

# A Study of The Efficacy of Computerized Skill Building for Adolescents: Reducing Aggression and Increasing Pro-Social Behavior

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## Abstract

Objective: Evaluate the impact of a computer-based, cognitive-behavioral and social skill training program on aggressive behavior and academic performance among middle-schoolers. Method: This was a three-armed, randomized controlled trial. Three groups of diverse seventh and eighth graders from a New York City public school participated: two experimental groups of 17 students each, and one control group of 23 students, over a twelve-week period. Experimental group A used the computer program as a stand-alone intervention; Group B had the additional intervention of teacher facilitated role-plays and discussion; the control group had neither. "Blind," trained observers monitored students for behaviors using a validated scale. Results and Conclusions: Both intervention groups had significantly fewer ( $p < .05$ ) anti-social behaviors than the control group, on the "resolving conflict" subscale. Both intervention groups had significantly fewer ( $p < .05$ ) anti-social behaviors than the control group on the "kindness." Group A (computer only group) had significantly more ( $p < .01$ ) pro-social behaviors than the other two groups on the "respect" subscale. An unexpected finding was that strong trends for students who used the program without adult facilitated role-plays showed greater increases in pro-social behavior (77%) and greater reduction in aggressive behaviors (32%) than those who had additional adult intervention and role-plays (32% increase in prosocial, 22% decrease in anti-social), when both were compared to the control group. On the other hand, the group with the added teacher intervention had fewer remedial summer school referrals (62% fewer than control group) than the one without (42% fewer than control group). Because of potentially wide-scale implications, more studies are needed to further test the efficacy of this approach.