Identifying Influential Elementary School Students for Engagement in Evidence-Based Program Adaptation and Implementation

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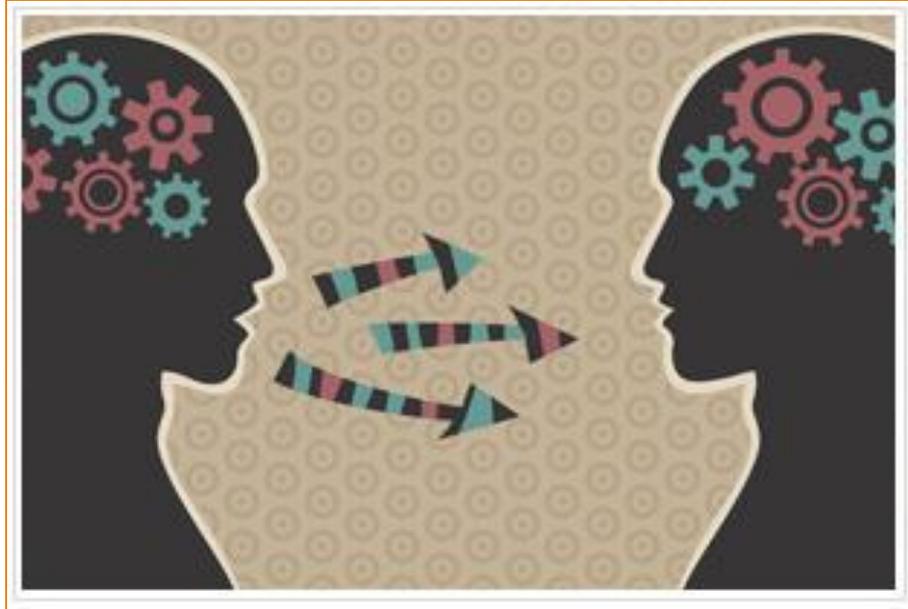
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An Example of the Problem:
Bullying and Bullying Prevention

The reason for diminished effectiveness of bullying prevention programs when widely disseminated may have to do with the quality of implementation and local acceptability of the program.

Engaging Community Members in Intervention

Increasingly, researchers are recognizing children as important stakeholders and are engaging them in the development and implementation of community-based programs (Cook & Hess, 2007; Gallagher, 2004).

While some evidence-based bullying prevention programs, such as the OBPP, engage educators in customizing the program to the school, it is rare for students to be engaged in bullying prevention as anything more than program recipients (Gibson, Flaspohler, & Watts, 2015).

No literature currently exists to direct researchers and practitioners as to whom among a group of children should be recruited to participate in customizing bullying-prevention and other school-based interventions.

