After working with the sixth graders in the problem solving workshops for the first semester, we began questioning whether the messages the children received from their families were contradictory to the training. That is we became acutely aware of the possible differences of the coping skills of the population under investigation from children in an earlier study by the senior researcher (McClure, 1971). The questions that emerger are: (a) what is the relevance of the strategies being taught for the child in his immediate environment? (b) How can we build more effectively upon the strategies that are learned in the family? An exploratory study was designed by Ms.Felder to assess the role of the family environment as determinants of children's social problem solving strategies. The questions sought to be answered through this survey a

(a) How can the school and families communicate more effectively?

(b) What are the families' perceptions of the role and function of the school for their children?

(c) Do parents view the school's role in a similar manner to school personnel?

(d) How do parents' views differ from the school's view of its role in a child's social development?

(e) What problem strategies are reinforced by families?

(f) Is there congruence between family systems and school systems in the reinforcement of problem solving strategies ?

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The ultimate goal of this study is to determine the needs of these families and then devise an appropriate intervention that will facilitate the training of social problem solving strategies with the target children. A subgoal, though not necessarily minor, is to establish a link between the school and families.

The study is being conducted by interviewing at least one family member (mother, father, grandmother, older sister, etc.), and having them complete the Moos Family Environment Scale.

The interview questions are designed to assess in addition to the above questions, parents' or another significant adult's knowledge of the kinds of problems that his/her child encounters in school, home or neighborhood. (For example: Does your child ever have problems at school, home or in the neighborhood?; if so what are the problems?) We are also interested in how parents instruct their children to solve problems. (What do you tell your child to do when he/she has a problem?) The preceding questions help determine if parents' instructions are congruent with the strategies that are reinforced in the school systems.

The Moos Family Environment Scale is a forced choice scale that assesses the social climates of families along three dimensions: relationships, personal growth, and system maintenance. There are ten subscales divided among the three dimensions. (Moos , 1974)

The interview team consisted of Ms. Felder and six trained undergraduate interviewers. The training consisted of simulated interviews and discussions of necessary techniques and potential problems and how to deal with them. The team consists of five black and two white interviewers. Black interviewers were assigned to interview black families only, likewise white interviewers

conducted interviews with white families only. Matching race of interviewers and families was decided upon to help insure that interviewers were sensitive to the interviewed family, also to facilitate rapport with the families and to gain the most accurate verbal reports possible.

In order to implement this study, approval was obtained from the school board, because the contact with the families was made through the student population by obtaining names and addresses from the school. The Director of Housing for the subsidized housing projects in which a significant number of the black families live was also contacted to gain support for the study. Prior to beginning the interviews, letters were sent to all the families outlining the intentions of the study.

Preliminary findings

Some general findings are:

a. Black parents generally feel alienated from the school. Possible factors are: the Blacks are inner-city children bused to a suburban school and inaccessibility of the school. (Black parents often do not have transportation to evening events - such as PTA meetings - because of bus schedules. This was mentioned specifically by two black parents aside from the questions asked during the interview.)

b. Parents, black and white, were often vague or unsure of interpersonal problems that their children have; a frequent response to the question about their child's problems in school was an answer concerning academic difficulties.

c. When a child does encounter problems at school most parents report that this information comes from the child's teacher, seldom directly

from the child.

d. Parents tend to instruct children to rely on the teacher for problem resolutions at school.

e. At home or in the neighborhood, parents often intercede for the child when there is a problem (for example parents stated that they instruct their children to come to them if they are having problems with other children).

SUMMARY

A social problem solving intervention and consultation program was initiated in an urban middle school. Initially, the intervention aimed at providing children with specific coping strategies. However, the program eventually encompasses a broad multilevel network.

The process of entering the school system involved teachers, parents and students. Rapport and program administration were facilitated by means of a systems maintanence philosophy and the designation of a school liaison worker.

Training was aimed at a variety of levels: teachers, students and undergraduate assistants. An in-service workshop prepared the teachers to co-develop and implement the social problem solving curriculum. Undergraduates were trained to be group leaders. In addition to the curriculum this training included awareness of black english, values clarification and group management. Sixth grade in-class training employed a variety of techniques: video-taping, role playing, discussion and creative expression.

The social problem solving curriculum was evaluated by randomly assigning classes and designating groups to treatment or control conditions. The evaluation was designed to measure pre- and post- differences on a variety of

measures and also to determine environmental correlates of program effectiveness.

