Socially Skilled- Successful Students: Improving Children’s Social Intelligence through Social Education Programs

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Abstract

Purpose: The current study investigated the effects of a social education program on the development of children’s social competence (SC). The social education program titled, ‘Socially Skilled - Successful Students: The 4S Program’ was implemented in one Sydney Metropolitan co-educational preschool.

Design/methodology/approach: A mixed factorial design, using a pretest-posttest control method was employed to determine if the 4S Program could increase children’s SC. The Behaviour Assessment System for Children - Second Edition, Parent Rating Scale- Preschool (BASC-2 PRS-P) was completed by parents at pre and post intervention phases to obtain a measure of their child’s SC. It was hypothesised that the 4S Program would increase children’s SC thereby fostering the development of their social intelligence (SI).

Findings/results: Findings indicated that there was a significant difference in the SC of the experimental group from pre to post test. It was unclear whether this difference was attributed to the 4S program however because the control group also showed a significant growth in SC.

Practical implications:

Originality/value:

Keywords: Social education programs; social competence; social intelligence; preschool children

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Introduction
Humankind’s ability to interact with others is considered to be one of our most valued and significant attributes (Freeman, Sullivan, & Fulton, 2003). The need for successful social interaction is an inherent aspect of human social life which is essential to a child’s cognitive, emotional and social development (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). A fundamental component of a child’s social development is their capacity to continually acquire and develop the social skills necessary to become socially intelligent. While some forms of intelligence are innate, social intelligence depends upon the acquisition and mastery of socially accepted and valued social skills. That is, social intelligence is based on the acquisition of certain social skills that are valued within a particular society, and therefore comprises a distinct form of intelligence that can be developed over time (Goleman, 2007). In order to develop social intelligence an individual must learn, and continually develop, the necessary social skills required to become socially competent in a wide variety of social contexts. Because social skills are malleable, they are learnable, teachable skills (Elliot & Busse, 1991). An important area of future research resides in creating and implementing effective social skills training programs, specifically in preschools and primary schools. Targeting young children as the focus of social education programs may result in improvements in their social competence and subsequently, their social intelligence. In turn, this may enable them to function more effectively in future social interactions and their broader social worlds (Heydenberk & Heydenberk, 2007).

Social Intelligence Defined
The term, social intelligence was originally defined by Thorndike (1920) as an individual’s ability to understand and manage others; involving their active engagement in adaptive social interactions. Over the years, many theorists have extended and challenged this original definition (e.g., Moss & Hunt, 1927). According to Sternberg’s (1984) triarchic theory of human intelligence, an individual’s social intelligence is a constituent of a larger repertoire of self-knowledge whereby they try to solve the practical problems they encounter in their physical and social world (Kihlstrom & Cantor, 2011). The most comprehensive definitions take into account both the social and cognitive components of the construct. For example, Vernon, 1933 defined it as ‘an individual’s: ability to get along with people in general, social technique or ease in society, knowledge of social matters, susceptibility to stimuli from other members of a group, as well as insight into the temporary moods or underlying personality traits of strangers’. (p. 44). Integrating all these components, a contemporary definition of social intelligence is: the ability to successfully perceive, remember, understand, and interpret social contexts, cues and information. More specifically, social intelligence is the use and application of cognitive processes to social contexts.

An important component of social intelligence is social competence - the execution of socially appropriate behaviour. Social competence is a multidimensional construct encompassing “cultural, demographic, adaptive behavioural and social skill variables” (Gresham & Elliot, 1987, p. 168). Further, to perform appropriate social behaviours individuals must successfully perceive social cues and interpret these cues correctly (Minne & Semrud-Clikeman, 2012). In this way, social competence and social intelligence are intrinsically linked: an individual must possess the necessary cognitive skills (such as perception and interpretation) in order to perform socially competent behaviours. This combination of possessing and applying cognitive strategies to execute successful social behaviours is indicative of an individual’s social intelligence. Conceptually, social competence comprises two subdomains: adaptive behaviour and social skills (Gresham & Elliot, 1987). According to Gresham and Elliot (1987) individuals who possess high levels of social competence are able to successfully meet the demands of daily social functioning and are equipped with the skills to take responsibility for their own, and other people’s welfare. On the contrary, those individuals with low social competence do not have the necessary skills to cope with these demands or take responsibility for their own welfare, or the welfare of others. Developing social skills is fundamental in pursuing positive and avoiding negative relationships (Freeman, Sullivan, & Fulton, 2003; Gresham & Elliot, 1990). As such they are critical to the development of social competence and social intelligence.

Social skills encompass a wide array of behaviours required for social interaction. They are best conceptualised in regards to their functional relationship to socially valued outcomes (Grizenko et al., 2000). Common characteristics include: successful social responses, awareness of social norms, understanding corrective feedback and using this feedback to alter behaviour
Bandura’s (1977) Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) posits that we learn social behaviours from our observations of others; in particular, that we encode ideas about how behaviours are performed and recall this information on later occasions where it serves as a guide for action. Importantly, social skills are socially learned behaviours that allow an individual to effectively interact with others by maximising positive responses and minimising negative responses (Gresham & Elliott, 1987; Grizenko et al, 2000). Defined in this way, social skills comprise identifiable specific behaviours that can be used as an index of social functioning (Rissanen, 2011). Examples of how children can display these social skills include: helping behaviour or requesting help, initiating and maintaining relationships, complimenting others and demonstrating manners, such as ‘please’ or ‘thank you’. These are socially desirable behaviours that are widely accepted as being indicative of a child’s social skills (Elliott & Busse, 1991).

Gresham and Elliot (1990) devised the acronym ‘CARES’ in order to identify the five major clusters of social skills:

1. Cooperation - behaviours such as helping others, sharing materials with a peer and complying with rules;
2. Assertion - initiating behaviours, such as asking others for information, and behaviours that are responses to others actions, such as responding to peer pressure;
3. Responsibility - behaviours that demonstrate the ability to communicate with adults, and concern about one’s property;
4. Empathy - behaviours that show concern for a peer’s or significant adult’s feelings;
5. Self-control - behaviours that emerge in conflict situations, such as responding appropriately to teasing or to corrective feedback from an adult. (Elliot & Busse, 1991, pp. 64)

Successful mastery of social competence is a significant developmental and educational achievement that is positively correlated with a child’s overall well-being and academic performance (Durlak et al., 2011). Children must develop the ability to utilise appropriate social skills in order to successfully interact with others in a range of social contexts, such as in the home, school or community environments (Hall, Jones, & Claxton, 2008).

Research has shown that children who are unable to master the necessary social skills experience difficulty in communicating with, and relating to others. Deficits in social skills can result in problems with playing, learning and cooperating with other children (Frostad & Pijl, 2007). In some cases this may result in experiences of isolation for the child, which can lead to the child being ignored or rejected by their peers and most importantly, not developing long-term, stable group memberships (Rissanen, 2011). Copeland (2006) found that children who experience deficits in social skills are more likely to present with behaviour problems, including aggressive behaviour and social maladjustment, as well as learning difficulties. The effects of peer isolation can be severe. Children may not establish a sense of belonging at school; it may hinder their access to future social experiences and can impact negatively on their self-image, confidence, motivation and performance at school. Identifying and improving deficits in social skills in early development is critical, as student’s who fail to progress in their social development early in life, may struggle in transitioning from preschool to kindergarten (Ladd & Price, 1987), and may become more resistant to future interventions (Lane, Menzies, Barton-Arwood, Doukas & Munton, 2005).

The inadequate development of social skills is cyclic in nature: if a child does not develop appropriate social skills, it can lead to social issues that result in further inability to acquire the fundamental skills necessary to succeed in social life. Developing and encouraging social competence in the school setting may facilitate the long-term development of social intelligence, leading to improved abilities in future social domains, such as pubescent interpersonal relationships, leadership roles, future education and occupations.

Social Skills Programs - Developing Social Competence in the Classroom

In educational settings, much of a student’s disposition will be determined by their social skills (Heydenberk & Heydenberk, 2007). This has major implications for educational programs. When students are provided with the skills to handle social situations effectively, they develop an increased sense of self-efficacy and the motivational dispositions that enable functioning in other areas of social life. To encourage the development of children’s social competence it is vital to incorporate into the school curriculum key aspects of successful socialisation such as how
to interact in socially skilled and respectful ways, practise positive and healthy social behaviours, and contribute ethically to their social networks (Greenberg et al., 2003). An implicit goal of formal education is to facilitate the social development of students to foster responsible, socially skilled, prosocial, contributing and caring members of society. Schools play an important role in nurturing children by facilitating not only their cognitive and academic development, but also fostering students’ social and emotional development (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor & Schellinger, 2011). Because schools and educators facilitate students’ social interaction for up to six hours per day, the schooling environment plays a pivotal role in fostering social competence in students (Haggerty, Elgin, & Woolley, 2011) and thus may assist in facilitating the development of their social intelligence. A multitude of studies have investigated the effects of promoting social competence in classrooms in order to facilitate social decision-making and problem-solving (Elias, 2002), social competence (Wentzel, 1991), prosocial behaviour (Chalmers-MacDonald, 2005) and social goals and behaviour (Frey, Nolen, Van Schoiack, Edstrom, & Hirschstein, 2001).

Despite social skills having an important role in academic progress, programs targeting this crucial area of development are not commonly included in formal schooling curricula (Hall et al., 2008). In part, this may reflect a reliance on parents to teach such skills at home. However, many children commence school without sufficient development of the social skills necessary to function effectively in the school environment. This may be due to media influences, reduced adult supervision, increased poverty or changes in contemporary family structures. Consequently, increased rates of noncompliance, disruptive behaviour and peer interactions are frequently reported in educational contexts (Hall et al., 2008).

