SOCIAL SKILLS INSTRUCTION FOR STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES: THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TEACHING SOCIAL STORIES AND VIDEO MODELING

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Abstract. This study focused on the use of social stories combined with video modeling to teach appropriate social skills to students with learning disabilities. After surveying parents, 15 students with learning disabilities were given individualized social stories with accompanying videos to target specific social skill deficits. Over a six-week instructional period, students reviewed the social story each morning and watched a correlating video model with an adult teacher or paraprofessional. Twice a week students interacted with typical peers in a structured play setting where the researcher recorded how many interactions took place and how long each interaction lasted. After six-weeks of social skills interventions, students with learning disabilities improved in the number of social interactions with typical peers as well as the length of the interactions. This study reinforces the effectiveness of social stories combined with video modeling for increasing social skills interactions for students with learning disabilities.

Keywords: learning disabilities, social skills instruction, social stories, video modeling

INTRODUCTION

Appropriate social skills are a crucial facet of successful school and community inclusion. It is common that people with learning disabilities may have difficulty

understanding social cues, body language, or facial expressions. Maladaptive social skills can put a student at a disadvantage socially, but can significantly affect academics as well (Amin & Oweini, 2013; Connor, 2020). This is due to the fact that social skills are crucial when working in collaborative discussion groups, in labs, or completing class projects.

Social skills training can be taught in many forms such as social stories, video modeling, peer modeling, and direct instruction (Knight, 2019). This study will focus on the combination of social stories and video modeling due to the fact that this strategy has become widely used in social skills instruction. Together, they have been gaining popularity for the past 15 years especially for students with autism (Bozkurt & Vuran, 2014); however, research has been mixed so the need to further examine these strategies is imperative in determining best practices for social skills instruction of students with learning disabilities. Appropriate social skills and communication training can support people with mild disabilities be more successful in the community by increasing friendship opportunities, supporting positive relationships at school and work, and improving self-esteem by having a more robust social life.

Definitions

Social stories: Short stories to help model how students should manifest appropriate social skills, they have been studied most often with students diagnosed as having autism

Direct instruction: Teaching a subject explicitly with a systematic, scripted curriculum, this is in contrast to inquiry-based learning

Inclusive classroom: Students with disabilities are included in a classroom with their same age peers

Peer modeling: Peers without disabilities demonstrate appropriate behavior which can be emulated by students with social skills deficits

Video modeling: Videos demonstrate appropriate skills for all students

ABA: Applied behavior analysis

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Students with social skills deficits need to be taught missing or inappropriate skills in a systematic, consistent way that will support their eventual acquisition of the needed skills to be successfully included in their communities (Ferreira et al., 2020; Lawson, 2018). Extensive research has been conducted on supporting students with disabilities in improving their social skills so that they can have more success in the classroom and in social situations (Lane, Givner, & Pierson, 2003;

Lane, Givner, & Pierson, 2004; Lane, Pierson, & Givner, 2004). Studies have detailed numerous social skills instructional strategies and research can be mixed on these different strategies (Milne et al., 2020). Technology can significantly impact and support the learning of social skills in a classroom setting (Mena & Pierson, 2015). However, the research behind social stories and video modeling has been mostly positive for improving social skill deficits among students with different types of disabilities. Because social skills deficits can be comorbid with learning disabilities, it is important that students with academic and social skill deficits focus on both areas for remediation.

Social Stories

Social stories present typical social situations that a student can identify with and breaks down the components for students to easily understand and follow. For example, the story might include a description of behavioral, environmental, and emotional cues and how the student can/should respond to these cues plus it may include a social model to follow. For instance, one study by Moore (2004) focused on decreasing a sleep problem by using social stories with a boy with a learning disability. The parents reported a positive outcome for this child because he was able to see normal, acceptance patterns of the abnormal sleeping behavior. Besides the content of the social stories, the teaching methods employed are important as well. Social stories are taught using specific scaffolding including repetition, priming, opportunities to practice, and corrective feedback (Bozkurt & Vuran, 2014) which allows students with disabilities opportunities to improve and make gains with that specific social skill.

