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## Effective Instruction Of Social Skills To Increase Student Achievement In Elementary-Aged Students

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EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL SKILLS TO INCREASE STUDENT  
ACHIEVEMENT IN ELEMENTARY-AGED STUDENTS

Kate Grahek

Hamline University

A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master  
of Arts in Teaching.

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

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Content Expert: Kristin Reilly

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This project was created to provide more insight into the positive effects of teaching social skills to elementary-aged students. With that, this project was created to offer assistance to educators due to the lack of time during the day. The purpose was to define social skills, discuss necessary skills to teach students, and finally, different strategies of teaching the skills. It also discusses the individuals and groups that benefit when positive social skills are taught to young children. It is all in one place for teachers to browse and implement in their daily instruction. My research question is: *How can educators successfully implement social skills with elementary-aged students to increase their overall achievement?* The project is focused on the importance of implementing social skills to elementary-aged students as well as a resource for teachers that do not know where to start or what to implement.

Much of this project was inspired by my work in an elementary school setting in an urban city. I had daily experiences with students that did not have the specific skills to cope with emotions. I have seen first-hand that the students in my classroom, as well as other students in the building, could benefit from explicit social skill instruction in order to succeed in academics and peer relationships. I also have spoken to numerous educators about this issue and many times heard the response that there was not enough time in the day to teach explicit social skills. The educators barely had enough time for the core subjects such as math, reading, and writing.

I realized that this subject was important in schools and I wanted to create a project to help educators realize the importance of teaching social skills to the students in his or her classroom. I wanted one resource that was not overwhelming with research but provided enough so that teachers saw the importance.

The project created was a website with all of the relevant information. The website has the following pages:

- Home
- What Are Social Skills?
- Necessary Skills
- Delivery Methods & Strategies
- Community Benefits
- References

All of these pages cover the research discovered in the capstone paper. These pages will give educators quick information about how social skills are defined, which skills are necessary for students to have, the different ways to teach those skills, and who benefits from the students carrying those skills.

# Social Skills in Elementary School Website

<https://kgrahek02.wixsite.com/eledsocialskills>

## Homepage

This site was designed with the **WIX**.com website builder. Create your website today. [Start Now](#)

[SOCIAL SKILLS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL](#)

[Home](#) [What Are Social Skills?](#) [Necessary Skills](#) [More](#)

# SOCIAL SKILLS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

## Effective Instruction to Increase Student Achievement

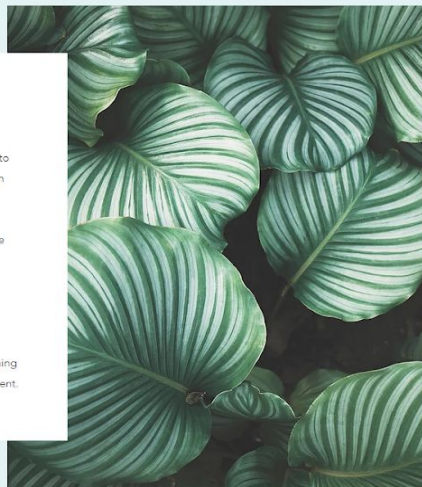
As teachers, we spend close to nine months of the year with our students, trying our best each and every day to shape them into intelligent and successful humans. Along with teaching the core academics, it is our job to teach social skills to help our students navigate through life, beyond the walls of the school.

## ABOUT

Based on research, this website provides ways to effectively teach basic social skills to students in elementary school.

Not only is it important for students to learn the skills, but it is crucial that they practice and implement these skills over time.

Although teachers are busy and the list of demands only seems to grow, this research highlights the importance and effect that teaching social skills has on a student's overall achievement.



[WHAT ARE SOCIAL SKILLS?](#)

[WHICH SOCIAL SKILLS ARE NECESSARY?](#)

[COMMUNITY BENEFITS](#)

[WAYS TO TEACH SOCIAL SKILLS](#)

## GET IN TOUCH

If you'd like to discuss social skills in elementary school, give feedback, or anything additional, please reach out!

kgrehak02@hamline.edu

Name   Email

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Subject

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[References](#)

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# What Are Social Skills? Page

## WHAT ARE SOCIAL SKILLS?

Many have heard the phrase [social skills] but what are they exactly? This question is broad and many researchers have varying definitions.