Research suggests that school-based interventions that promote and improve students’ social development are promising approaches to enhance the success of children in school and later life (Haggerty, Elgin & Woolley, 2011; Heydenberk & Heydenberk, 2007; Payton et al., 2008; Zins & Elias, 2006). Findings from meta-analyses on the effectiveness of social skills programs have been positive, and support the effectiveness of these programs for educating children on prosocial behaviour (Hall et al., 2008). Thus, implementing social skills programs in primary schools and preschools has substantial importance from a developmental perspective. The principles of Bandura’s (1987) Social Learning Theory are fundamental to the formulation of social skills intervention plans; in particular, the assumption that social skills are primarily acquired through learning which involves observation, modelling, rehearsal and feedback (Michelson, Sugai, Wood and Kazdin, 1983). Children learn important social skills vicariously (i.e. by observing others), via trial and error, or through guidance from older, more experienced individuals (Frostad & Pijl, 2007). Interventions focusing on social skills to improve children’s social competence emphasise the importance of positive behaviours and utilise non-aversive methods such as modelling, teaching and positive reinforcement (Elliott & Busse, 1991). One such intervention, The Stop and Think Social Skills Program (Stop & Think) developed by Howard Knoff (2001), is a primary prevention program for children, developed to teach prosocial skills based on behavioural and social learning theory. The activities are administered by an adult facilitator or teacher and the program is divided into four levels: PreK-1, 2-3, 4-5 and 6-8. The PreK-1 level involves teaching with modelling, prompting, role-playing, group activities and feedback. The skills that children learn at this level include (a) survival skills, including listening, following directions and using pleasant talk, (b) interpersonal skills, such as waiting one’s turn and how to interrupt politely, (c) problem-solving skills, including asking for help and ignoring others, and (d) conflict resolution skills such as dealing with teasing and losing, and accepting consequences. Early evidence supporting the effectiveness of this program came from multicomponent, psychoeducational interventions (Ysseldyke & Christenson, 2002).

More recently, Hall, Jones and Claxton (2008) evaluated the effectiveness of the Stop & Think Social Skills Program as a stand-alone intervention, using the Social Skills Rating System Teacher Questionnaire. They employed a sequential cohort design involving two groups of kindergarten students in each cohort. Results from Cohort 1 revealed that the kindergarten students showed increases in social skills and academic competences, and decreases in problem behaviours. Results for the non-equivalent control group (Cohort 2) showed that the findings were not due to maturation. The authors concluded that the Stop & Think program is an effective stand-alone program available for use in public co-educational kindergarten classrooms to improve social skills.
Despite the apparent effectiveness of social skills programs in educational settings, there is debate regarding the appropriate age to include children in such programs, with conflicting evidence about optimal efficacy in different age groups. Schneider and Byrne (1985) conducted a meta-analysis of social skills training studies and found that social skills programs had greater effectiveness for preschool children and adolescents, rather than primary school aged children. However, other research has provided support for the efficacy of implementing social skills programs in primary schools (Hall, et al., 2008; Knoff, 2001). Recent evidence suggests that social skills training interventions are generally effective for children aged 3-8 years (preschool to Year 2) (Spence, 2003).

What Should Effective Social Education Interventions Target?

According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2013), the effectiveness of social-emotional learning (SEL) programs involves commencing programs in preschool and continuing them through to high school. CASEL have identified five groups of interconnected cognitive, affective and behavioural competencies that SEL programs should encompass. These five competency clusters include: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making.

Three of these competency clusters are especially critical in the development of social education programs. Social awareness requires the child to demonstrate empathy and take the perspective of others, to understand ethical and societal norms for behaviour, and to recognise family, school and community resources and supports. Furthermore, relationship skills involve communication skills including, clear and concise communication, active listening, cooperating with others, effective conflict resolution and offering and seeking help when required. Finally, responsible decision making is an individual’s ability to make productive and respectful decisions about one’s own behaviour and social interactions by considering ethical standards, social norms, safety concerns, the consequences of their actions and the well-being of self and others. These competencies, in turn, establish strong grounds for better social adjustment and academic performance which are reflected through increased positive social behaviours, peer relations and academic outcomes, and reduced conduct problems and emotional distress (Durlak et al., 2011; Greenberg et al., 2003). Therefore, it is clear that social skills intervention programs would benefit from incorporating activities that focus on these core social competencies.

Knoff’s (2001) Stop & Think Social Skills Program has been shown to be a successful social education program when implemented in primary school classrooms. Therefore, when devising social skills programs that are to be implemented in classrooms with young children (aged 5-7) it may be advisable to include activities that address Knoff’s PreK-1 Level social skills. An understanding and mastery of these social skills may lead to improved social competence and subsequent increases in social intelligence.

Researchers purport that play is a fundamental component of a child’s development and its incorporation into preschool and early childhood programs is essential (Hanline, Milton, & Phelps, 2008). This is because actively engaging in play allows a child to grow across many developmental areas. A specific form of play is sociodramatic play (Piaget, 1962) which occurs between ages 3-4 and involves children assuming dramatic roles and acting out scripts, scenes, or books using themselves and/or animate objects such as dolls, puppets or utensils. This allows them to interact with others on shared ideas through the use of role playing, social interaction and verbal communication. Studies have shown positive correlations between the frequency and complexity of a child’s sociodramatic play, and problem-solving skills (Fisher, 1992), and social competence (Connolly & Doyle, 1984). Reinforcement strategies and corrective feedback can be incorporated by facilitators into children’s sociodramatic play in order to facilitate change in their behaviour and cognition (Minne & Semrud-Clikeman, 2012).

Children can also acquire appropriate social responses through teacher modelling and instruction. The teacher can give directions to prepare and guide the children to participate in teamwork and cooperation activities (Freeman, et al., 2003). Thus, activities that involve children using sociodramatic play and teacher facilitation may help them interact with others, and learn and remember relevant social skills and content.
Aims

Despite the overall effectiveness of social education programs and social skills interventions implemented in primary schools, no study to date has implemented a pretest-posttest research design with preschool-aged children to determine if participation in social education programs leads to improvements in social competence that may be linked to improvements in social intelligence.

The purpose of the current study was to investigate what effects the implementation of a social education program may have on preschool children’s social competence and the potential for long-term improvements in social intelligence. As no unified measure of social intelligence currently exists, a measure of social competence was employed and results obtained were used to extrapolate whether the social education program may have increased social intelligence where improvements in social competence are evident. The aim of the study was not only to investigate the effects this social education program may have on the children’s social competence and potentially their social intelligence, but also to improve their social functioning and competency as a result. This aim involves a certain degree of beneficence to the children participants. Although implicitly attempting to improve social competence, the social skills activities completed in the study are intended to be fun and engaging for the children and may improve their social intelligence, allowing them to function more effectively in social life. A secondary aim, therefore, was to explore the effects on individuals, because regardless of effects on the group, significant changes in an individual are important outcomes; particularly for certain children.

This study aimed to contribute to the current body of knowledge by providing a preliminary account of the effectiveness of a social education program on increasing children’s social competence and possibly their social intelligence.

The research question asked - can a social education program implemented in a Sydney metropolitan co-educational preschool increase children’s social competence and thereby, improve their social intelligence? It was hypothesised that the implementation of the social education program, ‘Socially Skilled- Successful Students: The 4S Program’ will increase children’s social competence thereby fostering the development of their social intelligence. To answer this particularistic research question (Maxwell, 2005), a mixed factorial design, using a pretest-posttest control method was undertaken to determine whether the 4S Program leads to improvements in social competence.

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited from an independent, co-educational preschool located in the Sydney metropolitan area in NSW Australia. The preschool’s manager was contacted for consent to their students’ involvement in the study. As the preschool was an independently run organisation, approval was required from the preschool’s committee. Once approval was granted from the preschool’s management committee and the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee a total of 40 parents and/or caregivers were contacted to obtain consent for their child’s participation in the study. This took place in the form of a brief face-to-face meeting at the preschool in which they were provided with a formal information sheet outlining the details of the research.

The participants were divided into two groups: an experimental group, and a wait group. The experimental group participated in the 4S Program between July and September (Term 3) and the wait group did not participate in the program; serving as a control group to provide a comparison between the effectiveness of the 4S Program, and no intervention at all. Of the 40 parents/caregivers contacted, 38 consented to participating in the study: 20 from the experimental group, and 18 from the wait group. However, due to participant attrition pretest data was collected from 31 children (14 girls, 17 boys, Mage = 4.6 years, age range: 3:11- 5:5). The experimental group comprised 17 children (8 girls, 9 boys, Mage = 4.6 years, age range: 4:0-5:3) and the wait group comprised 14 children (6 girls, 8 boys, Mage = 4.6 years, age range: 3:11-5:5).
Group allocation was determined by the preschool’s manager and the classroom teacher. Due to differences in class sizes and attendance rates on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, the children who attended preschool on Mondays were allocated to the experimental group and children who attended on Wednesdays were allocated to the wait group. Aside from attending on different days of the week, children in both groups had an average age of 4 years 6 months, had the same class teacher, completed the same preschool curriculum and were taught in the same classroom.

The participants formed a purposive sample, in so far as the children were recruited because they met the demographic characteristics (preschool students, aged 4-5) necessary for a study of this nature (De Vaus, 2002). However, their allocation to either the experimental or wait group was a matter of convenience for the preschool, based on which day the students attended. A limitation of the participant sampling procedures was the potential for group membership to act as a confounding variable; however this could not be controlled for due to sampling constraints and the naturalistic nature of this study.

The small sample size (N=31) presented concerns about generalisation of the results to the wider population of pre-school children beyond the current sample. However, as this study aimed to evaluate a newly-developed program in a particular setting, the preliminary evidence it yielded was intended only to inform future programs. De Vaus (2002) advises that if a researcher is not seeking to generalise their findings to the wider population, and is limiting their findings to the sample under investigation, then obtaining a large sample size is not critical. As such, adhering to recommendations of ideal sample size was not considered to be essential for the purpose of this study.

Although there is debate regarding effectiveness of programs at different ages, research shows that social skills interventions are effective in preschool and kindergarten contexts (students aged 4-7 years) (Hall, et al., 2008; Knoff, 2001; Schneider & Byrne, 1985). Given that early socialisation processes are critical for children’s social and cognitive development (Dunsmore & Karn, 2004), it is important for children to be exposed to social education programs as early as possible. For this reason preschool students were targeted in this study.

