

Systematic Search

An initial scoping search of Google Scholar, ProQuest (ERIC) and PsychInfo was carried out, looking for the terms 'Talkabout'. This search didn't yield any results, other than the links to the Talkabout resources themselves. This was also true when Proquest Theses and Dissertations was searched.

I subsequently emailed the author of Talkabout, Alex Kelly, to see if she would have any data that she would be willing to share with me (email 11.04.23: Dear Alex, I am a current Trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of Southampton. One of our assignments is to do an academic critique of an emotional literacy intervention. As I have recommended and used Talkabout in my previous role as an assistant SENCo, I was keen to evaluate Talkabout. In your preface for 'Talkabout for Children' you mention that you have been evaluating the intervention. I was wondering if any of these findings have been published? And if not, whether these would be findings that you would be willing to share with me?). I did not receive a response from Alex Kelly.

As a result of the paucity of research on Talkabout, I went down the alternative route (see Figure 1) and looked at other interventions grounded in a similar theory. A second scoping search using the terms 'social skills' yielded far more results. I used The PICO question framework (Population, Intervention, Comparison and Outcomes) (Richardson, 1995) to help generate a research question and the inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Tables 1 and 2). PICO was chosen as it addressed the core elements in this academic critique (Booth et al., 2019) and has been used previously to review evidence-based practice in education (Connolly et al. (2018)).

Figure 1

Guide to Structure Academic Critiques

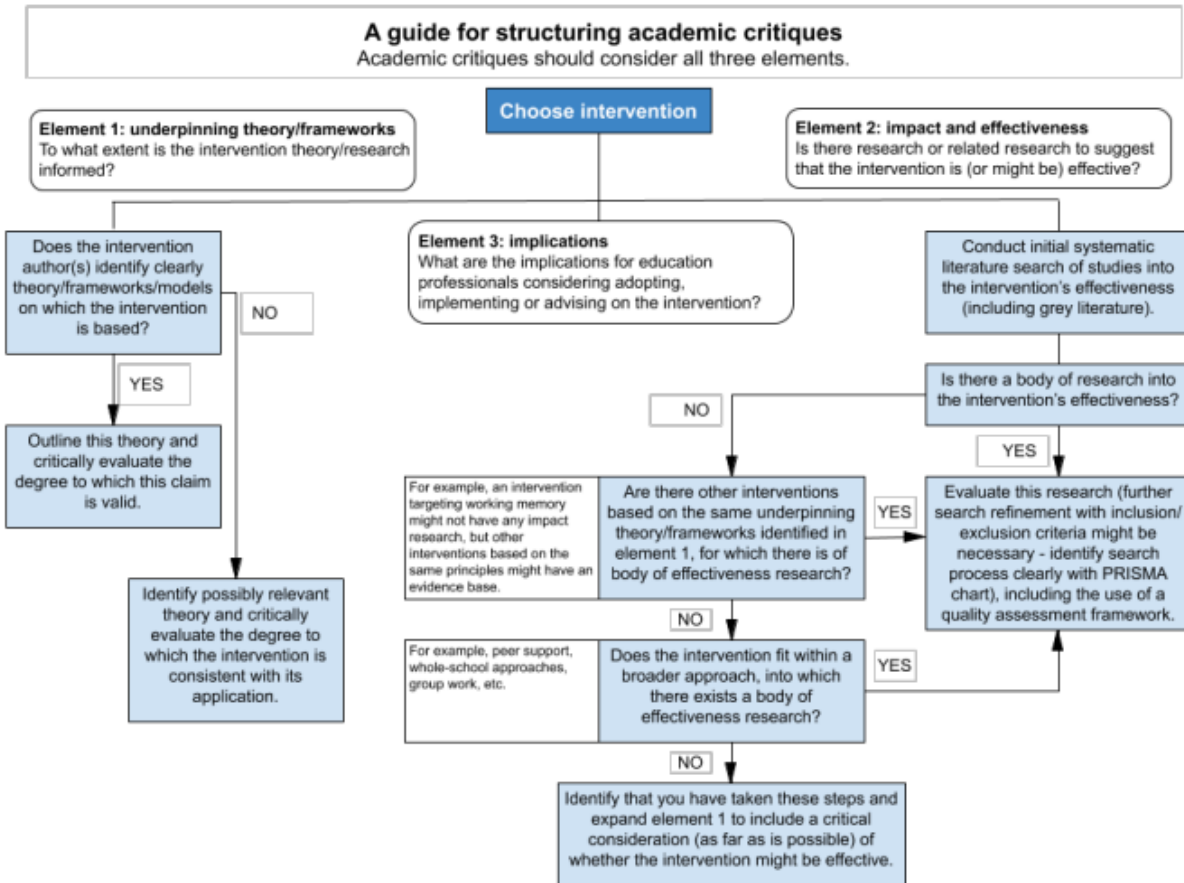


Table 1

PICO Question Formulation Framework

Population	Children in primary schools
Intervention	Social skills, Talkabout
Comparison	Ideally to a comparison intervention or control
Outcome	Improved /developed social skills