Social Diffusion Theory
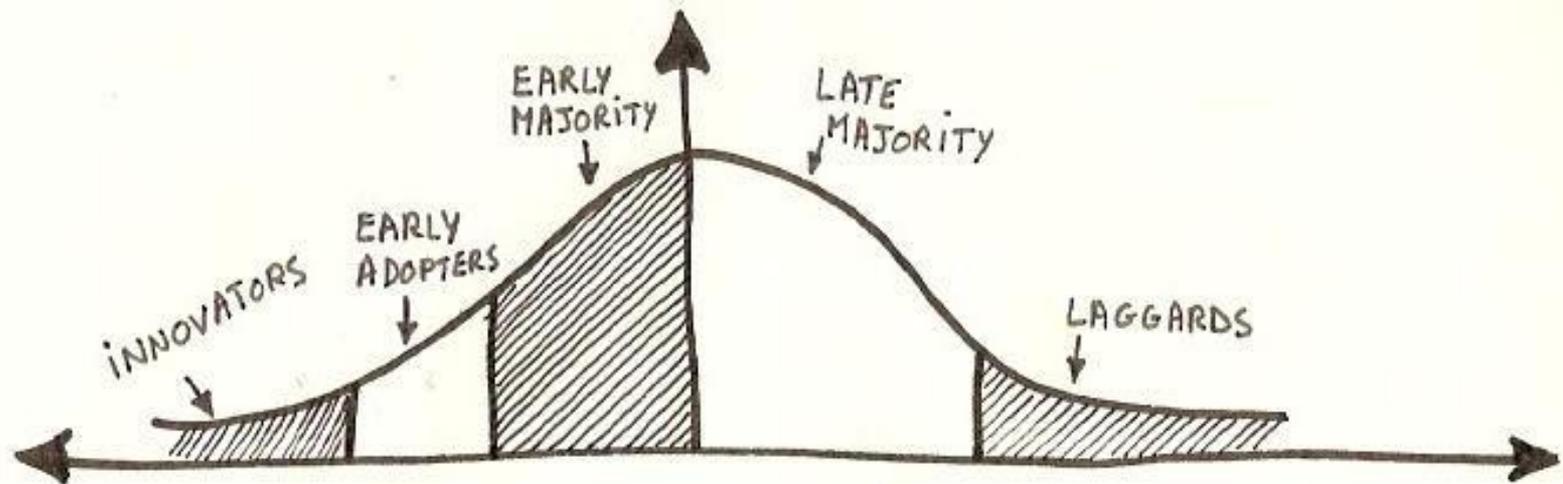
Opinion Leaders

Opinion leaders yield more influence when they share similar characteristics with other members, particularly those characteristics directly related to the target behaviors.

◦ Characteristics such as **age, lifestyle, and socio-economic status** all increase influence (Fisher & Misovich, 1990), and opinion leaders may be less influential among social network members who are dissimilar to them with respect to these key characteristics.

There is evidence to support the use of key opinion leaders in health promotion efforts among adolescents and adults.

Relatively little is known about opinion leaders within social networks of children.

Identifying Opinion Leaders

No evidence exists to suggest that programs can create key opinion leaders by helping them develop meta-capabilities or necessary characteristics (Smith, 2005).

Program implementers must instead identify pre-existing key opinion leaders and utilize their influence. Researchers and program implementers have relied on numerous strategies for identifying key opinion leaders.
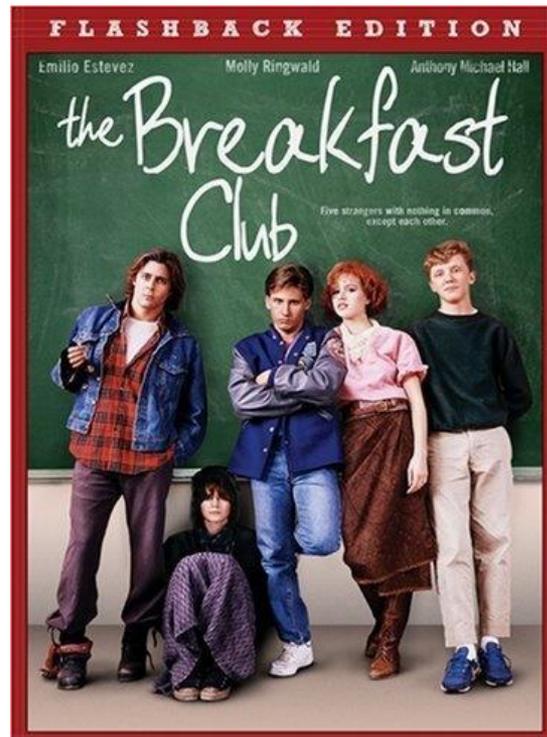
APPLES & ORANGES
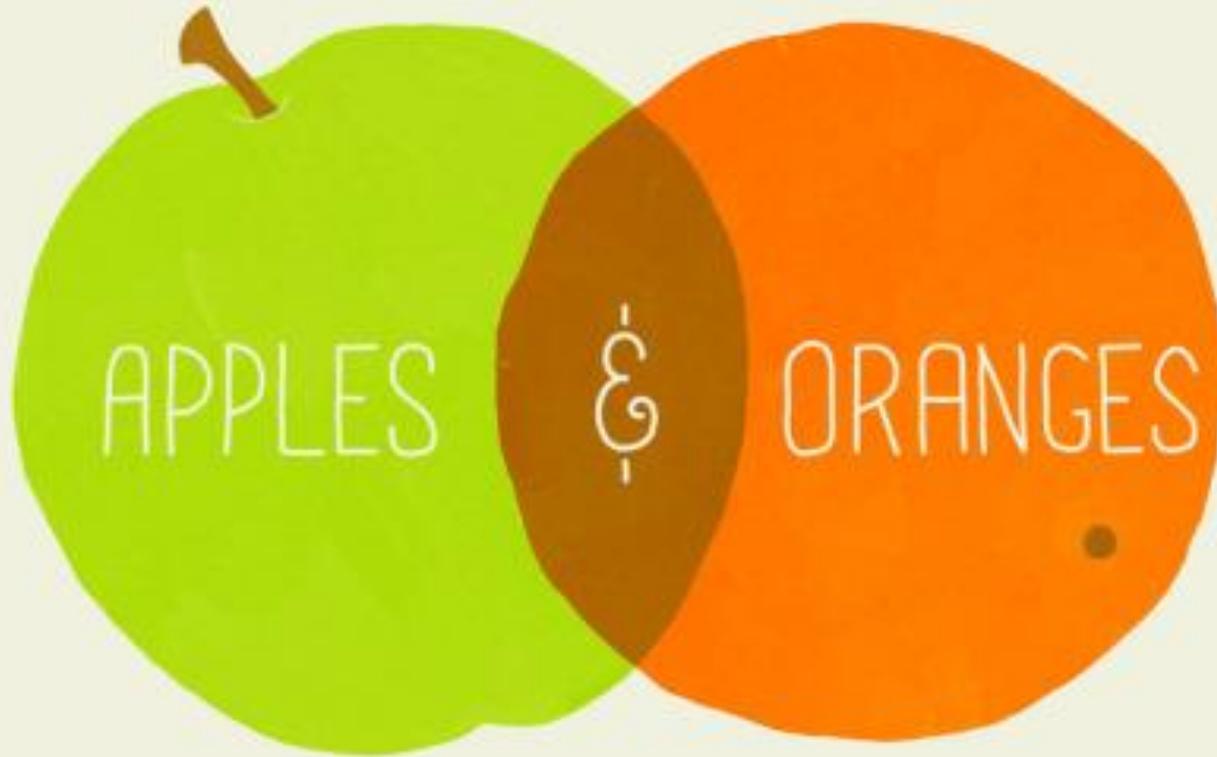
Social Networks of Childhood