Materials

The 4S Program involved the implementation of eight social skills activities in the classroom. Activities were taken from endorsed educational sites (Kids Matter: Australian Primary Schools Mental Health Initiative, 2012; PBS Parents, 2012) and combined to produce an eight week social skills program. To ensure the use of the most relevant activities, selection of the eight specific activities was made one month prior to the study’s commencement, in consultation with the preschool. The activities targeted different areas of social functioning necessary for young children, including identifying interpersonal relationships, conflict resolution, communication skills, manners, sportsmanship, safe play, sharing and being kind to others. For an explanation of the eight activities completed in the 4S Program, refer to Appendix A.

A number of resources were required to effectively run each activity. Standard classroom resources such as writing and drawing equipment (i.e. pencils, crayons, felt-tip pens) were provided by the preschool. Additional resources including books, craft supplies, puppets and stuffed animals were provided by the researcher so as not to put additional strain on the preschool’s finances and resources.

Additionally, several children’s books were required to run the activities. Only two of the activities had specifically designated a certain book to read; the Week 4 Good Manners activity which required What Do You Say, Dear? by Seslye Joslin and the Week 7 Share Tactics activity which required The Doorbell Rang by Pat Hutchins. However the preschool advised that they often use books as a means of introducing the children to new ideas, and to accompany learning activities. Therefore in order to provide the children with some continuity between their normal learning style and the 4S Program, four additional books were selected by the researcher that reflected the social skill being taught in the respective week. Josh’s Smiley Faces: A Story About Anger, accompanied the Week 2 Conflict Resolution activity; Cork and Fuzz- Good Sports, accompanied the Week 5 Good Sport activity; Percy Plays it Safe, accompanied the Week 6 Safe Play activity and Have You Filled Your Bucket Today? A Guide to Daily Happiness for Kids, accompanied the Week 8 Kindness Tree activity.
The Behaviour Assessment System for Children- Second Edition (BASC-2) was the instrument used to measure SC. The BASC-2 has two separate tests: the Parent Rating Scale-Preschool (PRS-P) and the Teaching Rating Scale- Preschool (TRS-P). These tests are comprised of 2 profiles: the Clinical Profile, and the Adaptive Profile. Only the PRS-P was used in the current study in order to minimise demand on the classroom teacher, and only the 37 questions relevant to the Adaptive Profile were asked, as these specifically address areas of social functioning. The Adaptive Profile is comprised of 4 subscales: Adaptability, Social Skills, Activities of Daily Living and Functional Communication skills. Items included “offers help to other children” and “says ‘please’ and ‘thank you’”. Parents were required to indicate how frequently each behaviour occurs by circling “N” (Never), “S” (Sometimes), “O” (Often) or “A” (Almost Always). Scores on each question were then summated to produce an Adaptive Skills Composite (ASC) (an overall score of SC). High scores on the Adaptive Profile indicate high levels of adaptive skills, and hence, SC. The BASC-2 has moderate to good reliability and validity, with the PRS ASC yielding a Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.82 (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004).

The Reliable Change Index (RCI) calculator (DeFife, 2004) can be used to determine whether a change in an individual’s score from pretest to posttest is statistically significant or not (Jacobson & Truax, 1991). The RCI calculator automatically calculates the significance level by subtracting the posttest score from the pretest score and dividing this by the standard error of the difference. In order to calculate the RCI, the researcher must provide the pretest and posttest means and standard deviations, the test-retest reliability of the measure being used and the participant’s pre and posttest scores. The test-retest reliability for the BASC-2 PRS-P is .77 (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004) and was used to make the calculations. This software was used to determine whether an individual child’s pretest ASC score was significantly different from their posttest ASC score.

Design

The present study consisted of a 2x2 mixed factorial design, using a pretest-posttest control method. All participants’ parents and/or caregivers were asked to complete the BASC-2 PRS-P at pretest (i.e., pre-program) and posttest (i.e., post-program), and these two measures served as the within-subjects factor. Furthermore, the participants were divided into two groups: the experimental group which participated in the 4S Program, and the wait group which acted as a control or comparison group, and did not participate in the program. These two groups served as the between-subjects factor.

Therefore the research design consisted of one within-subject factor (the administration of the BASC-2 PRS-P), with two levels (pretest and posttest), and one between subjects factor (the intervention) with two levels (wait group and the experimental group [4S Program]). The independent variable was the social education program, titled the ‘4S Program’. The dependent variable was the participant’s Adaptive Skills Composite score from the BASC-2 PRS-P which provides an overall score of social competence. Therefore the purpose of the present study was to determine whether the 4S Program could improve social competence, which may be indicative of increases in social intelligence.

Materials

An eight week social education program, The Socially Skilled-Successful Students: 4S Program, was developed specifically for the purpose of the study. This program involved the implementation of eight social skills activities in the classroom. Activities were taken from endorsed educational websites (Kids Matter: Australian Primary Schools Mental Health Initiative, 2012; PBS Parents, 2012) and combined to produce an eight week social skills program. To ensure the use of the most relevant activities, selection of the eight specific activities was made one month prior to the study’s commencement, in consultation with the preschool. The activities targeted different areas of social functioning necessary for young children, including identifying interpersonal relationships, conflict resolution, communication skills, manners, sportsmanship, safe play, sharing and being kind to others. For a detailed description of the eight activities completed in the 4S Program, refer to Appendix A.

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The 4S Program provides a soundly formulated intervention. The activities selected for the program are theoretically and empirically based, that is, grounded in theory and research relating to social learning, social skills and effective pre-existing programs. Bandura’s Social Learning theory (1977) asserts that individuals can learn via observation, modelling and imitation. Most of the activities completed in the 4S Program involve either a teacher or peer modelling the appropriate behaviour and allowing the children to learn appropriate social responses through imitation. Additionally, activities are based on the five major clusters of social skills detailed by Gresham and Elliot (1990). For example, the Conflict Resolution activity specifically relates to Cooperation, Assertion and Self-control clusters; the Good Manners activity is related to Cooperation, Empathy and Responsibility and the Good Sport activity addresses Cooperation, Assertion, Responsibility and Self-control.

Based on Piaget’s (1962) assertion of the efficacy of socio-dramatic play to facilitate social interaction amongst children and research showing positive correlations between a child’s socio-dramatic play and social competence (Connolly & Doyle, 1984), it was essential to include many play-like activities within the 4S Program. Among the activities included in the program are dressing up and attending a make-believe tea party to practice manners, and using puppets and role-play to demonstrate safe play techniques.

Empirically, the choice of activities to be included in the 4S Program were derived from Knoff’s (2001) Stop and Think Social Skills Program: a program grounded in behavioural and social learning theory and validated as an effective stand-alone social skills intervention (Hall, et al., 2008). The incorporation of activities in the 4S Program that address PreK-1 interpersonal, problem-solving and conflict resolution skills was done so on the grounds that Knoff’s program has been empirically supported and its effectiveness established.

**Measure**

The Behaviour Assessment System for Children- Second Edition (BASC-2; Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004) was the instrument used to measure social competence. This is a norm-referenced diagnostic tool designed to assess behaviours of children and young adults, aged 2 to 25 years. Although not developed for the measurement of social competence per se, the test items ask about behaviours that provide an index of socially competent functioning.

The BASC-2 comprises two separate tests: the Parent Rating Scale- Preschool (PRS-P) and the Teaching Rating Scale- Preschool (TRS-P). These tests are comprised of 2 profiles: the Clinical Profile, and the Adaptive Profile. Only the PRS-P was used in the current study in order to minimise demand on the classroom teacher, and only the 37 questions relevant to the Adaptive Profile were asked, as these specifically address areas of social functioning. The Adaptive Profile is comprised of 4 subscales: Adaptability, Social Skills, Activities of Daily Living and Functional Communication skills. Items included “offers help to other children” and “says ‘please’ and ‘thank you’”. The PRS-P requires only low level reading ability, and takes approximately 10-20 minutes to complete depending on the scales used. Parents are required to indicate the frequency of each behaviour by circling “N” (Never), scored as 0, “S” (Sometimes), “O” (Often) or “A” (Almost Always), scored as 4. Scores on each question are then summed to produce an Adaptive Skills Composite (ASC), yielding an overall score of social competence. The possible range of scores is 10 - 79. High scores on the Adaptive Profile indicate high levels of adaptive skills, and hence, social competence. The BASC-2 has moderate to good reliability and validity, with the PRS ASC yielding a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.82 (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004). Test-retest
reliabilities for periods from one to eight weeks were between .70 and .80 for individual scales across all age groups

Procedure
After consent from the parents was obtained, the study ran for 10 weeks in total, during Term 3 (July through to September). The first phase of the study involved pretest data collection. In the first week of the study, parents and/or caregivers whose children were in the experimental and wait groups completed the BASC-2 PRS-P about their child. As the pretest BASCs were returned to the preschool, they were scored using the BASC-2 Manual (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004), and all data were recorded in Microsoft Excel and securely stored for the following 8 weeks.

The second phase of the research involved implementing the 4S Program in the classroom. The 4S Program was 8 weeks in total, running from week 2 until week 9 of the NSW school term. The program involved children in the experimental group participating in one social skills activity every Monday morning, for half an hour. The social skills activities specifically targeted areas of social functioning including interpersonal relationships, conflict resolution, communication skills, good manners, how to be a good sport, safe play, sharing and how to be kind to others (see Appendix A).

During the 8 weeks in which the 4S Program was implemented in the experimental group’s classroom, the children in the wait group completed their regular classroom curriculum on a Wednesday morning. However as the research involved working with children, it was necessary to ensure equity amongst all the students in the experimental and wait groups. Therefore, it was organised with the preschool to run the 4S Program with the children in the wait group during Term 4 (October through to December). For this reason, children allocated to this condition were appropriately named as a ‘wait group’, rather than a control group, because they too experienced the program, but at a later stage, and their participation did not form the basis of any research or results.

The final phase of the research, conducted in week 10 of term 3, involved readministering the BASC-2 to the parents of children in both groups (i.e. experimental and wait groups). Once all the posttest BASCs were returned to the preschool they were scored using the BASC-2 Manual. Pretest and posttest data were then prepared for analysis.

