

BYRAM HILLS CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
ARMONK, NEW YORK

GROWTH PLAN END-OF-YEAR REPORT

Title: Assessing the effectiveness of the social problem-solving training within the Second Steps Social Skills program

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Year: 2010-2011

School/Grade: Coman Hill, Wampus, and HCC/K-6

SUMMARY OF ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

Context

As an administrator and school psychologists, we were interested in how the use of a social skills program will lead to improved problem-solving skills for students identified with a disability by the Committee on Special Education. During the 2009-2010 school year, a committee comprised of special educators, general educators, and psychologists was formed. Research was conducted on several social skills programs and models. Selected committee members observed social skills programs in neighboring school districts. The Committee determined to pilot the Second Steps Program within the special classes in grades three and four. During the 2010-2011 school year, the psychologists implemented the Second Steps Program within the special classes at the elementary schools (K-5) and within a counseling group at the middle school (grades 6 & 7.)

Plan and Actions

The focus of our study has been on teacher perception of social problem solving skills among classified students. Our research questions are:

- 1) How will implementing the Problem-Solving unit of the Second Steps social skills curriculum assist children in brainstorming solutions to a social challenge?
- 2) How will implementing the Problem-Solving unit of Second Steps social skills curriculum improve students' ability to execute solutions to a social challenge?

Our team read a variety of research articles to support our inquiry. The literature on social skills suggests that students with learning disabilities engage in fewer social activities and are less socially skilled than same-aged peers (Schumaker & Deshler, 1995). Teaching students interpersonal problem-solving skills can reduce and prevent

problem behaviors (Hawkins, Farrington, & Catalano, 1998; Tolan & Guerra, 1994). According to Committee for Children (2002), the emotional reactions that children have to social interactions and the cognitive and behavioral habits they have developed affect children’s ability to socialize and solve interpersonal problems. Pilot studies of the Second Steps program showed that students who received Second Step lessons achieved greater gains in knowledge of social-emotional skills than students in comparison groups (Moore & Beland, 1992).

In light of our research questions and the literature we read, we created a pre-test to assess problem solving skills in relation to social situations. It is a five point likert-type scale that assesses five types of problem solving skills (ability to: identify the problem, brainstorm possible solutions to problems, evaluate each solution, select, plan and try solution and evaluate the outcome). We had three teachers complete the checklist before implementing Unit 2 of the Second Step social skills program. We collected the information in March before beginning the Impulse Control and Problem Solving Unit.

Our Learning

Our data includes the teachers’ completion of the pre-test and their perception of the student’s problem-solving skills. (See Appendix A.) Within the special classes, there are different levels of need ranging from some students having no cause for concern to other students who have great cause for concern when evaluating their problem-solving skills in relation to social situations. This is true at both elementary schools and at the middle school.

Key to tables below:

1. No cause for concern
2. Mild cause for concern
3. Moderate cause for concern
4. Serious cause for concern
5. Great cause for concern

Our data includes five first grade students:

Problem-Solving Skills	1	2	3	4	5
a) Ability to identify the problem		2 of 5	1 of 5	2 of 5	
b) Ability to brainstorm possible solutions to problems		2 of 5	1 of 5	2 of 5	
c) Ability to evaluate each solution		2 of 5	1 of 5	2 of 5	
d) Ability to select plan and try solution		2 of 5	1 of 5	2 of 5	
e) Ability to evaluate the outcome		2 of 5	1 of 5	2 of 5	

We learned that the development of problem-solving skills across the discrete skills identified were consistent for each of the first grade students. That is, a student who was identified as having *Mild cause for concern* in identifying the problem would likely have *Mild cause for concern* in their ability to brainstorm solutions, evaluate solutions, select and try solution and evaluate the outcome. Students perceived as having *Great cause for concern* with identifying a problem, were likely to be seen as having

Great cause for concern with brainstorming, evaluating, selecting a solution and evaluating the outcome. This data provides a framework for understanding the students' needs in terms of their social problem solving skills. It indicates that continued direct instruction and support of problem solving skills will be instrumental in furthering their social development and problem solving repertoire.