Did you know 60% of children enter school with the cognitive skills needed to succeed but only 40% of those students have the social-emotional skills to succeed in kindergarten because of their pre-schooling environment?

[\(Aehdoun and Bernard 2012\)](#)



### SOCIAL SKILLS DEFINED

**Social skills:** the necessary abilities people need to interact adaptively in society ([Lawson, 2003](#)).

We are constantly learning social norms and expectations in our everyday living. However, we were not born knowing how to positively interact with people around us or how to apply skills to add to our overall well-being.

Many students enter school ready to learn and start the path to academic success, but without the proper social and emotional skills, a student may find themselves struggling in one or more areas. Positive social skills and relationships are associated with a child's overall achievement in the categories of behavior, emotions, and academics

[\(Blair, 2002; Connell & Prinz, 2002; DeRosier, 2004; Eisenberg, Sadovsky, & Spinrad, 2005\)](#).



### PEER RELATIONSHIPS

Similar to adults, children have to be able to decide what they want from other people and to communicate those needs clearly ([Rotheram, 2013](#)).

When students start school, they begin to form peer relationships from the start. They may share toys or converse during morning circle, or have play dates outside of school or sit closely near a peer while they work. Peer interactions are happening constantly for students.

[Parlakian \(2003\)](#) argued that when students have appropriate social skills, they begin to feel more confident and competent in developing those relationships, building friendships, and resolving conflicts with peers and adults. When students do not carry these skills while interacting with peers, it can lead to social withdrawal ([Rotheram, 2013](#)).



## ACADEMIC SUCCESS

A student's academic success is also positively affected with social skill instruction. Research by suggested

A student's mastery of social skills is connected to a better school performance overall ([Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, and Schellinger, 2011; January, Casey, and Paulson 2011](#)),

[DiPerna and Elliot \(2002\)](#) stated that similar to peer relationships, when a student feels confident and competent in an area, such as academics, their academic achievement increases.

When educators promote healthy social skill habits such as confidence and competence, students internalize those feelings and use them to make their lives better. [Bernard \(2004b\)](#) suggested that when students lack those skills, they are at a higher risk for academic difficulties. Students with low social-emotional competence have an overall lower reading achievement, as well as lower levels of organization and persistence.

As students progress through school and the academics become more difficult, students can rely on social skills to help them through it. The ability to engage in certain social skills such as managing emotions, setting goals, making positive decisions, and maintaining positive relationships can be a strong predictor of a student's future academic achievement ([Wentzel, 1993](#)).



## OVERALL WELL-BEING

**Social competence:** a person's ability to interact successfully with peers and adults ([Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence, 2011](#)). Children that perceive themselves as socially competent show fewer signs of depression ([Ross, Shochet, & Bellair, 2010](#)).

Teaching young students confidence, persistence, organization, and emotional resilience, as well as social-emotional competence, lays the foundation for their achievement and well-being ([Aehdown & Bernard, 2012](#)).

Educators have the ability to lay the groundwork to provide students with these necessary skills and support young students when they are in and out of the classroom ([Center on the Social Emotional Foundations for Early Learning, \(2008\)](#)).

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## IN SUMMARY

The effectiveness of teaching social skills to elementary-aged students contributes to their peer relationships, academic success, and overall well-being. The research confirms that the confidence and competence of a student contribute to their overall success.

Regardless of age, without intervention, children that struggle in social relationships often face an array of difficulties later on in life such as dropping out of school, drug abuse, depression, antisocial and behavior.

The overall purpose for educators to successfully teach social skills goes beyond helping a student for the present time. Educators are able to use their knowledge and past research to set students up for success for years to come.

([Howes, 2000; Keane & Calkins, 2008; Ladd, 1990; Johnson, Ironsmith, Snow, & Poteat, 2000; Snyder, 2001; Tremblay, Masse, Papani, & Vitaro, 1996](#)).



# Necessary Skills Page

## NECESSARY SOCIAL SKILLS FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

While the purpose of teaching social skills is a bit more clear, which social skills to implement is often harder to decide. When discussing which social skills to teach in schools, there are two common themes: **emotional skills** and **social development skills**. These skills make up how a person functions in society and are learned by children at a very young age, contributing to their academic and personal achievement.