Table 2

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for the Systematic Search

Inclusion Criteria	Specified as social skills or social competence (e.g., not behaviour) Participants aged 12 or under [could include kindergarten but not preschool] Mainstream school-based intervention [universal provision] Delivered in school [in class or as withdrawal intervention, not by parents] Intervention and not part of a whole class behaviour management approach Full text available Empirical study Presence of a comparison or control group (this could include treatment as usual and/or wait list) Peer reviewed article, or thesis or dissertation Published in English
Exclusion Criteria	Not for a clinical condition (e.g., social phobia, social anxiety disorder) Not specifically linked to autism or extreme behaviour Not delivered by parents or peers, either wholly or in part Not linked with another program (e.g., literacy, academic achievement) Participants in preschool or secondary school No comparison group Assessed skill other than social skills (e.g., literacy) Qualitative study Published in a language other than English Full text not available

The final research question was 'Are social skills programmes effective at developing social skills in primary school children?'. This question was used to generate the database search terms shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Search Terms Used in Database Search Strategy

effectiv* OR effect OR efficacious OR improv* OR impact OR evaluat* OR achieve* OR develop* AND 'Talkabout' OR 'Social skills' OR 'Social competence' OR 'Social Skills Hierarchy' AND child* OR youth* OR 'young people' OR 'young person' OR 'student' OR OR pupil* OR school OR classroom OR 'primary school*' OR 'elementary school*' OR 'elementary education' OR 'middle school' OR 'junior school'

The results of this search strategy generated over 500 papers. The search terms were then further revised to those shown in Table 4.

Table 4

effectiv* OR effect OR efficacious OR improv* OR impact OR evaluat* OR achieve* OR develop*

AND 'Talkabout' OR 'Social skills training' OR 'Social skills intervention' OR 'Social skills development' OR 'Social competenc* training' OR 'Social competenc* intervention' OR 'Social competenc* development'

AND child* OR pupil* OR school OR classroom OR 'primary school*' OR 'elementary school*' OR 'elementary education' OR 'middle school' OR 'junior school'

RQ- Are social skills programmes effective at developing social skills in primary school children

The specific databases searched were ERIC (Educational Resources Information Center) (ProQuest) and PsychInfo (EBSCO). The grey literature was searched using Proquest.

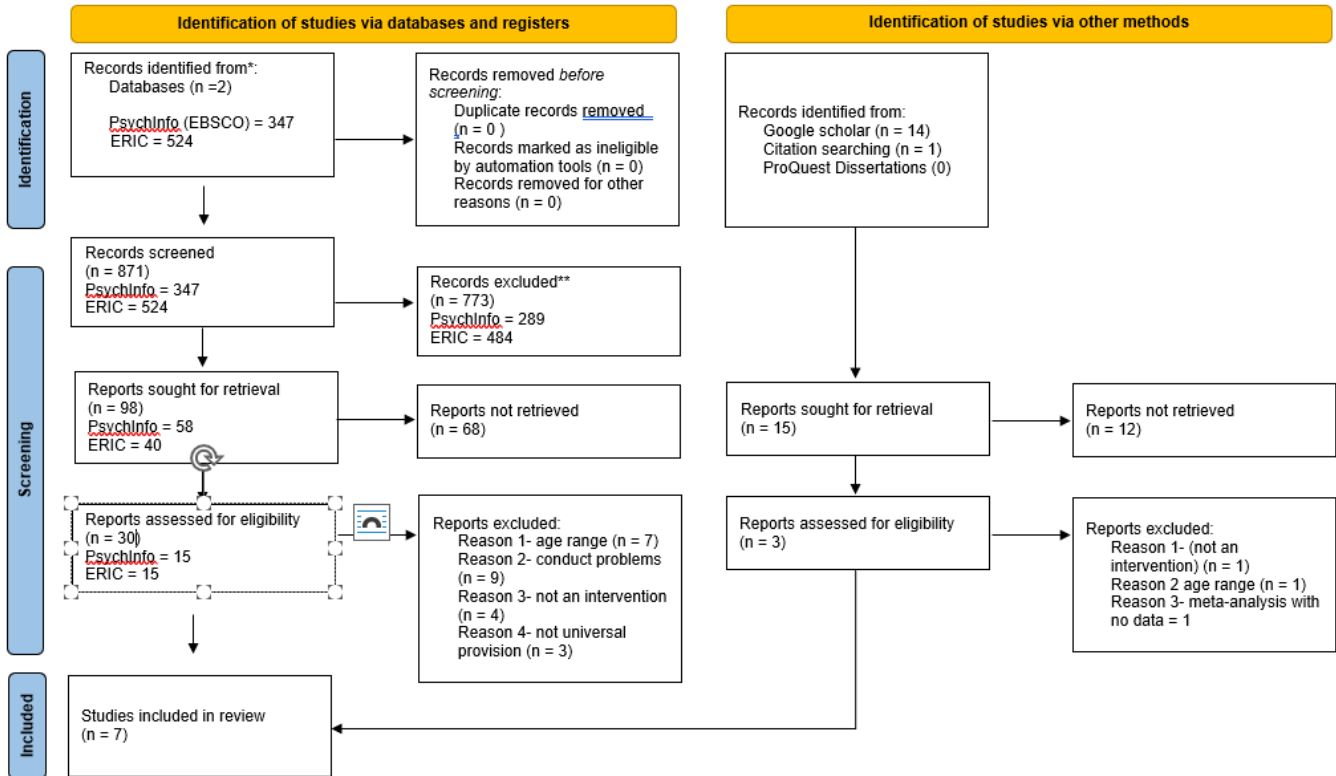
The inclusion criteria were used to screen the identified studies for inclusions. This process is shown in the PRISMA flow diagram (Page et al., 2021) (Figure 2). Initially titles were screened for relevance, and then those papers that appeared to meet in the inclusion criteria had the abstracts screened for suitability. Finally, papers whose abstracts met the inclusion criteria then had the full paper examined to ensure inclusion criteria were met.