Most of the empirical research conducted on youth identification of peer groups has been conducted with adolescent, not child, participants.

There are two types of widely recognized adolescent groups: crowds and cliques.
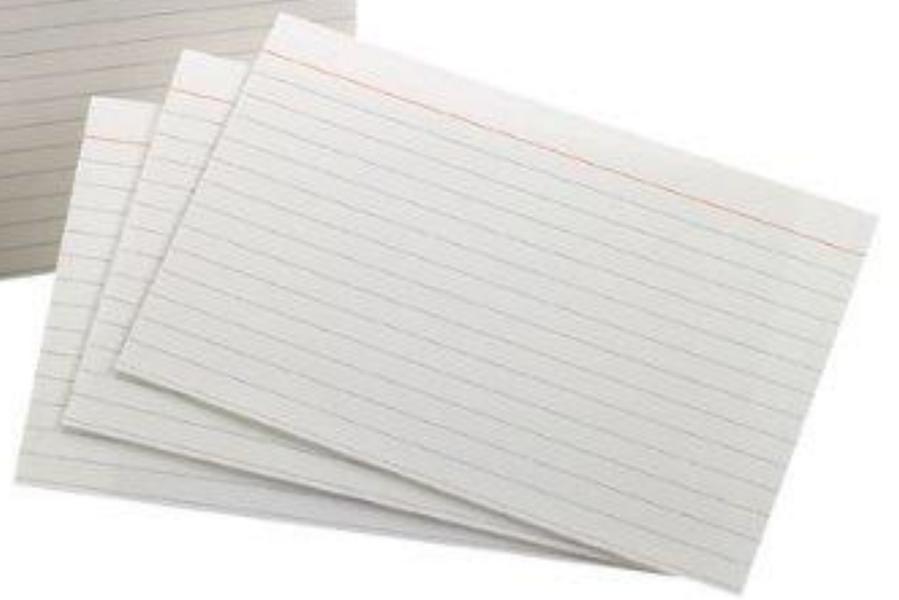
Adolescent Crowds

Study 1

Participants were from 3 elementary schools in a rural, Midwestern school district.

◦ Within this district, 17.5% of the students are economically disadvantaged and approximately 94% are Caucasian.