Based on the articles and studies reviewed (Xin & Sutman, 2011; White, et al., 2018; Bozkurt & Vuran, 2014; O'Connor, 2009; Moore, 2004; Adams et al. 2004; Karayazi, 2014; Swaggart & And, 1995), social stories should continue to be researched to determined best practices because in numerous studies, successful outcomes have been reported. Social stories can also be used as an effective tool with people with different types of disabilities other than autism or autism spectrum disorder. Currently, the use of social stories for children with autism primarily focuses on the reduction of inappropriate behavior, encouragement of play initiation with typical peers, and increased social interaction with all people, but social stories can be expanded to include additional individual social skills as needed.

Research has shown that children learn best through physical activity and play such as cooperative games and this can lead to the acquisition of appropriate social skills (Garwood & Van Loan, 2017; White et al., 2018). A study reviewed by Aljadeff-Abergel, et al. (2012) was conducted with third grade students in a physical education setting. This study focused on several students with behavioral and social skills problems and they were given scripts or social stories for how to play

games in the physical education class appropriately. The students practiced daily to earn mastery which further support and assessments confirmed. Behaviors that were targeted in this study included humming, noise-making, and appropriate hand raising. It is common that some skills respond quicker to social stories while others take more prompting and time to decrease in significance (Xin & Sutman, 2011).

Other research on students with intellectual disabilities evaluated the effectiveness of self-management strategies for social skills training programs (Avcioglu, 2012; O'Connor, 2009; Garwood & Van Loan, 2017). Strategies specifically focused on self-control and calming techniques for people with intellectual disabilities. Students with learning and intellectual disabilities frequently struggle with resolving social conflicts or disagreements and need to learn how to resolve these situations in school and the community without angry outbursts or physical aggression (Avcioglu, 2012). When students are given social stories for each targeted skill, such as picture cards of appropriate and inappropriate reactions, as well as a self-management contract and self-evaluations, improvements can occur (Garwood & Van Loan, 2017). Students need instruction on how to react appropriately and be given time to reflect to confirm if they were on the right track or not with their behavioral choices. With some research (Avcioglu, 2012; Mena & Pierson, 2015), intervention data revealed that students' correct responses to unfavorable situations increased from 25% to 100% accuracy and this level was reached by the sixth session of intervention. This demonstrates an incredible level of success after a relatively short time of intervention work. With this specific case, social stories and self-management were a good combination for increasing appropriate social responses for students with intellectual disabilities.

Video Modeling

Video modeling is an evidence-based, non-punitive practice that incorporates videos into social skills instruction to demonstrate appropriate social behavior and role-playing through visual stimuli. It has been proven effective for multiple groups of students with different types of disabilities (Clinton, 2016). Ogilvie (2011) and McCoy et al. (2016) both created a descriptive review and step-by-step instructions for using video modeling and peer mentoring to help students with disabilities learn social cues and better understand social situations. Peer mentoring can go hand in hand with video modeling as it is the practice of involving typical peers in the process of helping students with disabilities both academically and socially. Thus, students with disabilities can learn concurrently from a model peer mentor and from consistently watching positive behaviors and social skills demonstrated on specific videos.

Video models are created and used to fit the unique need of each child, both in learning style and particular interests. Video modeling and peer mentoring promote

self-awareness in children with disabilities as well as help ensure generalization of new skills across a variety of settings. In addition, video modeling can teach life skills to students with and without disabilities (Park et al., 2018). The skill should be presented and discussed with the student and questions about where this skill might be appropriate to use should be analyzed and implemented into daily classroom and community use. After the introduction of the skill, the teacher should review each step of the correct way to use the skill and allow the student repeat back the steps of using that specific skill appropriately. The child will then consistently view the video model and practice with the peer mentor. It is necessary for the teacher to then collect data and assess the student's level of growth throughout the intervention phase. Teachers should monitor the following probes to consider when assessing the students' skill level: (1) Did the student demonstrate the skill? (2) Was it generalized to a variety of settings? (3) What was most effective with the video model? (4) What was not so effective? (Ogilvie, 2011).

Data taken from the multiple baseline assessments frequently indicates that the target students using video modeling with the support of peer mentors had huge and positive changes in behavior and use of specific appropriate social skills. The students, amazingly enough, are usually able to generalize the skills learned in outside settings into the classroom setting as well. Data frequently demonstrates a significant increase in leadership and appropriate conflict resolution in the target students, as well as a decrease in off task behavior in and outside the classroom (Aljadeff-Abergel, et al., 2012).