### EMOTIONAL SKILLS

Emotional skills, sometimes referred to as social-emotional skills or soft skills, incorporate the understanding, experience, expression, recognition, and management of emotions ([Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2019](#)).

Emotional skills are intrapersonal skills typically happening within one's self. As students move through the primary grades, they are learning key emotional competencies such as self-regulation and positive peer relationships ([Blair & Bayer, 2015](#)). Although we learn a lot of these emotional skills throughout life, such as self-regulating ourselves when upset, developing empathy for others, and self-reflection, many of these skills do need to be taught to young children.

Many programs, such as [You Can Do It! \(YCDI\)](#), focuses on teaching confidence, organization, persistence with difficult tasks, and emotional resilience. Similarly, CASEL, or [Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning \(2019\)](#) focuses on five emotional skills that are important for all young children: self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. All of these skills require a child to be aware and understand what is happening in their minds.



### SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT SKILLS

Similar to emotional skills, social development skills involve the knowledge, understanding, and appropriate skills to relate to others effectively and interact in positive ways with the people around them ([Be You, 2019](#)).

These skills help students with daily interactions. People learn these skills throughout life, such as knowing it is polite to say "please" and "thank you" or hold the door open for someone, but direct instruction is useful when students enter school.

Students that have social inferential abilities, or the ability to notice someone else's emotional state and imagine themselves in their position, have more positive social interactions ([Rothbart, 2013](#)). Social awareness, conflict resolution, and positive peer relationship building are all positive social development skills that, when taught effectively, can contribute to a student's overall achievement.

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## IN SUMMARY

Both emotional skills and social development skills are crucial to everyday life. Humans are at their best when they can control themselves and interact effectively in society.

While these two groups of skills are extremely broad, it is clear that both should be taught when looking at which skills to teach elementary aged students. The two groups overlap and may build upon each other so educators should aim to find a balance between the two categories in order to increase student's overall success.

[Social Skills in Elementary School](#)

# Delivery Methods Page

## DELIVERY METHODS AND STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING SOCIAL SKILLS IN THE CLASSROOM

Not only do educators want to know the purpose behind effectively teaching social skills to students to increase their overall achievement and which skills to teach, but they also need to know how to use this information to deliver the social skills. There are several ways to effectively teach social skills to students and it depends on the educator's personal preference and the students they are teaching.



### THROUGH PHYSICAL MOVEMENT

Educating students through physical play is an effective social skills training strategy that allows students to be mobile in their natural setting of play ([Laddell-Fabrizio, Ayres, & Eider, 2017](#)).

Inspired by Peter Arnold, the Educating Through Physical (ETP) model suggests that children learn about the world through playing and moving around ([Craig, 2016](#)). When given a social skill, such as self-control, waiting, or responding to rules and routines, the ETP model teaches students through movement how to successfully handle and practice these skills.

While it is mostly made for physical education and special education teachers, this kind of learning is great for students that have difficulties sitting still and present social deficits in a typical classroom learning environment that all educators can tie into their daily routines. All students like to wiggle and move, so incorporating social skills such as sharing, taking turns, and self-regulation through movement is one way to implement them.



### THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

With the rise of technology in the world, it is becoming more common for people of all ages to engage with technology in some form. Children are no exception. Teaching social skills through technology can be effective because many students know how to operate cell phones, computers, and tablets easily.

One form of teaching social skills with technology is through video modeling ([Haydon, Musti-Rao, McCune, Clouse, McCoy, Kaira, & Hawkins, 2017](#)). Video modeling is a kind of video instruction that allows students the chance to watch a video of a model performing the desired behavior over and over ([Bridwell & Rehfeldt, 2006](#)).

There are two ways to teach social skills this way. The first is instruction through video prompting where the student watches a model perform the part of the task ([Cihak, Fahrenkrog, Ayres, & Smith, 2010](#)). The other variation is video self-modeling, where a student serves as the model ([Haydon et al., 2017](#)).

Video modeling is portable, versatile, and requires minimal teacher assistance. In addition, it carries less of an embarrassing stigma for students, such as students with disabilities, because it is all available on the technology device and can be completed just like any other assignment given ([Haydon et al., 2017](#)).