Data Analysis
Data screening procedures were employed to ensure the accuracy of the data. Descriptive analyses were done using parametric techniques. Change in ASC scores was analysed at group and individual levels using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 20.

In line with the 2x2 mixed measures research design, a mixed repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed in order to determine whether the 4S Program significantly improved social competence in the experimental group compared to the wait group (Hills, 2011). ASC scores from the two groups were analysed with group as the between-groups factor with two levels: experimental condition and wait condition and score as the within-groups factor with two levels: pretest and posttest. Significance level for group comparisons was set at α=.05.

Power calculations showed that to detect a moderate effect size of .371, with power set at .7, using ANOVA, required a sample size of 138 children (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009). Practical considerations, however, limited the sample size. The preschool had a maximum of 20 children available for the experimental group (as only 20 children attended preschool on the Monday) and a maximum of 20 children available for the wait group (as only 20 children attended preschool on the Wednesday). That is, we anticipated that the sample size of the present study may not be powerful enough to detect an effect of the social education program on BASC-2 scores when there really is one. However, as the effect size of the newly developed 4S Program was not known, the possibility of a significant change being detected could not be completely excluded.
The small sample size (N=31) presented concerns about generalisation of the results to the wider population of pre-school children beyond the current sample. However, as this study aimed to evaluate a newly-developed program in a particular setting, the preliminary evidence it yields was intended only to inform further program development. De Vaus (2002) advises that if a researcher is not seeking to generalise their findings to the wider population, and is limiting their findings to the sample under investigation, then obtaining a large sample size is not critical. As such, adhering to recommendations of ideal sample size was not considered to be essential for the purpose of this study.

Individual improvements in social competence were explored using the Reliable Change Index (Jacobson & Truax, 1991). Due to the limited sample size, a single case reporting methodology was employed in order to determine whether there were individual improvements in social competence. The Reliable Change Index provides a relatively easy to compute statistic that is useful in small-sample studies, particularly research assessing whether observed change is ‘reliably and individually significant’. Reliable change explores whether individuals change sufficiently that the change is unlikely to be due to the measurement variability of the instrument.

The Reliable Change Index (RCI) calculator (DeFife, 2004) was used to determine whether a change in an individual’s score from pretest to posttest was statistically significant (Jacobson & Truax, 1991). The RCI calculator automatically calculates the significance level by subtracting the posttest score from the pretest score and dividing this by the standard error of the difference. In order to calculate the RCI, the researcher must provide the pretest and posttest means and standard deviations, the test-retest reliability of the measure being used and the participant’s pre- and post-test scores. The reported test-retest reliability for the BASC-2 PRS-P is .77 (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004) and this was used in the RCI calculations. The RCI software was used to determine whether an individual child’s pretest ASC score was significantly different from their posttest ASC score (Jacobson & Truax, 1991).

While no formal collection or analysis of qualitative data was performed, comments made by the preschool manager and the classroom teacher to the researchers were noted as anecdotal evidence. This provided a further source of information, as well as context for the statistical results.

**Results**

**Improvements in social competence within and between groups**

Due to participant attrition from pre to post-test, data from 26 out of the original 31 children were analysed. A mixed repeated measures of analysis (ANOVA) was performed using ASC scores from the two groups, with group as the between-groups factor with two levels: experimental condition (n = 15) and wait condition (n = 11) and score as the within-groups factor with two levels: pretest and posttest.

There were no missing cases and the assumption of normality was satisfactory. Analysis of the box plots revealed one potential univariate outlier, however analysis of the z-scores revealed that this case was not greater than the critical z value of 3.29 (Hills, 2011). No cases showed a Mahalanobis distance critical value greater than 13.82, p = .001 indicating the absence of any multivariate outliers (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

The ANOVA test assumptions were satisfactory, including Levene’s Test for equality of variance which was non-significant, F(1, 24) = .48, p = .49, indicating homogeneity of variance within the sample, and the assumption of homogeneity of covariance was also met, F(1, 24) = .61, p = .61. The assumption of random sampling, however, was not met. Due to the specific nature of the study, a convenience, purposive sample was necessary; therefore, it was not possible to obtain a truly random sample from the population. It was not necessary to meet the assumption of sphericity because with only two levels of ASC scores (pretest and posttest) this assumption was not relevant (Hills, 2011).

Descriptive statistics and standard deviations for the experimental and wait groups at both pre and posttest phases are shown in Table 1. The main effect for time was significant, F(1,
24) = 25.59, p < .001, ηp² = .52 (effect size of .52), showing that the mean ASC scores were higher in the posttest phase, compared to the pretest phase as evident in Figure 1. The main effect for group was not significant, F(1, 24) = .01, p = .94, ηp² = .00, showing that the changes observed from pretest to posttest are not significantly different between the experimental and wait groups. As expected, the score by group interaction was not significant, F(1, 24) = .15, p = .71, ηp² = .01.

### Table 1.
Mean Scores and standard deviations on the Adaptive Skills Composite for the experimental and wait conditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Experimental Group (n=15)</th>
<th>Wait Group (n=11)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M(SD)</td>
<td>M(SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>95% CI</td>
<td>95% CI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretest</td>
<td>59.40 (9.80) [54.80, 64.01]</td>
<td>59.91 (6.69) [54.53, 65.29]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttest</td>
<td>63.00 (10.33) [58.17, 67.84]</td>
<td>63.00 (6.94) [57.35, 68.65]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The possible range of scores was 10 - 79, with higher scores indicative of higher adaptability and social competence. CI = confidence interval.

Individual improvements in social competence

Due to the limited sample size, a single case reporting methodology was employed in order to determine whether there were individual improvements in social competence (Engel & Schutt, 2013). Each child’s pretest and posttest scores on each of the Adaptive Profile subscales and their overall ASC were graphed for visual interpretation. Examples of T-score (i.e. standardised score) data on the four BASC subscales are presented in Figures 2 and 3, showing results for a child in the experimental group and the wait group, respectively.
Visual analysis of the data revealed that 12 of the 15 children from the experimental group obtained some improvement in their overall ASC. More specifically, 10 children showed improvements in their social skills as they received higher Social Skills -T-scores from pretest to posttest. Children from the wait group also showed improvement in their overall ASC (8 out of 11 children) and Social Skills (9 out of 11 children).

The Reliable Change Index (RCI) was used to determine whether the improvements in individual children’s ASC scores were statistically significant beyond the measurements variability (Jacobson & Truax, 1991). After entering the pretest and posttest means and standard deviations obtained from the ANOVA analysis and the BASC-2 PRS-P test-retest reliability, the RCI calculator automatically generated the standard error of the difference, obtaining scores of 6.932 and 5.416 for the experimental and wait groups respectively. In order for the RCI to yield statistical significance, an individual must score 1.96 or greater, which equates to the 95% confidence interval (Jacobson & Truax, 1991).

RCI analysis revealed that no children from either group obtained a difference in their pretest to posttest ASC score that was statistically significant. Table 2 displays the RCI significance values for the children in the experimental and wait groups.
Table 2.
Reliable Change Index (RCI) significance levels for children in experimental and waiting groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experimental Group</th>
<th>Wait Group RCI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child 1</td>
<td>0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child 2</td>
<td>0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child 3</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child 4</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child 5</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child 6</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child 7</td>
<td>0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child 8</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child 9</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child 10</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child 11</td>
<td>-0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child 12</td>
<td>-0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child 13</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child 14</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child 15</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child 16</td>
<td>-0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child 17</td>
<td>-0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child 18</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child 19</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child 20</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child 21</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child 22</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child 23</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child 24</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child 25</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child 26</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: RCI significance levels were obtained using the RCI calculator, which automatically subtracts the posttest ASC score from the pretest ASC score and divides this by the standard error of the difference, which was 6.932 and 5.416 for the experimental and wait groups respectively. In order to achieve statistical significance, a RCI of 1.96 or greater is required.

Anecdotal evidence

Anecdotally, both the preschool’s manager and the classroom teacher reported that they had witnessed children from the experimental group implementing some of the social skills and strategies that had been taught in the 4S Program. For example, when playing outside one of the children was reported as saying that they needed to play like a ‘safe monster’, and this was a strategy that was taught in the week 6 activity on safe play. Furthermore, differences were noted in the children’s social behaviour, such as increasing use of ‘please’ and ‘thank you’, improved sharing techniques and conflict resolution strategies; all of which were incorporated in the 4S Program.

Discussion

The primary aim of this study was to investigate whether a social education program implemented in a Sydney metropolitan co-educational preschool could increase the children’s social competence and thereby improve their social intelligence. It was hypothesised that the implementation of Socially Skilled - Successful Students: The 4S Program would increase children’s social competence thereby fostering the development of their social intelligence. Results from the present study did not definitively support the hypothesis. Results from the mixed repeated measures ANOVA revealed that there was no significant difference in ASC scores from pretest to posttest between the experimental and wait groups. That is, the experimental group’s mean score on social competence after participating in the 4S Program (i.e. their posttest scores) did not differ significantly from the wait group. This means that despite participating in the 4S Program, on average children in the experimental group made no greater improvement in social competence than children who did not receive the program.
Interestingly, ASC scores changed significantly over time within the groups, such that on average children’s scores improved from pretest to posttest in both groups. ANOVA within group results showed a highly significant (p<.001) and large (ηp2=.52) effect of time on ASC scores. Further, a non-significant interaction effect indicated that the effect of time did not depend on group membership. As both groups showed improvement in social competence over the study period, it appears that a factor other than the 4S Program was influencing ASC scores. A possible explanation for this finding is the role of maturation effects; meaning that any changes in ASC scores may have been due to the children’s physical, cognitive and social development over the 8 week period. In this way, these results support the notion that improvements in social competence, and thus social intelligence, may depend on a developmental process of maturing cognitive mechanisms and social experience. Suggesting that, as such, it may be nurtured and fostered in an appropriate learning environment.