The consultation intervention expanded as resources were linked. School personnel, university resources, families and district psychological services had access to each other by means of the consultation team. Particularly, families became more involved during an assessment of family problem solving. The family assessment component to the problem solving intervention designates inroads to increase program effectiveness.
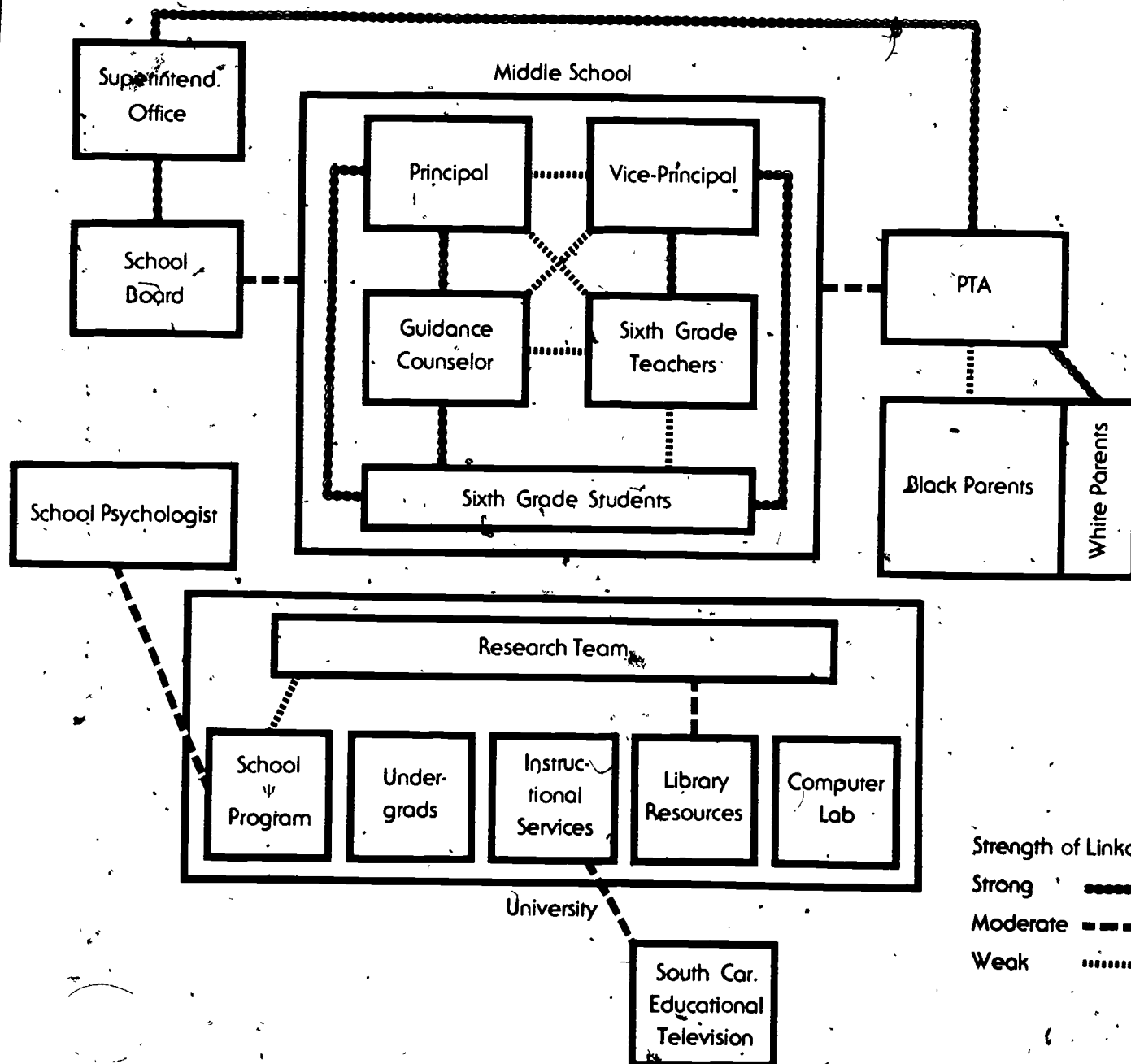
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HISTORY AND TIME SEQUENCE OF SCHOOL SOCIAL PROBLEM SOLVING INTERVENTION

Time Frame [1]	Activity

School years:
1973-1975
	Local concern over school administration
	  Parents presented grievances to school superintendent
	  Principal replaced

Spring 1975	L. McClure coloquium introducing Social Problem Solving Research.
Fall 1975	Meeting between PTA president, Dr. McClure, and the school principal

Spring 1976	Research team formed
	Entry initiated
	  Research team familiarized with the school, its population
	  and history
	  Permission to do research in the school obtained: School
	  Board and University Research Committee
	Began collaborative process of program development
	  Collected descriptive data about school
	  Met with teachers to assess their needs and reactions
	  Initiated negotiation of compensation to teachers
	  Met with students to assess their problems and concerns
	  Met with parents for assessment and introduction of program
	  Piloted permission blanks
	  Piloted program materials
	  Began development of classroom observation system
	Randomization of Fall 1976 sixth grad class assignments

Fall 1976	School liaison position created Negotiation of compensation for teachers' involvement Pre- measures taken (PSE, I-E, CES, etc.) Teacher and group leader in-service training began Program initiated with experimental groups Classroom behavioral observations initiated Late in semester training of undergraduate assistants began
Spring 1977	Experimental group completed problem solving curriculum Post-measures taken Problem Solving Curriculum initiated with control group Family Assessments initiated In-service workshop expanded to include classroom manage- ment techniques School Psychologist participated in in-service training

[1] Time frame designated in terms of school semesters.

Fig. 1

Middle School

Superintend. Office

School Board

Principal

Vice-Principal

Guidance Counselor

Sixth Grade Teachers

Sixth Grade Students

PTA

Black Parents

White Parents

School Psychologist

Research Team

School ψ Program

Under-grads

Instruc-tional Services

Library Resources

Computer Lab

University

South Car. Educational Television

Strength of Linkage
Strong
Moderate
Weak

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FIG. 2

Middle School

Superintend. Office

School Board

School Psychologist

Principal

Vice-Principal

Guidance Counselor

Sixth Grade Teachers

Sixth Grade Students

PTA

Black Parents | White Parents

Research Team

School Ψ Program

Under-grads

Instruc-tional Services

Library Resources

Computer Lab

University

South. Car. Educational Television

Strength of Linkage
Strong ●●●●●●●●
Moderate ▬ ▬ ▬ ▬
Weak ▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪

32

FIG. 3

Strength of Linkage
Strong ■■■■■■■
Moderate ▬ ▬ ▬ ▬
Weak ▪▪▪▪▪▪▪▪

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