RUNNING HEAD: CRITIQUE OF “PEER GROUPS AND BEHAVIOUR PROBLEMS”

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QRM 4910
The abstract notes that “Pre-test/post-test control group design was used.” (p. 120) In the Methodology section it appears that the design was experimental in that nine classes in schools were randomly assigned to one of three study groups. However, the study did not truly involve random sampling as it was in fact a “quasi-experimental research plan, including control group pre-testing and post-testing . . .” (p. 125)

The quasi-experimental research design involved selecting six schools in the Quebec area, selecting nine classes of third graders who were randomly assigned to treatment group on social skills alone; a treatment group involving social skills and cooperative teaching; and a control group. The researchers identified 54 of the 212 students in the study group as having behavior problems.

A better design for the study would have been experimental with true random sampling so that the researchers could then generalize their findings to the larger population. It would also have allowed for only one variable rather than two.

A strength of the design is the use of treatment and control groups, mitigating such threats to internal validity as testing, instrumentation, ambiguous temporal precedence, history, and maturation. The quasi-experimental nature allowed for treatment manipulation. However, a weakness of the design was that it did not involve random assignment. Another weakness is that more than one treatment, or variable, was introduced (confounding variables). By nature the quasi-experimental design could use manipulation or treatment, but not random assignment. It could not control for threats to internal or external validity.

The treatments were described well. Group one was provided an adaptation of the PARC program, social skills workshop from a cognitive behavioral approach to dealing
with difficult behaviors. Group two also received this intervention, as well as cooperative educational activities with peers as mentors. Both required cooperation from and involvement by the classroom teacher.

The controls are not well described. The researchers only mention that there was a control group which one assumes did not receive either of the two treatments. Random assignment was not used in this study. Assignment was nonrandom so the researchers did not control the assignment. The group differences may have affected the outcome of the study.

The article includes a table of the mean and standard deviation of scores for peers’ evaluation, teachers’ evaluation and self-perception for all three groups, for each variable addressed in the study, both pre-test and post-test.

No mention is made of any missing data. The results are presented in clear and understandable terms, with apologies from the authors that their results did not support their hypotheses, and that further evaluation is needed.