Moderate to large gains for students with learning disabilities have also been recorded in the specific subject areas of reading, math, and science when video models are used (Boon et al. 2020). Social behavior is a key area of social skills research for students with learning disabilities because deficits in this area can affect so many other aspects in life; thus, studying social stories and video modeling to teach appropriate social behavior in students with learning disabilities is imperative.

With continued and regular use of social stories and self-monitoring strategies in the classroom setting, students will be able to increase appropriate social skills necessary for success in all settings. Teaching social stories through technology such as a smart board, DVDs, Chromebooks, or iPads seem to be motivating for students because many students identify with technology and are motivated to learn from it. "Social stories create situations and provide information regarding social needs for children with ASD to learn social skills and increase communication within their environments" (Xin & Sutman, 2011) (O'Connor, 2009; Fenstermacher, 2006). A crucial aspect of implementing social stories is making sure the story is created at the developmental level of the student so he/she is able to understand it and use the self-modeling skills which will help understanding and generalization across settings (Xin & Sutman, 2011).

Social Stories and Video Modeling

Few studies exist on the benefits of the combination of social stories and video modeling to increase positive social skills for students with disabilities. Both Scattone (2008) and Gul (2016) conducted research on the benefits of these two interventions and each reported significant successes. Additional research should seek to combine social stories and video modeling for various types of students with disabilities to determine the overall effectiveness of these interventions together.

Scattone (2008) focused on improving conversation skills for students with autism. The results confirmed that social stories and video modeling training were effective in increasing conversation and social skills – specifically eye contact, smiling, and play initiations. Although smiling and play initiations had smaller gains, they still improved which would matter in classroom and social situations for students with disabilities. Students with learning disabilities would then be more apt to be included in all settings.

Using the two interventions for students with intellectual disabilities was the focus of Gul's 2016 research. All students who participated reached 100% accuracy with the social skill that they were targeting. They were able to maintain successful social skills consistently over a lengthy period of time as well as were able to generalize their learnings to other settings, conditions, and with additional people. Gul's research was robust and several assessment probes were used to confirm these findings.

This current study will support Scattone (2008) and Gul (2016)'s focus on the use of social stories and video modeling to increase social skills interactions of students with disabilities.

METHODS

Determining the effectiveness of social stories and video modeling for improving appropriate social skills of students with learning disabilities was the goal of this study. The development of appropriate social skills through the use of interventions such as social stories and video modeling have proven effective throughout the last decade (Bozkurt & Vuran, 2014). One reason may be that social stories and video modeling break down the complex components of social skills into personalized step-by-step instruction which is helpful for students with learning disabilities.

Participants and Procedure

15 students identified as having a learning disability, 10 male and 5 female, ranging in age from 9–12 years old participated in this study. Over a period of six weeks, students were given a social story to read and practice each morning in the classroom with an adult (either a teacher or a paraprofessional) for at least 15 min-

utes. After the stories were reviewed, students were given laptops with a video of a social situation that correlated with their social story. Students also practiced their specified social skill for 20 minutes twice a week with an adult. They were then observed during structured playtime with typical peers twice a week for 20-minute intervals.

Student #1	Male	9 years old
Student #2	Male	9 years old
Student #3	Female	9 years old
Student #4	Male	10 years old
Student #5	Male	10 years old
Student #6	Male	10 years old
Student #7	Female	10 years old
Student #8	Female	10 years old
Student #9	Male	11 years old
Student #10	Male	11 years old
Student #11	Male	11 years old
Student #12	Female	11 years old
Student #13	Male	12 years old
Student #14	Male	12 years old
Student #15	Female	12 years old

The parent survey was divided into two portions of six questions (three quantitative questions and three qualitative questions) as well as present levels of social skills functioning and parent desired level of social skills functioning.

My child initiates _____ appropriate social interactions with familiar people per day
> a. 0–3
> b. 3–6
> c. 6–9
> d. 9 or more

My child initiates _____ appropriate social interactions with unfamiliar people per day
> e. 0–3
> f. 3–6
> g. 6–9
> h. 9 or more

My child independently initiates social greetings with familiar people _____
times per day
    i. 0–3
    j. 3–6
    k. 6–9
    l. 9 or more

The next three questions focused specifically on what social interactions were like with familiar and unfamiliar people as well as which social skill was the most important for the student to learn in the parent's opinion.

Please elaborate and list ways in which your child verbally communicates and socializes with familiar people in the home setting.