◦ All of the approximately 200 fifth grade students, as well as 25 school staff members working with fifth grade students received a letter informing them about the study and a consent form.

◦ A total of 23 school staff members provided consent, and 35 students received parental consent and provided assent to participate in the study.

The materials and procedures were adapted from the social-type ratings (STR) methodology developed by Brown (1990) and used by others (e.g. Cross & Fletcher, 2009; England & Petro, 1998; Schwendinger & Schwendinger, 1997) to study crowds.

Crowd Group Identification

	Elite	Academic	Athlete	Deviant
Standard Crowd Description	Students who enjoy high peer status, are highly socially involved, and may or may not be academically involved	Students who are highly academically engaged, may enjoy some peer status, but typically are relatively socially uninvolved	Students who participate in sports, have high peer status, are socially involved, but are traditionally only slightly involved in academics	Students who rebel against school norms and expectations, may enjoy some peer status, and typically are uninvolved academically
Initially Identified	27	36	41	30
Example of Immediately Identified Participant Descriptions	"Popular Girls: Good clothes; look good; sit together; don't try to be super smart"	"Nerdy: Very smart; not in style; talk about school; mostly boys"	"Jocks: Athletes; football players; cheerleaders; smart but not too smart; popular; leaders"	"Bullies: This group is really mean; also, stay away from them; don't try to act like them"
Secondarily Identified	37	8	5	20
Example of Secondarily Identified Participant Descriptions	"Drama Queens: Girls who have lots of 'friend fights' but always resolve them"	"Quiet: Doesn't talk a lot; usually smart; dresses different; boys"	"Academically Careless: Variety of kids; jocks who are focused outside of school and socially focused in school"	"Outcasts: Dress poorly; sloppy; poor students; poor verbal skills; poor social skills"
Total descriptions per crowd group	64 (31.4%)	44 (21.6%)	46 (22.5%)	50 (24.5%)

Chi Square Test Results

Chi Square Test Results for Group by School, for Students Only

	School			
	1	2	3	χ^2
Elite	10	12	22	22.32***
	(-1.93)	(0.07)	(1.79)	
Academic	11	9	1	
	(2.01)	(1.82)	(-3.59)	
Athlete	12	1	14	
	(1.35)	(-3.09)	(1.50)	
Deviant	7	10	10	
	(-0.96)	(1.35)	(-0.30)	

Note. Adjusted standardized residuals appear in parentheses below crowd group frequencies.
*** $p = .001$

Students identified the crowd groups with different frequencies across schools.

Teachers did not.

Students and teachers did not differ in the crowd groups identified.

Study 2

Participants in Study 2 were from a small kindergarten to eighth grade school in New England. In this district, 12% of the students are economically disadvantaged and approximately 90% are Caucasian.

- All of the school's 34 fifth grade students, and 13 school staff members working with fifth grade students received a letter informing them about the study and a consent form.

- For the first aim of Study 2, participants were five fifth grade students and five fifth grade teachers who provided consent/assent.

- For the second aim of Study 2, participants were 29 fifth grade students and 10 school staff members working with fifth grade students who provided consent/assent.

For the first aim of Study 2, the materials were the same as those used in Study 1.

For the second aim of Study 2, the materials and procedures were adapted from the sociometric key opinion leader identification method cited by Valente and Pumpuang (2007) and used by several other researchers (e.g. Crick & Ladd, 1990; Zakriski, Seifer, Sheldrick, Prinstein, & Dickstein, 1999).

Smart Kids

Place cards he

Other

- - - - - - - - - - - - - -

Popular Kids

- - - - - - - - - - - - - -

Place cards here

Sports Kids

- - - - - - - - - - - - - -

Place cards here

Troublemakers

- - - - - - - - - - - - - -

Place cards here

Brian Johnson

- - - - - - - - - - - - - -

Claire Standish

- - - - - - - - - - - - - -

ID #: 45

1st   2nd

Allison Reynolds

- - - - - - - - - - - - - -

rd

John Bender

- - - - - - - - - - - - - -

ID #: 32

1st   2nd   3rd

Results for Study 2

The same named student in the Popular Kids crowd (z = -0.34, p = .48), Sports Kids crowd (z = -0.34, p = .48), and Smart Kids crowd (z = -0.28, p = .42) received the majority of both student and adult nominations as an opinion leader.