A system for assessing the quality of the papers, based on Downs and Black (Downs & Black, 1998) was used, with key information being recorded in a data extraction table (Table 5). Relevant data from each study were extracted to facilitate analysis of the efficacy of the social skills intervention. The data were summarised in relation to: intervention; geographic location; age of participants; sample size; selection criteria; frequency of intervention; duration of intervention; who delivered the intervention; training given; individual or group; group sizes; control or comparison study; measured outcomes; design; RCT; results; statistical analysis; statistical results; conclusions and notes.

Figure 2

PRISMA Flow Diagram (Page et al., 2021)

PRISMA 2020 flow diagram for new systematic reviews which included searches of databases, registers and other sources



*Consider, if feasible to do so, reporting the number of records identified from each database or register searched (rather than the total number across all databases/registers).

**If automation tools were used, indicate how many records were excluded by a human and how many were excluded by automation tools.

From: Page MJ, McKenzie JE, Bossuyt PM, Boutron I, Hoffmann TC, Mulrow CD, et al. The PRISMA 2020 statement: an updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. *BMJ* 2021;372:n71. doi: 10.1136/bmj.n71. For more information, visit: <http://www.prisma-statement.org/>

Table 5 Data Extraction Table

	Calhoun 2020	Sheridan 2011	Gil-Madrona 2019	Curtis 2007	DiPerna 2015	Hennessey 2006	Humphrey 2010
Intervention	PATHS (targets self-control, emotion regulation, attention, communication and problem solving)	Skillstreaming (to develop listening, following directions, problem-solving and knowing when to tell). Principal aim here was prosocial skill dev.	Delfos programme- social skills during PE lesson [mainly about measuring appropriate behaviours in sport, but has a specific score for social skills].	PATHS (targets self-awareness, managing feelings, motivation, empathy and social skills)	Social Skills Improvement System Classwide Intervention Program (SSIS-CIP). Targets social behaviours necessary for classroom success, e.g., listening to others, taking turns in conversations, cooperating with others.	Open Circle Program (OCP)- learn and practice communication, self-control and social skills	New Beginnings- targets children thought to be at risk of social and emotional problems, working with children considered to be role models. Develops empathy, emotional understanding and social-problem solving (skills)
Location	US	Canada	Spain	UK	US	US	UK
Age of participants	K and grade 1 (age 5-7), with follow up in grade 2	K to grade 3 [mean age 6.4]	grades 5 and 6	KS1	Grade 2	grade 4 [mean age 9.24]	age 6 to 11
Sample size	314 to 281 (attrition over time)	647	204	287	432	154	253 (159 in intervention and 94 in comparison) (62 role models, 191 receiving extra support)
Selection criteria	schools in disadvantaged areas	schools in local area invited to participate; up to 10 children from each class selected	convenience sampling- 7 schools from the region. Urban and disadvantaged areas.	doesn't say how the 5 schools were selected	all grade 2 teachers in the district invited to participate	class	schools selected children for intervention based on a number of factors, including perceived needs and group dynamics
Frequency of intervention	2xweekly for 20 mins	not said	20 sessions of 45 mins each	not said	30 sessions over 12 week period	over the year	weekly for 7 weeks
Duration of intervention	over 2 years- teachers use scripted lessons 2x/wk for 20 mins	not said	20 sessions of 45 mins each	not said	20-25 minutes	twice per week work on one of 35 lessons	45 minutes
Who delivered intervention	teachers	mental health practitioners in collab with teachers	PE teachers	teachers	teachers	teachers	school staff, typically a TA or learning mentor
Training	yes, 2 days	yes, teachers trained	not said	yes, 2 days	yes, 1 day	yes	not said
Individual or group	whole class	whole class	whole class	whole class	whole class	whole class	small group
Group sizes	class	8-35 students	class	class	class 20-25	class	small group not defined
Control or comparison	control- active placebo condition, also 1 yr post	pre-post testing- comparison	pre-post with control	pre-post with control	multi-cluster randomised trial	pre post with control	pre-post with control, also 7 weeks post
Measured outcomes	various teacher rated including social competence scale	teacher and mental health staff rated behaviours on a scale of 1-100	questionnaire- which included questions on social skills	strengths and difficulties questionnaire	Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS) Rating Scale, Cooperative Learning Observation Code for Kids	self-report and teacher report	child self-report, and teacher and parent scores on Emotional Literacy Assessment Instrument, also parents and teachers completed SDQ