Results showing that on average there were significant improvements over time within both groups suggesting a maturity effect, appear to contradict the RCI results that showed no significant changes at the individual level. The explanation for this apparent paradox may lie with the analytic techniques employed. Both techniques take measurement error into account in their calculations, but the RCI uses the known variability of the particular measure; in this instance the test- re-test reliability of the BASC-2 from the normative sample over periods from one to eight weeks. A test- retest measure includes not only variability of the measure but also any real changes in the characteristic being measured. As an age-normed measure the BASC-2 is designed to detect changes associated with maturity, and its good test-retest reliability (0.77) suggests that it does this well. It may be that the ANOVA within group results reflect the ‘real changes’ that happen over time due to maturity; whereas, for ‘individual significance’ the RCI requires more than the ‘real changes’ expected by the test over time. Taken together, these results indicate that, on average, the children’s social functioning improved significantly over time, but for individual children the change in social functioning was not significantly greater than may be expected in 95% of children over this time period, based on the test's normative data and test-retest reliability. These findings demonstrate how the RCI can provide interesting information that complements other results and makes an important contribution to interpretation.

The findings of the present study are inconsistent with the findings of other research that has supported the effectiveness of social skills programs for improving social competence and other social behaviours (Elliot & Busse, 1991; Knoff, 2001; Schneider & Byrne, 1985). More specifically, Hall, Jones and Claxton (2008) found that the Stop and Think Social Skills Program (Knoff, 2001) was an effective primary prevention program that increased the social skills of children in the experimental group. Furthermore, their study used a second cohort to act as a control group, and this group showed no significant increases in social skills, therefore indicating that the improvements in the experimental group were not due to maturation. These findings are dissimilar to those of the present study where both groups showed significant improvements over time and no significant difference was found between the experimental and control groups, indicating the potential for maturation effects to have formed the basis of any improvements observed.

Despite the lack of consistency between the findings of the present study and past research, it is essential to remember that the 4S Program is an entirely new social education program, designed specifically for the present study, and not previously evaluated. Past research was conducted on different programs, making it difficult to compare the results. There are several possible reasons why the 4S Program was not found to significantly improve the social competence of children in the experimental group compared to those in the wait group. These explanations pertain mostly to methodological flaws in the study, rather than the effectiveness of the 4S Program to improve social competence.

Firstly, the chance of making a Type II error - of not finding a significant effect when there is one - due to inadequate sample size was a major possibility and a significant limitation of the present study. Even if the 4S Program did have the potential to significantly improve social competence, the sample size may not have been large enough to detect the effect, even if it was present. Power calculations showed that a sample size of 138 children was required to detect a moderate effect of the 4S Program. However, due to time and ethical constraints...
placed on the present study, it was not possible to obtain a larger sample. Thus, the sample size was not optimal and this is an acknowledged limitation of the present study. Nevertheless, issues such as these commonly arise when working with purposive and convenience samples (Davis & Smith, 2005) and should not entirely undermine the quality and importance of this research. Further, the inadequate sample size has implications for future research. Due to the inadequate sample size and particularistic nature of the research question, it was not possible to generalise findings beyond the preschool involved. Future research is needed to replicate the present study using a larger sample of children, ideally including culturally diverse children from multiple preschools, with differing socio-economic backgrounds. This would allow the effectiveness of the 4S Program to be explored within a broader context and permit the results to be generalised to the wider population of preschool-aged children. Consequently, this could have far-reaching implications for the long-term implementation of social education programs in preschools and primary schools if principals and other educators believe that the programs are well-researched, widely implemented, beneficial and effective (Hall, et al., 2008).

Secondly, the BASC-2 PRS-P Adaptive Profile may not have been sensitive enough to detect changes in social competence on the basis of the skills taught in the 4S Program. That is, the social skills taught in the 4S Program may not have related strongly enough to the questions presented in the BASC-2 PRS-P. For example, due to the empirical and theoretical evidence supporting the inclusion of conflict resolution activities in social skills programs (CASEL, 2013; Knoff, 2001) an activity pertaining to conflict resolution was included in the 4S Program. However there are no questions on the BASC-2 PRS-P that relate to conflict resolution. Therefore any conflict resolution skills taught in the 4S Program were not directly measurable on the BASC-2 PRS-P. The anecdotal evidence supports this notion, with the preschool manager and classroom teacher reporting that they observed children from the experimental group implementing some of the social skills and strategies that had been taught in the 4S Program, including improved sharing techniques and conflict resolution strategies.

Further, many areas of social functioning addressed by the Activities of Daily Living (ADL) subscale on the BASC-2 were not included in the 4S Program. Skills including: deciding what to wear, needing help tying shoes or washing hands when needed, were not incorporated in the program due to time constraints and the need to incorporate social skills that were more contextually relevant to the children, such as sharing, communication skills and safe play. Therefore it may not have been possible for children to improve in these areas, thus resulting in lower scores on the ADL subscale; consequently contributing to lower overall ASC scores. While it is possible to exclude the ADL subscale scores from the composite ASC score, this has implications for the psychometric characteristics of the test. As many behaviours on the ADL subscale are in keeping with Sternberg’s (1984) theory of social intelligence (that is, solving the practical problems of their physical and social world), future revisions of the 4S Program may incorporate some of these activities where feasible.

In light of these issues regarding the relatability of the BASC-2 PRS-P to the social skills taught in the 4S Program, it can be argued that perhaps the BASC-2 was not the most optimal measure of social competence for the present study. However, assessment tools used to measure social competence are limited and it was determined that because of the simplicity of the BASC-2 PRS-P that this would be the most appropriate measure of social competence for the present study, despite its limitations.

Thirdly, social desirability bias (SDB) may have interfered with the parents’ ability to accurately report their child’s social behaviour. SDB is the tendency of participants to answer questions in a way that they believe will be socially valued, rather than in a way that accurately reflects their behaviour or opinions (De Vaus, 2002). Often, parents may find it difficult to report less than optimal accounts of their child’s behaviour or may attempt to over-report desirable behaviours (Gooden & Struble, 1990). This may help explain why some children received ASC scores in the 99th percentile at the pretest phase. That is, these parents may have wanted to present their child in a positive light, thereby overemphasising desirable behaviours and under-reporting negative behaviours. Having received such high scores at pretest meant that some children had no room for improvement throughout the 4S Program, therefore affecting their ability to obtain posttest increases in their ASC scores.
Furthermore, social desirability bias may also explain why two children actually experienced a decrease in ASC scores from pre to posttest. When the pretest BASC-2 PRS-P was administered to the parents, they may have wanted to present their child as highly socially competent, thereby reporting more frequent incidences of socially competent behaviour. However, once the posttest measures were administered and the parents were familiar with the reporting process, they may not have been as concerned with presenting their child so positively, or they may have become more discerning in their observations, thereby reporting decreased incidences of behaviour at posttest. These findings highlight the importance of including a qualitative research component to future studies of this nature. Behavioural observation or interviews with parents and teachers at pre and posttest phases could be used to supplement the BASC-2 PRP-P scores and provide a more comprehensive account of the child’s social behaviour both at home and at preschool.

Despite the methodological flaws and biases that are likely to have contributed to the non-significant difference between groups, an alternative explanation of the findings may be that the 4S Program was simply not effective in improving social competence in the children. However, despite appearing ineffective in the present study, the fact that the program is grounded in theory and previous research means that further investigation into its effectiveness is needed; rather than simply dismissing it as an ineffective social education program. Activities in the 4S program were informed by relevant social learning and social skills theory and research (e.g., Bandura, 1977; Connolly & Doyle, 1984; Gresham & Elliott, 1990; Hall et al, 2008; Minne & Semrud-Clikeman, 2012; Piaget, 1962). Further, it incorporated activities addressing PreK-1 interpersonal, problem-solving and conflict resolution skills that were derived from Knoff’s (2001) Stop and Think Social Skills Program – a program that has been empirically supported and its efficacy established. Grounding the 4S Program in relevant social learning and social skills theory and research, establishes it as a theoretically and empirically derived social education program, that despite the present study not yielding conclusive findings, warrants further investigation of its effectiveness.

Extrapolating beyond the findings: Linking improvements in social competence with social intelligence

It has been argued that social competence and social intelligence are two distinct constructs that are intrinsically linked. In order for one to possess social intelligence, they must behave in socially competent ways. Thus a temporal understanding of the two constructs is as follows: social competence must be developed first and then social intelligence can result from this- one cannot be socially intelligent without first being socially competent, because experience influences the acquisition and application of knowledge (Bandura, 1977). As the 4S Program did not significantly improve social competence in the present study, it is difficult to extrapolate whether the program would have improved the children’s social intelligence. Due to the link between social competence and social intelligence it could be hypothesised that any improvements in social competence could lead to the development of social intelligence over time; however this cannot be definitively ascertained by the present study. Thus, currently the findings are inconclusive regarding whether social education programs can improve social intelligence. It is necessary, therefore, to conduct further research into the effectiveness of the 4S Program to increase social competence, and if significant findings are obtained, then it could be extrapolated that improvements in social competence can lead to improvements in social intelligence.

Moving forward: Empirical and practical implications

In the present study, consideration was given to allowing the classroom teacher to complete the Teaching Rating Scale- Preschool (TRS-P) about each child (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004). This would have provided a secondary set of data in which parent and teacher responses could have been compared to provide a more comprehensive account of the children’s social skills. However, with a total of 26 children from both the experimental and wait groups and TRS-P measures required at pretest and posttest phases, this task was understandably too demanding on the teacher’s workload. Future research in this area would greatly benefit from obtaining BASC-2 assessments from both the child’s parents and their classroom teacher to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the child’s social competence.
The 4S Program may not have been of optimal length and future research could extend the duration of the program by two weeks, making it a ten week program (which would conform to a standard NSW school term) and increase the number of activities per week to three. Although limited, the study’s anecdotal evidence suggested that some children showed improvement in the skills targeted by the program. By extending the duration of the program to ten weeks, with three thirty-minute activities completed each week, this may be expected to improve the quality of the program, allowing more social skills to be addressed, and more time allocated for revision of key concepts. However, this may also affect the program’s suitability for inclusion in the pre-school’s usual schedule, presenting an obstacle to its implementation and reducing the likelihood of its use. These issues would need to be explored.