Different members of the Troublemakers crowd received the majority of adult and student nominations (z = 1.56, p = .014).

Discussion

The results of Study 1 reveal that, in general, the names/ descriptions of crowd groups generated by fifth grade students correspond to those frequently cited in the literature for adolescents (see Sussman et al., 2007), and that the names/descriptions of crowd groups generated by adults resembled those generated by their students.

In Study 2, adults were able to correctly identify the same crowd-specific key opinion leaders as their students in three of the four crowd groups: Popular Kids, Sports Kids, and Smart Kids.
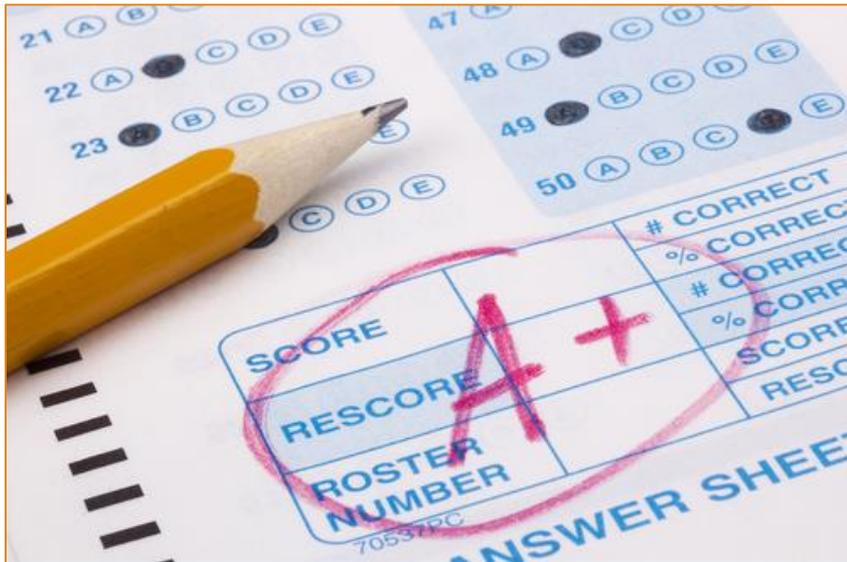
Form 75C