10 fifth grade students:

Problem-Solving Skills	1	2	3	4	5
a) Ability to identify the problem	3 of 10	2 of 10	1 of 10		4 of 10
b) Ability to brainstorm possible solutions to problems	2 of 10	2 of 10	1 of 10	1 of 10	4 of 10
c) Ability to evaluate each solution	2 of 10	2 of 10	1 of 10	1 of 10	4 of 10
d) Ability to select plan and try solution	3 of 10	2 of 10	1 of 10		4 of 10
e) Ability to evaluate the outcome	3 of 10	2 of 10	1 of 10		4 of 10

We learned that the development of problem-solving skills across the discrete skills identified were less consistent for the fifth grade students. Four of the students were rated as having *Great cause for concern* across each discrete skill identifies. One of the students was rated as *Moderate* across the areas; two of the students as *Moderate* and two students as *Mild* across the discrete skills identified. The remaining student showed more scatter and was noted to have no difficulty identifying a problem, trying and evaluating a solution but had great difficulty brainstorming possible solutions. We found that 50% of the students were found to have *Serious to Great Cause for Concern* in their Social Problem Solving Skills. This is evident across settings and consistent with their classifications as language impaired children.

Five sixth grade Students:

Problem-Solving Skills	1	2	3	4	5
a) Ability to identify the problem	2 of 5	2 of 5	1 of 5		
b) Ability to brainstorm possible solutions to problems	1 of 5	2 of 5	2 of 5		
c) Ability to evaluate each solution		2 of 5	2 of 5	1 of 5	
d) Ability to select plan and try solution		2 of 5	2 of 5	1 of 5	
e) Ability to evaluate the outcome		4 of 5		1 of 5	

We learned that the development of problem-solving skills across the discrete skills identified were less consistent for the sixth grade students. Students' ability to identify the problem ranged from *No Cause for Concern* for two students, *Mild cause for concern* for 2 students and *Moderate cause for concern* for one student. Students' ability to brainstorm possible solutions to problems ranged from *No Cause for Concern* for one student, *Mild cause for concern* for two students and *Moderate Cause for Concern* for two students. Students' ability to evaluate each solution ranged from *Mild Cause for Concern* for two students, *Moderate Cause for Concern* for two students and *Serious Concern* for one student. Students' ability to select plan and try a solution ranged from *Mild Cause*

for *Concern* for two students, *Moderate Cause for Concern* for two students and *Serious Concern* for one student. Lastly, students' ability to evaluate the outcome ranged from *Mild concern* for four students and *Serious Concern* for one student. For many of our students, the ability to evaluate the outcome is a more concrete task and therefore leads to more success for them. The act of generating ideas was more difficult, as this is a task that requires more abstract thinking and fluid reasoning skills.

Implications for the Future

We learned that the scale that we created measured very closely related problem-solving skills. Problem solving is a dynamic process that involves many facets, all of which are important to resolving social situations that might arise. The ability to identify a problem, generate, evaluate and chose a solution and finally to evaluate the outcome of that solution relates positively with how the problem-solving skills or students with disabilities are perceived by their teachers. We believe that our school based intervention of administering the problem-solving unit of the Second Steps program can lead to beneficial changes in self-perception and others-perceptions of students with learning disabilities.

A significant proportion of students in the special classes are struggling with these problem-solving skills, hence the need for the implementation of the Second Steps curriculum focused on an array of social skills, which include problem-solving skills. Classroom teachers reported that the pre-test was instrumental in helping them distinguish between the discrete subset skills of problem-solving. We hypothesized that students who have language and learning disabilities are at increased risk for social emotional difficulties. This was confirmed by our pre-test data. Therefore, we feel strongly that the Second Step program will continue to improve problem-solving skills of students who are identified by the Committee on Special Education.

Next Steps

We recognize that the scope of our research was limited to students who have been identified by the Committee on Special Education and are enrolled in special education classes. We encourage further studies to explore the long-term impact of social skills problem solving lessons on student development.

Additional questions/comments that emerged include:

- How will classroom teachers use this information to increase student generalization of social problem solving skills?
- To what extent do teachers engage in scaffolding students' social skills and problem solving development?
- How can psychologists and teachers incorporate literature into the problem solving unit and assess its impact?
- A curriculum overview might be considered for regular education teachers and special education teachers.
- How can we measure and if necessary, increase student opportunity for in-vivo practice of their problem solving skills?
- How can the Second Steps social skills program align with district Anti-Bullying and Character Education Initiatives?

APPENDIX A

Byram Hills School District PRE-TEST

Name of Student: _____

Name/Title of Rater _____

Date: _____

Problem-Solving Checklist

Please rate your student's problem-solving skills in relation to social situations.

Key:

- 6. No cause for concern
- 7. Mild cause for concern
- 8. Moderate cause for concern
- 9. Serious cause for concern
- 10. Great cause for concern

Problem-Solving Skills	1	2	3	4	5
a) Ability to identify the problem					
b) Ability to brainstorm possible solutions to problems					
c) Ability to evaluate each solution					
d) Ability to select plan and try solution					
e) Ability to evaluate the outcome					

Please discuss your greatest concern in the area of problem-solving skills in social situations for this student.
