THE EFFECTS OF ASSERTIVENESS TRAINING ON THE SELF ESTEEM AND ASSERTIVE PERFORMANCE OF AT-RISK YOUTH

Renee Bader
Austin Boon
**Definitions**

- **Assertiveness**: “Standing up for your assertive rights and expressing what you believe, feel, and want in direct, honest, appropriate ways that respect the rights of the other person.”
  
  (Jakubowski & Lange, 1978, p. 2).

  Example: Expressing Anger

- **Self-Esteem**: “a favorable or unfavorable attitude toward the self” or “feeling of self worth”
  
  (Rosenberg, 1965, p.15)

  Example: “I feel I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.”
Definitions (continued)

• Training Program: Facilitative/Trainee-centered
  • Includes cognitive restructuring and behavioral rehearsal
  • Empathetic, relationship-oriented, informal, personalized assertive situations
    (Piccinin, McCarrey, & Chislett 1985)
Effects of Assertiveness Training
Programs

• Various populations
  • Adolescents
  • Ninth grade students considered by teachers and peers to be aggressive or unassertive
  • Eleventh grade students with poor assertion skills
  • Undergraduate students

• Benefits of Assertiveness Training:
  • Improved assertiveness in cognitive ability
  • Improved assertive performance
  • Improved teacher-student communication
  • Significant and long term (2 yrs.) improvement

Lee, Hallberg, & Hassard, 1979; Lee, Hallberg, Slemon, & Haase, 1985; Pentz, 1980; Piccinin, McCarrey, & Chislett 1985
Assertiveness and Self Esteem

- Assertiveness Training has been used with many populations:
  - Parents
  - 9-11 year old bullying victims
  - Adolescents
  - Jr. and senior high school women
  - Women with low self esteem

- Assertiveness training:
  - Used to increase self esteem, and does
  - Improves work performance
  - 4 measures of assertiveness are positively correlated with self esteem

Hypotheses

• Hypothesis 1:
  o We hypothesized that assertiveness training would improve the assertive behavior of participants in the training group.

• Hypothesis 2:
  • We also hypothesized that the assertiveness training program would improve the self esteem of the participants.
Method: Participants

- Ninth and tenth grade students at an Alternative High School in a mid-sized, Midwest town
- The School
  - Reasons students attend:
    - Poor attendance from home schools
    - Family and personal issues
    - Behavioral issues with other students
    - Suspensions – not expulsions
      (personal communication, April, 2011)
- Other relevant factors:
  - Low socio-economic student body
  - Part of a school system in transition (mostly new teachers and administration)
  - Our perceptions of conversations with and observation of teacher-student interaction reflect frustration and helplessness from the teachers.
Method: Participants

- Study was offered to 20 students. Fifteen did not take part in this study:
  - Lack of Parent’s Consent for Video Recording (n=7)
  - Refusal to give consent (n=3)
  - Participant’s refusal to participate after giving consent (n=4)
  - Leaving the class during the study (n=1)

- Our full participant group gave self esteem measurements (n=5).

- One participant declined the exit video session, which was for assertion measurements (n=4).
Method: Participants

• Gender
  o Female: 3
  o Male: 2
• The sample described themselves as:
  o “White”: 3
  o “American Indian” and “Black/African American”: 1
  o “Hispanic”: 1
• Students reported living with:
  o Mother: 3
  o Father: 1
  o Mother, Father and Grandmother: 1
Method: Measures

• Pre and Post Tests
  o Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (SES)
    ▪ 10 items
    ▪ Two week, test-retest reliability = .85
      (“Rosenberg self esteem scale”, 2009)

Sample Questions:

"On the whole, I am satisfied with myself."
  SA  A  D  SD

"I wish I could have more respect for myself."
  SA  A  D  SD

Key: SA= Strongly Agree, A= agree, D=disagree, SD= strongly disagree
Method: Videos

• Video Recording of Three Assertiveness Skills

• A trained college student with a script guideline played the actor for each skill.
  
  o **Introducing Yourself:** Participants were to ask to introduce him or her self to the mother of their new friend.

  o **Refusing Requests:** Participants said no to a friend who was asking for money.

  o **Responding to Anger:** Students responded to their teacher who was yelling at them for being late.
# Method: Rubric for First Skill

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Introducing Yourself</strong></th>
<th>Absent/Poor</th>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Good/Ideal</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Verbal</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Self-disclosure</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Free information</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Seeking and giving</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nonverbal</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Eye contact</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Hand gestures</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Nodding</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Smiling</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Fidgeting</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Posture</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tonality</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Rate</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Loudness</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>General</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Warm</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Friendly</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Showed interest</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results: Hypothesis 1

• We hypothesized that assertion training would improve the assertive behavior of participants in the training group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Participant 1</th>
<th>Participant 2</th>
<th>Participant 3</th>
<th>Participant 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Test</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>44.5</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Test</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>63.5</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• A repeated measures $t$-test was used to compare the means ($p=0.26$); no significance was found.
• Additional $t$-test revealed no significance by person, skill, or content, verbal, or non-verbal categories.
Results: Hypothesis 2

- We also hypothesized that assertiveness training would improve the self esteem of the participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Test RSES</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Test RSES</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- A repeated measures $t$-test was used to compare the means; no significance was found ($p=0.22$).
Discussion

Hypothesis 1 did not achieve significance

- Other studies with similar training programs fail to show significant effect on adolescents' assertive performance.
  - There is no evidence that general assertiveness is a protective factor against substance use in teen students, ages 12-14. (Wills, Baker, & Botvin, 1989)
  - Stored cognitive information of social assertiveness does not correlate with behavioral performance in role-played situations. (Thompson & Bundy, 1996)
Discussion

Hypothesis 2 did not show significant results; no improvement in self esteem of participants

• No improvements from training

• Self Esteem as measured is a global factor.
Discussion

Reviewing the factors that determine effectiveness of assertiveness training programs:

- Participant Motivation and Investment
  - Participant mortality
  - Pre and post interviews
  - Attendance

- Participant Characteristics:
  - Verbal reasoning
  - State anxiety
  (Pentz, 1981)
Discussion

- Training Program
  - This was the first adaptation of a training program to at-risk youth, from one designed for college students.
  - No verbal (or content) improvement in any participants (the level of skill was likely not appropriate for the audience)

- Trainer Quality
  - Not specifically trained to work with at-risk youth
Discussion

Perceived Factors of the Environment

• Assertive behavior not modeled or rewarded
• Passive behavior reinforced in the classroom
• Aggressive behavior is reinforced through (negative) attention
• Life stressors: parenthood, dysfunctional families, low SES families, poor adaptation to school because of long term absences (personal communication, April, 2011)
Implications for Future Research

- For future research
  - Personalize pre and post-test role plays to individuals' experiences
  - Reinforce and reward assertive behavior
  - Provide trainers more experience working with this population
  - Adapt the verbal content of skills taught to the appropriate level of learning for at-risk youth
References


References (continued)

References (continued)