Please elaborate and list ways in which your child verbally communicates and socializes with unfamiliar people in the home setting.

Describe the most important social skill you would like to see from your child after the conclusion of this study.

The following was examined: 1) How effective are social stories combined with video modeling in improving the number of social interactions between a student identified as having a learning disability and a typical peer? 2) How effective is the combination of social stories and video modeling in increasing the number of social interactions between a student with a learning disability and a typical peer? In addition, the researcher utilized parent survey responses and structured play observations to identify the progression of social skills improvement throughout the study.

RESULTS

Parent Survey Responses

Questions on the survey focused on how often the child with learning disabilities independently greeted familiar and unfamiliar people per day. With people the students were familiar with, 99% of responses indicated that children made between three and nine independent social greetings per day. With unfamiliar people, 46% of responses indicated that their children made between zero and three independent social greetings, and 54% reported the children made between four and six independent social greetings. Question three asked about the number of daily independent social initiations with familiar people. 92% of responses indicated that the participants made between three and nine initiations. Question four focused on the same question, but with unfamiliar people. 61% said that their children made between zero and three social greetings, and 38% reported that their children made between four and six social initiations with unfamiliar people. Questions five and six asked approximately how many minutes per day their children spent engaged in conversation with familiar and unfamiliar people. With familiar people, 48%

reported that their children engaged in between zero and three minutes of conversation per interaction. 52% reported their children engaged in between three and six minutes of conversation per interaction with a familiar person. When asked the average number of minutes per interaction with unfamiliar people, 84% of parents reported that their children engaged in between zero and three minutes of conversation with unfamiliar people. 16% indicated their children engaged in between three and six minutes of conversation with unfamiliar people.

The survey also included three open-ended questions focused on specific ways that the child with a learning disability communicates and socializes with familiar and unfamiliar people. In addition, parents were asked which social skill was the most important for their child to learn. Clearly, this question would vary based on parental culture, experiences, and expectations for their children.

Number of Social Interactions with Typical Peers

During the first week of data collection, 59% of observed students engaged in zero to three social interactions, 38% of students engaged in four to six social interactions, and 3% engaged in seven to nine social interactions with typical peers. In the third week of data collection, 55% of observed students engaged in zero and three social interactions, 1% engaged in four and six social interactions, and 44% engaged in seven and nine social interactions with typical peers. By the final week of the study, 18% of observed students engaged in zero and three social interactions, 80% engaged in four and six social interactions, and 3% engaged in seven and nine social interactions.

Week One	59%	0–3 social interactions
	38%	4–6 social interactions
	3%	7–9 social interactions
Week Three	55%	0–3 social interactions
	1%	4–6 social interactions
	44%	7–9 social interactions
Week Six	18%	0–3 social interactions
	80%	4–6 social interactions
	3%	7–9 social interactions

Number of Interactive Minutes with Typical Peers

During the first week of data collection, 94% of observed students engaged in zero to three interactive minutes, 5% of students engaged in three to six social interactive minutes, 0% engaged in six to nine interactive minutes, and 1% engaged

in nine or more interactive minutes with a typical peer. In the third week of data collection, 89% of observed students engaged in zero to three interactive minutes, 9% of students engaged in three to six social interactive minutes, 1% engaged in six to nine interactive minutes, and 1% engaged in nine or more interactive minutes with a typical peer. In the final week of data collection, 82% of observed students engaged in zero to three interactive minutes, 15% of students engaged in three to six social interactive minutes, 14% engaged in six to nine interactive minutes, and 1% engaged in nine or more interactive minutes with a typical peer.

Week One	94%	0–3 social interactions
	5%	4–6 social interactions
	0%	7–9 social interactions
Week Three	89%	0–3 social interactions
	9%	4–6 social interactions
	1%	7–9 social interactions
Week Six	82%	0–3 social interactions
	15%	4–6 social interactions
	14%	7–9 social interactions

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to analyze the use of the combination of social stories and video modeling to determine if there was improvement of social skills for students with learning disabilities. Were these interventions an effective means of teaching social skills? This was an important study to support the findings of White et al. (2018) and Bozkurt and Vuran, (2014)? The study especially examined the initiating of conversation with familiar and unfamiliar people. Interactions of 15 students were analyzed by the researcher and data was also collected from the parents. Baseline data was taken from parent input and used to create individualized social stories for students based on specific areas of social need. Individual social stories were created to match unique needs which was suggested in the 2008 research by Terpstra & Tamura. Components of successful social skills training can include social stories, video modeling, and practice in an inclusive play environment. The consistent use of social stories as a part of classroom instruction in social skills training confirmed that students with learning disabilities would be able to increase and generalize their conversation initiation with familiar and unfamiliar people. Video modeling as a reinforcer for the social story was proven to help ensure generalization of these new skills in classroom settings which confirmed numerous other studies previously described that supported the use of technology in the classroom for social skills instruction.