Although teachers would need to be trained on how to properly set up the technology device, such as a tablet, it is mostly student-led. With that, students can conference with the teacher about specific skills that he or she wants to work on and go at their own pace. Social skills that could be used with video modeling could be but are not limited to, how to appropriately respond to situations, taking turns to listen and responding in a conversation, and how to resolve conflicts.

Another way to incorporate technology is through game-based learning. In-person social skills training can be expensive and take significant amounts of time, but with game-based learning, more students can benefit.

An example is a program called [Zoo U](#) was introduced to children, an interactive online game for elementary-aged students that uses evidence-based social and emotional learning strategies in a videogame format. The program teaches age-appropriate skills to students and collects data on how they handle various situations prompted during the game, making it ideal for Response to Intervention (RI) data collection. Zoo U is not the only game-based social skill program out there, but it is an example of how an interactive, kid-friendly program can teach students through technology. With Zoo U, children reported feeling more satisfied and confident about their social relationships, showing that teaching social skills through technology has the potential to be something very positive for students ([Craig et al., 2016](#)).

Technology is how many students learn in today's educational world so incorporating a game-based strategy to deliver social skill training to students may increase motivation and engagement.



#### THROUGH LITERATURE

While many classroom teachers and other educators may not have the availability to use physical activity or technology, there is the option of teaching social skills effectively through literature-based approaches. Teaching social skills through other core subjects, such as literature, has been a convenient and approachable way for teachers to teach social skills throughout the day (Dennis, Masterson, & Bondy, 2011).

Because of limited time, teachers are often on a time crunch to fit in math, reading, and writing. Not only is there limited time to teach these subjects, but there are always going to be interruptions to the schedule that educators do not have control over. Teaching social skills through core subjects is a way for teachers to ensure students are getting their academic needs met, as well as their social skills.

Wanada et al. (2011) stated that pull-out programs for students needing extra social skills time are not ideal because there can be a negative stigma attached to it and those students do not necessarily transfer those skills to the real world. With that, all students, regardless of their background or needs, can benefit from social skill instruction. Teaching social skill instruction through read-alouds in the general education classroom is feasible for teachers because it is already happening in the classroom so a separate social skills time block is not needed. Students can have open discussions and learn through characters in the books instead of hypothetical scenarios in other forms of delivery.



#### THROUGH CURRICULUM

Another way that educators can implement social skills instruction is through basic curriculum. There are many free social skills programs on the Internet, as well as programs available for schools to purchase.

While the list of commonly used social-emotional programs is long, the majority of programs take anywhere from twenty to forty minutes per lesson (DiPerna et al., 2018). The issue is that teachers often skip these lessons to make time for the core subjects if time is tight. With that, consistency is crucial.

With a program called *Skillstreaming* which targets four skills (listening, following directions, problem-solving, and knowing when to tell), it was found that the lack of a follow-up assessment around the six month and one year mark to verify that gains were being made and sustained by students was lacking (Sheridan, Donlon, Kuhn, MacDonald, Friedman, & McGovern, 2011). This means that although curriculum-based programs are great and beneficial, a main part of the success is consistency.

Formal lessons with curriculum-based programs have positive results when they are taught daily over long periods of time. The greater the intensity and the longer the duration, the more positive outcomes (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012).

Although time-consuming and difficult to keep consistent, educators and children can benefit from the use of explicit and direct instruction of social and emotional skills through curriculum lessons.

Each program is unique in its own way in terms of which target skills they chose and the duration of each lesson, the programs typically use modeling, coaching, and reinforcement from the educator (Graham & Elliot, 1999). These programs typically give real-life contexts and scenarios that are applicable to the students (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012). Typically, the targeted social skill is named and explained explicitly and the educator gives the reason the skill is useful. For example, an educator may say that the skill the class is discussing is self-control which is when a person can keep control of themselves. If we have self-control, then we will not hit our friends if we are upset. The students then role play a scenario or read a vignette about using self-control. The teacher gathers feedback from the rest of the class and talks through how the self-control was demonstrated.

It was found that the combined effects of teaching social skills through curriculum-based instruction are more helpful and stronger in the long run than the educators simply responding to a student's social and emotional needs in less structured ways (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012). However, it is most important to note that consistency and intensity are required to see gains.