A practical implication of the present research is its relevance to educational psychologists and school counsellors. The work of Hall and colleagues (2008) emphasises the ever increasing need to reduce and prevent social and emotional difficulties in children. Given the applicability of social education programs to school contexts, and the psychological and pedagogical knowledge of educational psychologists, it is critical for these practitioners to be at the forefront of addressing these issues in the school setting. Educational psychologists and school counsellors could work in collaboration with educators in order to ensure that social education programs or at least social skills lessons are implemented effectively and accurately and are sensitive to the educational needs of children.

Additionally, if wide-spread implementation of social education programs is to occur in the future, it is important to ensure that social education programs are cost-effective. Despite the success and usefulness of social education programs, schools may be unlikely to implement these programs long-term if they are perceived as too costly (Hall, et al., 2008). Therefore it is necessary to allocate adequate funding to such programs in order to ensure that teachers and educators are sufficiently trained, that the programs are implemented accurately and effectively, and that they are of optimal benefit to the children involved. A body of robust evidence is required to secure the necessary funding from policy-makers.

Conclusion

Findings from the present study revealed that the 4S Program did not reliably or significantly improve children’s social competence. However, despite no significant difference being found between the experimental and wait groups, all children showed significant improvements in social competence from pretest to posttest. This improvement is likely due to maturation effects. When working with children in an educational and developmental context, any improvement in a child’s functioning is considered a positive outcome. Early intervention to promote optimal development is important for all children, but particularly so for those who may benefit most. While the current findings regarding the 4S program are inconclusive, the literature showing the effectiveness of social education programs in the classroom suggests that developing and evaluating preschool programs aimed at fostering socially-skilled, successful students warrants further pursuit.

References


## Appendix A

Lesson plans corresponding to each of the weekly activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1 - Activity 1: Every Face has a Place</th>
<th>AGE: 4-5 Akuna Room</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learning Outcome:</strong> Recognising individuals with whom the children have social interactions in their daily lives.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part &amp; Timing</th>
<th>Content (WHAT)</th>
<th>Teaching &amp; learning strategies (HOW)</th>
<th>Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Introduction  | -Introduction by Alison  
-Introduction by Libby  
-Explanation of learning outcome- i.e. identifying individuals with whom the children have social interactions with. | • Alison to introduce Libby- i.e., “This is Libby and over the next 8 weeks each Monday morning she will be coming in to our room and helping us with some fun activities!”  
• Libby to introduce herself and her role at the preschool over the next 8 weeks- i.e., “Good morning children, my name is Libby. I would like to invite you to spend some time with Alison and I, listening to stories, playing some games and doing some craft activities. I would like to come in on Monday morning each week and Alison will work with you on these fun activities and I will be a helper in the room. Now if we are doing an activity that you don’t like, come and talk to Alison and she will find another activity for you. Does that sound okay boys and girls? Does anyone have any questions?”  
• Explanation of relevant concept: “Every-day we see and talk to lots of different people; at home, at preschool, when out with our family, or at special occasions. Whenever we talk to someone, or smile or wave at them- we are having a social interaction with that person. Social interactions are very important to us as they teach us how to behave around other people and how to talk to people. There are some people in our lives that we have lots of social interactions with- like your mum and dad, your brothers or sisters, your grandparents or your preschool teachers. There are also some people that you don’t see or talk to as much, but they are still really important to have social interactions with- such as people serving you and your parents at the supermarket, waiters who bring you your food if you go out to dinner, policemen or fire-fighters, your doctor, and perhaps your dancing or swimming teacher! There are lots of different people in your family and your community that you can have social interactions with. It is important to know who these people are and what they look like so that when you see them you know to say | • This lesson plan: in order to be able to explain the relevant concepts and the activity |
**Body**

**20 minutes**

- Explanation of activity
  - Students are encouraged to draw faces of people who they may have social interactions with. For example: different faces of children in their class, faces of people in their school or faces of their family members or people in the community.
  
  - Explanation of Every Face Has a Place Activity: “Today boys and girls, we are going to draw the faces of people who we have social interactions with—people who we see, talk to or play with every day.
  - Show the children the activity sheet and provide an example—i.e., “Someone I see and talk to all the time is [name] so I am going to draw their face in the first circle here!”
  - Ask the children if they have any questions and are ready to start.
  - Send the children to their tables and ensure they have the necessary equipment, e.g. the worksheet and coloured pencils or crayons.
  - Teachers are to ask the children whose faces they have drawn and if the child is incapable of doing so, the teacher can write the name of the person underneath their face. E.g. Grandma
  - Teachers walk the room, observing everyone’s progress, answering questions, keeping all students focussed and providing positive reinforcement.

**Conclusion**

**5 minutes**

- Pack up and return to the floor
  - Group discussion
    - Instruct the children to pack up their things and return to their floor with their worksheet
    - Engage children in a class discussion about who they drew and why. I.e., ask the children the names of some of the people they drew and ask them why they decided to draw that person, and then ask other children if they also had the same person, e.g. “who else drew their mum or dad?”
    - Thank the children for participating and wrap up the activity

- This lesson plan
- Every Face Has a Place activity worksheet—enough copies for all children and teachers in the classroom, plus spares
- Drawing resources: Coloured pencils or crayons

- Completed worksheets
Week 2- Activity 2: Conflict Resolution: Explore conflict resolution strategies  

**AGE:** 4-5 Akuna Room

**Learning Outcome:** Understanding what anger is and how it can lead to conflict, and exploring conflict resolution strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part &amp; Timing</th>
<th>Content (WHAT)</th>
<th>Teaching &amp; learning strategies (HOW)</th>
<th>Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td>2.5 minutes -Explanation of learning outcome</td>
<td>• Introduction to the social skill: conflict resolution. I.e., “Today boys and girls we are going to be talking about times when we feel angry and things that other people do to make us feel angry. Then we are going to talk about things that we can do when others make us feel upset or angry.”&lt;br&gt;• Explain to the children that sometimes other people can make us feel angry and ask them if they can remember a time when someone made them feel angry or upset. Use this discussion to identify times when the children have felt angry or upset because of others.&lt;br&gt;• Ask the children if they have any questions before they begin</td>
<td>• This lesson plan in order to be able to explain the relevant concepts and the activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Body</strong></td>
<td>25 minutes -Read: <em>Josh’s Smiley Faces: A Story About Anger</em>. By Gina Ditta-Donahue&lt;br&gt;-Use of role-play to set up and resolve conflicts&lt;br&gt;-Discussion of situations involving conflict and conflict resolution strategies using the stuffed animal/puppet</td>
<td>• Read the children the story book titled: <em>Josh’s Smiley Faces: A Story About Anger</em>. This will introduce the children to the topic of feeling angry, who can make us feel this way, and strategies to overcome it.&lt;br&gt;• Introduction of activity: Introduce the puppet or stuffed animal as Binky Barnes. Binky has a reputation for being the class bully. Explain to the children that Binky, like some kids, sometimes does things that scare other kids or make them mad.&lt;br&gt;• Role-play: Set up role-playing situations reflecting conflicts that may occur among the children at preschool.&lt;br&gt;(1) Have one child hold a red pencil. Then have the puppet attempt to take the red pencil from the child and say: <em>You’ve got the red pencil! I was looking for that!</em> And have the puppet snatch the pencil from the child&lt;br&gt;(2) Have a couple of children quickly build a block tower. Then have the Binky puppet knock down the block tower saying: <em>Hey, I’m an earthquake. Your tower is history.</em>&lt;br&gt;• Discuss: After each role-playing situation, discuss with the children what happened.&lt;br&gt;• Resolve: Brain storm with the children and encourage them to use their own words to work out a solution with Binky. Such as, “Now boys and girls, what can we do to</td>
<td>• Book: <em>Josh’s Smiley Faces: A Story About Anger</em>. By Gina Ditta-Donahue&lt;br&gt;• Puppet or stuffed animal&lt;br&gt;• Red pencil&lt;br&gt;• Blocks to build a tower</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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make Binky understand that what he has done has really upset us?” Possible solutions may include:
-Saying to Binky: *You really hurt my feelings when you knocked over my block tower* - *I worked really hard on it and it made me feel angry when you destroyed it.*
Or, suggest a compromise: *I was using the red pencil first, I will give it to you when I am finished and you can use it.*
- Let a teacher know what has happened and have them help you sort out the problem with Binky
- Do not get angry or upset and talk nicely to Binky - let him know that what he did hurt your feelings and you would like it if he could not do that again.

- Brainstorm: As the children come up with responses to situations, have them think about how those responses would make them feel. I.e., would talking to Binky nicely keep them calm and stop them from becoming angry or upset? Emphasise the importance of thinking before talking/acting
- Once potential solutions have been discussed, praise children for their good problem-solving skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conclusion</th>
<th>Discussion and summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.5 minutes</td>
<td>Discuss with the children what they will do from now on if they encounter situations at home or at preschool that make them feel angry or upset</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summarise main points: It is important when you are feeling angry that you do not get upset or react physically, but use your words and tell a teacher.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>None</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**Week 3-Activity 3: Make Popsicle Puppets and Practise Communication**

**AGE:** 4-5 Akuna Room

**Learning Outcome:** Practising and developing communication skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part &amp; Timing</th>
<th>Content (WHAT)</th>
<th>Teaching &amp; learning strategies (HOW)</th>
<th>Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Introduction  | -Explanation of learning outcome                                                | • Explain to the children that today we are going to be doing an activity that will help them to practise their communication skills. I.e., “Today boys and girls we are going to be doing some craft activities and making some signs and puppets that will help us to communicate better with each other. Communicate is a big word that means telling other people things, such as things you want (like telling your mum you want a sandwich for lunch) or things you would like to tell someone because you think it is special or important (like telling your mum about all the fun things you did at preschool.) Every time you talk to another person, you are communicating with them- that means you are telling them something. Being able to communicate or talk to other people is really important because it lets people know what we are thinking, or feeling, or wanting to do. It is important to be able to communicate your thoughts, needs, wants and feelings to other people, including parents, brothers or sisters and friends. Sometimes when your words don't work- when you can’t think of the right thing to say, you may want to use your bodies instead, but as well all know, hitting or pushing is never okay, so today we are going to practise some other ways to tell people what you need.”  
• Ask the children if they have any questions before they begin | • This lesson plan- in order to be able to explain the relevant concepts and the activity |

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The first activity that the children will complete is making signs out of paper plates and sticking them on to ice-cream sticks. The signs include: Stop, Speak and Share. While all the children are sitting on the floor, take a paper plate and draw a red stop sign on the paper plate and then stick it onto the back of the ice-cream stick. Do the same for the Speak sign- by drawing lips, and the Share sign- by drawing 2 hands holding a toy. Once the teacher has demonstrated how to make all 3 signs, send the children to their tables and instruct them to start working on their own signs. All the tables will have 3 paper-plates and 3 ice-cream sticks for each child, as well as pencils, markers or crayons. Throughout the activity, ensure teachers are walking around the room to assist the children when needed.