Because students with learning disabilities from this group of participants had deficits in the area of appropriate and lasting interactions with familiar and unfamiliar peers, studying their play conversations throughout the intervention period demonstrated that social stories and video modeling were effective in increasing their conversations with peers. This was shown in the frequency data which indicated that many students were able to improve in six weeks with the number of interactive social skills and length of interaction. Thus, it is logical to conclude that interventions which include social stories and video modeling with peer support lasting for fewer weeks than six could also be effective if they were used consistently and multiple times per week.

During the first week of the study, the majority of students (94%) made many interaction attempts (up two seven) that lasted only seconds. It was noted that most students enjoyed greeting the typical peers even though most interactions were short and ended after an initial greeting. This is still a significant gain for students with severe social skill deficits and helpful to their inclusion in different settings in classrooms or the community. However, the majority of the students studied did not understand how to appropriately leave a conversation, so after the greeting/interaction they just turned and walked away without continuing the play or conversation. Thus, after the first week of the study, a focus on maintaining conversations beginning with week two became a priority.

After focusing on how to maintain conversation through social stories and video modeling, a slight improvement of the duration of conversations in all students was evident starting with week two. By week three, the number of students making only zero – three minute interactions decreased from 94% to 89%. As an example, one student was able to improve the length of his conversations from an average of two minutes to around four minutes. Another student had a similar experience and was able to engage in conversation with three different typical peers. During the third week of observation, he was able to increase to over three and a half minutes when two boys approached him to ask about his favorite movie and he briefly spoke about Star Wars.

This study reinforced the fact that students with disabilities should be taught social skills in inclusive settings which is a typical expectation in employment and the general community. The goal was to increase the number of interaction minutes between students with learning disabilities and their typical peers as well as increase the number of conversational exchanges with typical peers. During the first week of the study, a large number of interactions with little to no appropriate back and forth conversations between the observed students and typical peers occurred. Students with learning disabilities began to utilize conversation skills and examples taught through both the social stories and video modeling. Many of the students actively answered personal questions and spoke about things they enjoyed doing. They improved either by increasing the number of interactions or sustaining longer

appropriate conversations, but consistent social skills intervention is still required. The importance of sustained and generalizable social skills instruction is key to supporting students with learning disabilities as they navigate social relationships in and out of the classroom setting. Meaningful peer relationships will also increase academic engagement and outcomes which will increase purpose and mental health for students with learning disabilities as they will feel like they fit into the classroom more.

IMPLICATIONS

This study reinforced the importance of students with learning disabilities learning specific social skills through the combined instruction of social stories and video modeling with the support of typical peers. This method of social skills instruction is successful with consistency and targeted focus on a specific social skill that needs improvement for each student. Students with specific learning disabilities can struggle with the acquisition of appropriate social skills, but given the necessary tools which include social stories, video models, and a structured play setting with typical peers, these students can learn and generalize information across settings. Teachers of students with learning disabilities who have social skills deficits can benefit by adding social stories in combination with video modeling to their classroom curriculum. These two interventions will strengthen their personal satisfaction as they will know how to make and keep meaningful friendships.

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Appendix A: Sample Social Story Instructions

1. Generate the students' favorite topics and interests such as a super hero, favorite activity, or favorite toy.

2. Pair up the students.

3. Ask one student to begin talking about their favorite topic that they just identified.

4. Students are given conversation reminders such as:

   a. Only use sentences related to the topic.

   b. Ask questions of the person speaking about their topic.

   c. If one can't think of anything to say, ask a Who, What, Why, Where question.

   d. If one wants to change the subject, be sure to wait for a break in the conversation and say something like, „This reminds me of. . .“

5. Be sure to set a timer for 5–10 minutes to give the students a goal for their conversation.

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