## IN SUMMARY

The four ways to teach social skills to students is only a brief snapshot. As technology grows and the need for social skill instruction increases, people are getting more creative in how students are learning. Regardless of how the skills are taught, educators that consistently push social skill instruction at elementary students will see a positive outcome and an increase in their achievement. Moving forward, educators should take the time to get to know their audience and figure out which way of instruction best suits the students.

No matter which way the skills are taught, the idea of being explicit, consistent, and intentional while teaching social skills is what matters.

# Community Benefits Page

## COMMUNITY BENEFITS

There are many individuals that benefit greatly from social skill instruction in elementary schools, most clearly **the students**. They are able to interact with peers and adults in more mature and strategic ways. They are better able to communicate and get their needs met in an effective manner. However, students are not the only people that benefit from positive social skill instruction. **Educators** also have a lot to gain when social skills are implemented into the school day. They are able to spend less time managing behaviors and more time educating. **Families** are also a group that can gain something from social skills being taught in schools. They are able to implement useful skills at home and in the community, creating a school-to-home connection for the student.



### STUDENTS

When discussing why educators should try and effectively teach students the necessary social skills to increase their overall achievement, it is clear that the students being taught are benefiting the most. Elementary-aged students are like sponges, soaking in all of the information they are taught from the moment they enter kindergarten. They apply this knowledge in their everyday lives and, with the help of experiences and relationships, grow as human beings.



### EDUCATORS

Not only do students benefit from effective social skill instruction, but educators do as well. Addressing students' social and emotional development is not simply an extra task for teachers to try and fit in if possible; rather, it is a crucial part of learning that will help all students in school and for the rest of their lives ([Cox & Anderson, Weisberg & Walker, 2001](#)).

When students are actively participating in social skills lessons and applying them to their growth and development, their academic levels tend to increase, which in turn, benefits the educators (CASEL, 2012).

Not only are academics affected, but the overall calmness and respect in the classroom increases ([Johnson & Bernard, 2012](#)). When students are getting along and under control, it makes the educator's lives much easier. There is less behavior management and more academic teaching happening. By making the time to fit in social skills instruction, whether it is through physical movement, technology, literature, or curriculum, it can increase the atmosphere in the classroom which is helpful to the educator at school.



### FAMILIES

Students spend approximately 180 days in school. It is without question that they transfer skills they learn at school to their home life. By effectively teaching social skills at school, the hope is that students will bring them into their personal lives as well. As young as kindergarten, children are developing socially and emotionally at a rapid speed ([Cohen, Kaufman & Finkel, 2000](#)). Research suggests that students that have positive home-school relationships have optimal child development (Christianson & Sheridan, 2001; Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders & Simon, 1997; Knoff & Swick, 2007; Ryan, Adams, Gullotta, Weisberg & Hampton, 1995).

Teaching social skills in an effective way may benefit the student greatly, but a real challenge is teaching the students in a way that can use in the real world. Communication between the parents, family, and educator could help everyone, including the student, to better understand why the child is acting out and how to help ([Luka et al., 2011](#)). In turn, the school and the families could work together to determine consequences and effective responses ([Luka et al., 2011](#)).

Whether social skills are taught at school could then be carried out at home. Studies that reported that parents and teachers generally do not have high levels of communication about students, regardless of their age ([Gutman, Cohen, Doolin, Adams & Libendash, 2009; Cohen & Beardslee, 1994](#)). If families and educators communicated the targeted social skills students were learning in the classroom, there would be more consistency of positive behaviors ([Luka et al., 2011](#)). When teachers stated they had strong relationships with parents and were able to communicate what was being taught in the classroom with families, they were more likely to rate the children in their classroom as more socially competent and less aggressive ([Luka et al., 2011](#)).

Just like any core subject, when families are involved with the student and are incorporating school learning into their home lives, the students are much more influenced and able to apply ideas they have learned into their everyday lives.

## IN SUMMARY

It is easy to simply believe students benefit from social skills, but there is much more to it. Educators and families are equally benefiting, although maybe not as directly. With positive social skill instruction, educators and families may be able to work together to help students succeed even more in and out of the classroom.

# References Page

## RESOURCES & REFERENCES

As part of a Masters of Arts in Teaching program, this website was designed based on the creator's research. All references can be found below.

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