Once they have created the signs on the paper plates, they can sticky tape each one on to an ice-cream stick. Teachers are to provide assistance with this. Explain to the children that these three signs are a reminder of what they can do when they have a problem with another person. They can “Stop” before things get out of hand, they can “Speak” to the other person about their feelings and talk about solutions to the problem, or they can “Share” if the argument is about a toy or game that both kids want.

The next part of the activity involves the children making paper-plate puppets so that they can practise their communication skills. Issue all children with one paper plate and an ice-cream stick and place craft supplies in the middle of the tables- such as coloured paper, coloured wool, googly eyes and the pencils, crayons or markers from the first part of the activity. Have the children use the pencils, crayons or markers to draw features or cut features out of coloured paper and glue them onto the plate. Then glue on the googly eyes, and the coloured wool for hair. Then sticky-tape the puppet’s face onto the ice-cream stick.

Once the children have finished their puppets, have them come back to the floor as a group and explain to them that good communication is like a muscle, it gets bigger and better the more you use it! Then role-play one or more of the following situations, using the puppets. Ask the children to use one of the signs to show you how they would deal with the problem:
  o We are arguing over a toy car. (Share sign)
  o We both want to read the same book (Speak and Share sign)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Body</th>
<th>Explanation of activity</th>
<th>Completion of activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25 minutes</td>
<td>The first activity that the children will complete is making signs out of paper plates and sticking them on to ice-cream sticks. The signs include: Stop, Speak and Share. While all the children are sitting on the floor, take a paper plate and draw a red stop sign on the paper plate and then stick it onto the back of the ice-cream stick. Do the same for the Speak sign- by drawing lips, and the Share sign- by drawing 2 hands holding a toy. Once the teacher has demonstrated how to make all 3 signs, send the children to their tables and instruct them to start working on their own signs. All the tables will have 3 paper-plates and 3 ice-cream sticks for each child, as well as pencils, markers or crayons. Throughout the activity, ensure teachers are walking around the room to assist the children when needed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90 ice-cream sticks</td>
<td>Once they have created the signs on the paper plates, they can sticky tape each one on to an ice-cream stick. Teachers are to provide assistance with this. Explain to the children that these three signs are a reminder of what they can do when they have a problem with another person. They can “Stop” before things get out of hand, they can “Speak” to the other person about their feelings and talk about solutions to the problem, or they can “Share” if the argument is about a toy or game that both kids want.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90 paper plates</td>
<td>The next part of the activity involves the children making paper-plate puppets so that they can practise their communication skills. Issue all children with one paper plate and an ice-cream stick and place craft supplies in the middle of the tables- such as coloured paper, coloured wool, googly eyes and the pencils, crayons or markers from the first part of the activity. Have the children use the pencils, crayons or markers to draw features or cut features out of coloured paper and glue them onto the plate. Then glue on the googly eyes, and the coloured wool for hair. Then sticky-tape the puppet’s face onto the ice-cream stick.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sticky-tape</td>
<td>Once the children have finished their puppets, have them come back to the floor as a group and explain to them that good communication is like a muscle, it gets bigger and better the more you use it! Then role-play one or more of the following situations, using the puppets. Ask the children to use one of the signs to show you how they would deal with the problem:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>safety scissors</td>
<td>o We are arguing over a toy car. (Share sign)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>crayons/pencils</td>
<td>o We both want to read the same book (Speak and Share sign)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coloured paper</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coloured wool</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Googly eyes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>2.5 minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>------------</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Summary of activity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pack up</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Discuss with the children how they can use their new signs to communicate their needs, wants and feelings with others
- Advise that they can take the signs home and use them if they are in a situation where they need some help communicating
- Clean up and pack up resources

| None |
**Week 4 - Activity 4: Good Manners: Practise good manners at a tea party**  
**AGE:** 4-5 Akuna Room

**Learning Outcome:** Understanding what good manners are and how to use them in social situations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part &amp; Timing</th>
<th>Content (WHAT)</th>
<th>Teaching &amp; learning strategies (HOW)</th>
<th>Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Introduction** | - Explanation of learning outcome | - Explain to the children the purpose of the activity. I.e., “Today we are going to be looking at good manners and how we can use good manners when we are talking and playing with other people.” Ask the children if anyone knows what good manners are and discuss possible answers.  
- Ask the children if they have any questions before we begin | - This lesson plan in order to be able to explain the relevant concepts and the activity |
| **Body** | - Read: *What Do You Say Dear?* By Sesyle Joslin  
- Explanation of activity  
- Practise manners and conversation skills with the children at a make-believe tea party using role-playing | - Start the activity by reading *What Do You Say, Dear?* Pause to let children predict the right thing to say in each quirky situation. Ask the children to raise their hands if they have an answer and only select one child to answer per situation.  
- Once the book is finished, explain to the children that we are going to have a pretend tea-party to practise our manners and they are to go and select some dress-up clothes and put them on and meet back on the floor.  
- Once all the children are back on the floor divide them into two groups: 10 in one group and 11 in the other (dependent on numbers). Have the two groups sit in 2 circles on the floor. Have the children find a partner and invite each other to their make-believe tea party. This is their chance to show off their excellent manners. Model the types of behaviour and conversations that they should have, such as:  
- [Name] I would love it if you would come to my tea-party! Thank you very much for inviting me [Name] I would love to come to your tea-party!  
- Would you please join me [Name] for a cup of tea at my tea-party? What I lovely offer [Name], thank you for the invitation!  
- Once each pair of children has invited another to the tea-party, have them go and sit on a seat at the table and wait for the other children in their group to join them. As more children come to sit at the table, the children already at the table could say: | - Book: *What Do You Say Dear?* By Sesyle Joslin  
- Dress-up clothes  
- Tea set x 2 |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conclusion</th>
<th>Summary of activity</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.5 minutes</td>
<td>- Ask the children to return to the floor</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Ask the children if they enjoyed their make-believe tea-party and what nice things they said to the other children to show their good manners. Emphasise the importance of good manners and suggest that the children practise their new skills at home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Have children undress and pack up dressing clothes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Thank you for coming! It’s lovely to see you.
- Here [Name], have a seat! (and pull out a chair for them to sit on)
- Once all the children are seated, they can serve each other pretend refreshments and engage in polite conversation. Demonstrate the types of things the children could say and then have them practise their good manners. Conversation may include:
  - Would you like some tea? Yes please or no thank you.
  - May you please pass the milk [Name]? Sure [Name] not a problem, here is the milk!
  - Mmmm, this is delicious - what lovely tea you make [Name]
  - What a lovely tea-set you have [Name]
  - I hope everyone is having a lovely time!
**Week 5 - Activity 5: Good Sport: Practise being a good sport**

**AGE:** 4-5 Akuna Room

**Learning Outcome:** Understanding what it means to be a good sport and strategies children can use to be a good sport

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part &amp; Timing</th>
<th>Content (WHAT)</th>
<th>Teaching &amp; learning strategies (HOW)</th>
<th>Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Introduction**<br>2.5 minutes | -Explanation of learning outcome | • Explain to the children the purpose of the activity. I.e., “Today we are going to learn about what a good sport is and how to be a good sport when we are playing with each other.” Ask the children if anyone knows what a good sport is and if they can remember a situation in which they had to be a good sport.  
• Tell the children that the teacher is going to read a book about two friends who both like to win and what happens when they play a game together.  
• Ask the children if they have any questions before they begin | • This lesson plan in order to be able to explain the relevant concepts and the activity |
| **Body**<br>25 minutes | -Read: *Cork and Fuzz- Good Sports* By Dori Chaconas  
-Explanation of activity  
-Completion of activity: playing catch with the children, and help them practise being good sports | • Start the activity by reading *Cork and Fuzz- Good Sports.*  
• Once the teacher has finished reading the book, set the scene for the activity. Have the children imagine that they are on a sports team, such as a soccer team. I.e., “Imagine boys and girls that we are out playing a game of soccer and you kick the ball to the doll [insert name if a familiar toy to the children] and when the doll shoots for the goal they miss! The game is over, and the team has lost. Ask your children: *What would you say to [Insert name of doll] to make them feel better?*  
• Role-play: Have the children sit in a circle on the floor and pass the doll around the circle. Give each child a chance to make [name of doll] feel better. They could tell [name] that making a mistake is no big deal, and that the important thing about a game is to have fun. Being angry at your teammates makes it less fun for everyone. Model these statements to the children and then ask them to have a go.  
• The second part of the activity involves playing a game to allow the children to practise being a good sport. The name of the game is the “Good Sport Game”. Explain the game to the children and then split them into two groups and send them to opposite ends of the playground or classroom.  
-Explanation of game: “Now boys and girls, we are going to play a game so you can all practice how to be a good sport! In the game, you will all stand in a circle and toss the bean bag gently to one another. If someone misses the bean | • Book: *Cork and Fuzz- Good Sports.* By Dori Chaconas  
• Bean bag  
• Large doll (preferably one known to the children) |
bag or they drop it on the ground, I want everyone to remember what they told [doll's name] when they didn’t make the goal in the soccer game. Remember the nice things you said to them and say them to your classmate. For example, “great job [name] you tried your best!” Or “don’t worry [name] it can be tricky to catch the ball- have another go!” The teachers are to compliment any good sport behaviour that they observe.