Design	multi-site RCT	children with low prosocial vs those with average prosocial skills. Up to 10 in each class chosen for pre-post evaluation.	multi site pre-post comparison	multi-site pre-post with control	multisite CRT (cluster randomised trial)-	multi-site pre-post with control	multi-site pre-post- post+ with control
RCT	yes	no	no	no	yes	no	no
Results	children in PATHS groups showed sig greater improvement to control (soc. Compt, pro-soc. Behav + other)	statistically significant results obtained in all 4 skill areas. Medium effect size based on teacher scores and large effect size based on mental health staff scores	post-test scores for social scores were significantly higher than pre-test	significant improvement in all 5 dimensions for the intervention group but not the control BUT t-tests on pre-test scores showed there to be a significant difference on the 5 SDQ constructs between the PATHS and control groups	positive significant effects on teacher ratings of participant's overall social skills, small-medium effect size. Effect sizes should be interpreted with caution as effect of intervention seems to have been dependent on pre-test levels of these measures. [stronger effect for classes with lower pre-test scores]	OCP participants showed significantly greater teacher-reported improvements in social skills than for the control group.	child self-report data shows an improvement in scores in the children selected for extra support (small to med effect size), but not in the teacher or parental data. No significant difference in scores between T1 and T3 (7 weeks post intervention). Suggest that interventions are more intensive (2x per week) and longer (e.g. 14 weeks)
Statistically analysed	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Statistically significant results	yes- significant intervention effects but plateaued over time	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Conclusion	PATHS exerts universal benefits, irrespective of status. All children benefitted significantly	Both teachers and mental health professionals ratings of children's pro-social functioning showed sig improvement with med to strong effect sizes.	intervention was effective in improving social skills	the change in scores from pre to post test was significant for the intervention but not the control group. PATHS therefore had a significant impact.	student's overall (composite) social skills scores showed significant positive increases, with small to medium effects, as compared to the control group. RCT so strong finding.	OCP participants showed significantly greater improvements in social skills than for the control group.	evidence of positive impact in child report data, not corroborated by teacher and parent data. Any gains accrued from the intervention seem to decline after a few weeks. Suggest that interventions are more intensive (2x per week) and longer (e.g. 14 weeks)
Notes	delivered the intervention over two years, and then looked after a third year as to what the effects were. Didn't set out to measure efficacy, as this has been shown previously, but for whom it worked best. Still their results show that it was effective, so study was kept in. Core set of scripted lessons, as per Talkabout	similar to Talkabout in that it targets 3 developmental ranges (p 421) and specific skill areas (e.g. social skills, friendship skills, dealing with feelings) This is a really good one to compare to. Delivered by 2 instructors in small group format [but can be whole class]	programme more about developing social skills associated with sport than what is delivered in Talkabout, but it shows that doing it in PE works as a mechanism of delivery and could target different skills deficits.	Central focus of PATHS is the generalisation of skills into everyday life. This study was carried out by Winchester EPS. Scarce evidence for PATHS in the UK			

Reflecting on this search strategy, it is felt that the search terms should have been further refined. Searching by 'social skills' generated too many results. It would perhaps have helped to add a term that searched for withdrawal groups specifically, rather than interventions generally. This critique would also have been improved by concentrating on interventions that focussed on skills more similar to those developed by Talkabout. I feel that this critique went from not enough information to too much, and like Goldilocks, a more well-defined research question would have got it 'just right'.

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