DETENTION SLIP

HANLEY COLLIN
Last Name · First Name

Date 3/28   Room 33

Reason STUDENT THREW
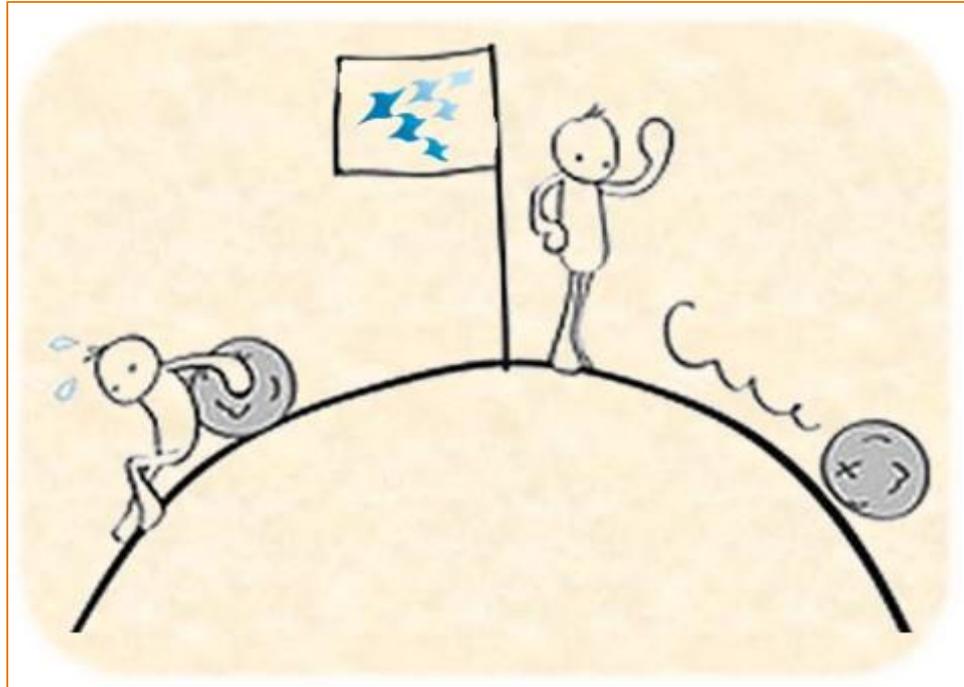SANDWHICH ACROSS CLASS
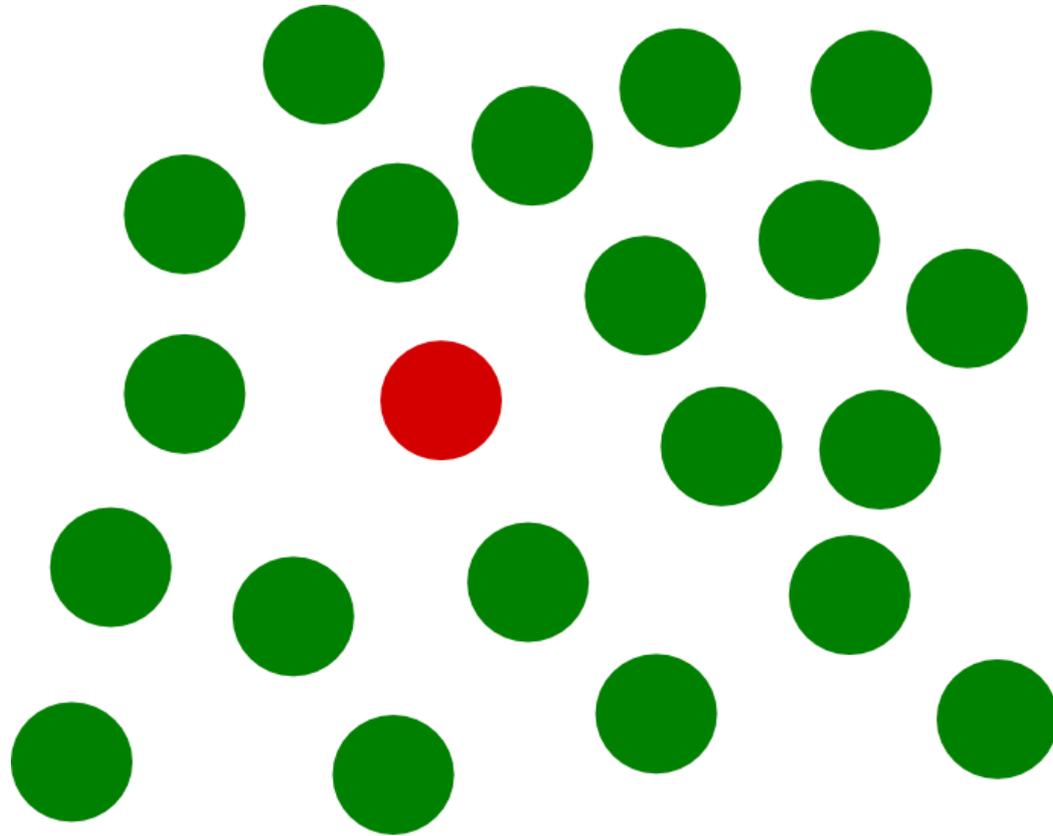SCREAMING YOLO.

Teacher's Signature

Detention Form

NoSh

I am in Srta. ▓▓▓ Detention because...
I threw a very impressive majestic paper airplane into the recycling bin

This is not how one is supposed to act because...
It could have impaled someone

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21 Ⓐ Ⓑ Ⓒ Ⓓ Ⓔ
22 Ⓐ Ⓑ Ⓒ Ⓓ Ⓔ
23 Ⓐ Ⓑ Ⓒ Ⓓ Ⓔ
47 Ⓐ Ⓑ Ⓒ Ⓓ Ⓔ
48 Ⓐ Ⓑ Ⓒ Ⓓ Ⓔ
49 Ⓐ Ⓑ Ⓒ Ⓓ Ⓔ
50 Ⓐ Ⓑ Ⓒ Ⓓ Ⓔ

CORRECT
% CORRECT
# CORRECT
% CORR
SCORE
RESCORE

SCORE **A+**
RESCORE
ROSTER NUMBER

ANSWER SHEET

Limitations and Future Directions

Conclusion