Conclusion

2.5 minutes

- Discussion about being a good sport

- Have the children return to the floor as a class. Talk to the children about winning and losing. Ask: How does it feel to win? How does it feel to lose? If you have won a game, can you imagine how the losing side must feel? Talk about some things you can do or say as a winner: “You played a really good game!” or “That was a close match, but maybe you’ll beat me next time.” Talk about some things you can do or say as a loser: “Congratulations, you’re a really good player!” or “Amazing Play! Let’s play again some time.” Explain that it’s not about winning or losing, it’s about how you play the game and being kind to one another.

- None
Week 6- Activity 6: Safe Play: Establish helpful guidelines for playing safely

AGE: 4-5 Akuna Room

Learning Outcome: Understanding what safe play is and how children can engage in safe play at home or at preschool

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part &amp; Timing</th>
<th>Content (WHAT)</th>
<th>Teaching &amp; learning strategies (HOW)</th>
<th>Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>-Explanation of learning outcome</td>
<td>• Explain to the children the purpose of the activity. I.e., “Today we are going to learn about how to play safely with one another. Can anyone think of what would happen if you were to not play safely with one another?” • Tell the children that the teacher is going to read a book about playing safe in the playground- just like the children do at preschool. Then explain that they will do some brainstorming about what is unsafe, aggressive and safe play and talk about how you can play safely with everyone. • Ask the children if they have any questions before they begin</td>
<td>• This lesson plan in order to be able to explain the relevant concepts and the activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 minutes</td>
<td>-Read: <em>Percy Plays It Safe</em> By Stuart J. Murphy -Explanation of activity -Completion of activity: helping the children learn to distinguish between safe play and aggressive or unsafe play</td>
<td>• Start the activity by reading <em>Percy Plays It Safe</em>. • Once the teacher has finished reading the book, explain the activity. I.e., “Now boys and girls, we are going to talk about being safe and being kind to others when playing. I’m going to ask some questions and then when you say an answer, I’m going to write it up on this big piece of paper. Does everyone understand? What do you think I mean by unsafe play? (wait for answers and write them on the construction paper paper). Now if someone is angry when they are playing, then this is called aggressive play- can anyone think why aggressive play is bad? (wait for answers and write them on the construction paper). What are some ways to play more safely with others?” Brainstorm with the children a list of helpful guidelines and include them on the sheet of paper. For example: o <em>DO ask if someone else wants to play</em> o <em>DO take turns.</em> o <em>DON’T hit, push, kick, or bite.</em> • <em>DON’T wreck another child’s work.</em> -The next part of the activity involves role-play: Help the children explore the issue by role-playing safe behaviour in various situations. The children can use puppets and stuffed animals to act out safe play scenarios with each other. Scenarios include: 1. Running too quickly in the playground or in the classroom (Solution: always walk carefully when in the classroom or the playground so others don’t get hurt). 2. A child is playing with blocks and another child walks through the blocks and falls overs (Solution: walk around if people are playing blocks so you cannot fall over and so you don’t</td>
<td>• Book: <em>Percy Plays It Safe</em> By Stuart J. Murphy • Markers • Construction paper • Hand puppets • Stuffed animals • Building blocks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. A child is swinging on the swings with their eyes closed (Solution: always keep your eyes open when playing on the equipment to keep you and others safe).

Divide the children into 2 groups and have a pair of children act out the scenario and have the remaining children say what they think could be done to make the situation safe (refer to the solutions above). Have 2 teachers supervising the two separate groups.

Suggest positive ways your children can correct unsafe play (for example, helping another child rebuild a structure that was knocked down, and apologising).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conclusion</th>
<th>Summary of safe play</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.5 minutes</td>
<td>-Pack up</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Summarise what unsafe play means and what safe play involves.
- Ask the children if they have any questions about the activity
- Pack up of resources and equipment

- None
### Week 7 - Activity 7: Share Tactics: Learn to share and play fairly

**AGE:** 4-5 Akuna Room

**Learning Outcome:** Understanding what it means to share and how to share and play fairly

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part &amp; Timing</th>
<th>Content (WHAT)</th>
<th>Teaching &amp; learning strategies (HOW)</th>
<th>Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Introduction** | - Explanation of learning outcome | • Explain to the children the purpose of the activity. I.e., “Today we are going to learn about the importance of sharing and how we can share with one another.” Ask the children if anyone knows what sharing is and if they can remember a time when they had to share something that they were playing with or eating.  
• Tell the children that the teacher is going to read a book about sharing and then we are going to complete some activities to help them become better sharers.  
• Ask the children if they have any questions before we begin | • This lesson plan in order to be able to explain the relevant concepts and the activity |
| 2.5 minutes | | | |
| **Body** | - Read: *The Doorbell Rang* by Pat Hutchins  
- Explanation of activity  
- Completion of activity: use the activities to help the children develop their ability and willingness to share | • Start the activity by reading *The Doorbell Rang* and ask the children if they understood how the book was about sharing, i.e., “Did everyone see how all the children needed to share the cookies so everyone could have one and so it was fair?”  
• Once the teacher has finished reading the book, explain the activity. I.e., “I am going to give you all one piece of paper and I want you to draw a picture of you playing safely - just like we spoke about last week. Your group is only going to have 7 pencils to draw your picture, so you will need to work out how you can share the pencils fairly. Once you have drawn your picture I want you to tell me how you decided to share the pencils.”  
• Have the children sit at their desks in their 3 separate groups (3 tables of approximately 7 in each group) - with 7 pencils in the middle of each table. Once they draw their picture and discuss how they shared the pencils fairly, praise them for their efforts and move onto the next activity.  
• The second activity involves sharing a bowl of cookies (these are not really cookies, but cardboard cut-outs). Have the children stay at their tables and place a bowl with 21 paper cookies in the middle of each table. Explain to the children what the activity involves, i.e., “now boys and girls, there are some | • Book: *The Doorbell Rang* by Pat Hutchins  
• paper cookies  
• crayons/pencils  
• paper |
cookies in a bowl in the middle of the table—just like in the book we read, you need to share the cookies evenly, so you each get the same amount of cookies. I want you to figure out how you can share the cookies fairly, and then tell us how you worked it out!”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conclusion</th>
<th>2.5 minutes</th>
<th>Summary of sharing</th>
<th>Pack up</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Ask the children, “Why do you think it is important to know how to share? What are some ways you can share things like books and toys?”</td>
<td>• None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Pack up of resources and equipment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Week 8 - Activity 8: A Kindness Tree - Explore Acts of Kindness

**AGE:** 4-5 Akuna Room  
**Learning Outcome:** Understanding the importance of being kind to others and learning and practising kind behaviours

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part &amp; Timing</th>
<th>Content (WHAT)</th>
<th>Teaching &amp; learning strategies (HOW)</th>
<th>Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Introduction** | - Explanation of learning outcome | - Explain to the children the purpose of the activity. I.e., “Today we are going to learn about the importance of being kind to each other and how we can be kind to other people.” Ask the children if anyone knows what “being kind” is, or what kindness is and if they can remember a time when they have done something kind for another person  
- Tell the children that the teacher is going to read a book about filling our kindness buckets. That is, things that we can do to be kind to others and make them feel happy!  
- Ask the children if they have any questions before we begin | - This lesson plan: in order to be able to explain the relevant concepts and the activity |
| **Body** | - Read: Have You Filled Your Bucket Today? A Guide to Daily Happiness for Kids By Carol McCloud  
- Explanation of activity  
- Completion of activity: make a “Kindness Tree” with the children, and show them how to make it bloom | - Start by reading the book, Have You Filled Your Bucket Today? to the children and allow them to ask any questions they may have at the end. Confirm that they understand the message of the book, i.e., “does everyone see how we all have an imaginary bucket that can be filled when we do nice things for each other?”  
- Once the teacher has finished reading the book, explain the activity. I.e., “Today boys and girls, we are going to make a Kindness Tree! We are going to talk about ways that we can be kind to one another, and write them on this big piece of paper, then you are all going to be given a leaf where you can draw a picture of something you can do to be kind to another person, or something that someone else has done to be kind to you.”  
- Have the children name ways that they can be nice to people. Ask questions to prompt ideas: What can you say to make someone feel better when she’s sad? How can you help each other every day? What special things can you do to show your friends you like them?  
- Write all of these ideas down on the piece of construction paper. Once the children have finished giving their answers, give each child a cardboard leaf and remind them of what they are required to do, i.e., “now that we have written all of our ideas down, you can pick one that you like and draw a leaf” | - Book: Have You Filled Your Bucket Today? A Guide to Daily Happiness for Kids By Carol McCloud  
- leaves made from coloured cardboard  
- a tree (trunk, branches, leaves) made of construction paper, taped to a wall  
- Pencils, crayons or markers  
- Large piece of construction paper and markers |
picture- remember, you can draw a picture of something that you can do to be kind to someone else, or something that someone else has done to be kind you!” Then send the children to their tables.

- Ensure each table is equipped with pencils, crayons or markers for the children to complete their pictures.
- While the children are completing their pictures, have the teacher and helpers wander the room to ensure that none of the children are experiencing difficulties. Once a child is finished, the teacher or helper can ask them what they have drawn, and write a brief description on the bottom or the back of the leaf, for example, if a child has drawn a picture of them giving their mum a hug, the teacher can write, “I can be kind to mummy by giving her a hug”. Also ensure that the child’s name is on the front of the leaf.
- Once all the children have finished their leaves, have them hang their leaves up on the Kindness Tree, 2 at a time.
- Once all the leaves are on the tree, help the children read the flowers- Can they find their names? Can they find the names of their friends?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conclusion</th>
<th>Summary of kindness</th>
<th>Pack up</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.5 minutes</td>
<td>Ask the children if everyone had fun making their Kindness Tree. Ask the children if they have thought of new ways that they can be kind or helpful to a friend or family member, or ways that a friend or family member has been kind to them.</td>
<td>None</td>
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Pack up resources and equipment