Spicing Up
SOCIAL SKILLS
Instruction with Web 2.0 Tools

The Importance of Teaching Social Skills

Many educators know that social skills are a critical element to student success; however, teachers are often so focused on curricular demands that social skills instruction is much lower on the list of priorities. Social skills have often been thought of as the "hidden curriculum," however, the new Common Core State Standards will bring social skills to the forefront by placing a much greater emphasis on speaking and listening skills that are embedded throughout the K-12 standards in all areas. Thus, systematic instruction of social skills will be increasingly necessary for student success.

So how do we do it?

Research tells us that direct instruction is a key component for effectively teaching social skills. T.H.E. P.A.C.T.™ (Technology Helps Easy and Practical Adapted Curriculum Teaching) is a four-step, color-coded teaching framework broken down into the receptive Learn About and Read About modules, followed by the expressive Write About and Talk About modules (See Photo 2, reprinted with permission). Lessons are presented in consistent formats across various activities so that cogni-tive energy is focused on the learning, not the task. Because of its structure and focus on consistent/predictable supports, T.H.E. P.A.C.T. (see Photo 1, reprinted with permission) is a natural fit for social skills instruction. Therefore, in our quest to design more effective social skills units, key social skills, assistive technology supports, and multimedia tools (free Web 2.0 tools) were identified and embedded into the modules of T.H.E. P.A.C.T. In the "Having a Conversation" social skills unit outlined in Table 1, activi-

LESLEY MCGILLIGAN, is a speech-language patholo-gist in St. Louis, MO who specializes in augmentative communication. Since 1996, Lesley has been supporting learners with various disabili-ties and ability levels and has a keen eye for pairing technology tools with the needs of the learner to ensure a more active, engaged learning experience. In addition to her roles as an augmentative communication facilitator and active staff developer at Special School District of St. Louis County, Lesley serves as an adjunct faculty member at St. Louis University and presents at the local and national level on relevant and exciting topics related to augmentative communication and assistive technology.

JULIE OSHEROW, M.Ed. has been a special education teacher since 1998 with students with various special needs in both self-contained and inclusive settings. She is currently a computer access facili-tator at Special School District of St. Louis, MO, supporting students with assistive technology and providing professional develop-ment to staff in the form of workshops and hands-on technology trainings. Julie is a local and national presenter in the field of assistive technology.

WHAT THE RESEARCH TELLS US

- A student's social skills are critical to future success as an adaptive adult. (Hartup, 1992)

- 75 percent of students with learning disabilities (LD) exhibit social skills deficits (Kavale & Forness, 1996) in addition to being a common feature of ASD.

- Students with deficits in social skills are known to have difficulties with interpersonal relationships, depression, aggression, anxiety and poor academic performance. (National Association of School Psychologists [NASP], 2002)

- Students with poor social skills show a higher incidence of involvement in the criminal justice system as adults. (NASP, 2002)

- A 2007 study conducted at Indiana University involving a meta-analysis of 55 published research studies revealed that programs designed to teach social skills to children with autism are failing to meet their goals.

- Social skills instruction can be improved by: (Center for Implementing Technology in Education [CITEd], 2009)

  - Increasing the intensity and frequency of direct instruction

  - Matching social skills deficits taught to the skill deficits of students

  - Instructing in the general education environment to increase generalization

  - Using authentic contexts

  - Using a variety of media to teach skills throughout the day

  - Allowing for practice and feedback

  - Selecting tools that give opportunity for reflection and discussion

T.H.E. P.A.C.T.™ is a 4-step color-coded, comprehensive, language-based structured teaching framework that is easy to implement.

- ✔ Founded on language-based research
- ✔ Aligns to Common Core Standards
- ✔ Integrates into any setting
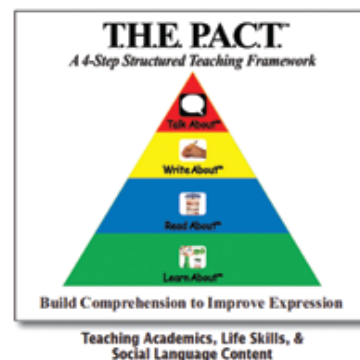- ✔ Systemizes instruction for learners and teaching staff

Photo 1: T.H.E. P.A.C.T. framework.

Photo 2: The four modules of T.H.E. P.A.C.T. framework.

ties were adapted to meet different learning outcomes in more than one module, and many were printed as low-tech solutions.

Web 2.0 Tools

Knowing that student engagement is increased with the use of multimedia technology, four free Web 2.0 tools were chosen for integration into the "Having a Conversation" unit: Prezi, VoiceThread, SpiderScribe and Pixton.

Prezi: www.prezi.com

Prezi is an online presentation tool with a "zoomable canvas." Instead of a traditional slide format, information is presented in a nonlinear format on a large canvas. Content can include text, images, audio, video and even links to other Prezis. Prezi is also available as an app, which allows you to create, present and share your Prezis on Apple mobile devices.

Prezi is a perfect tool for a Learn About activity by teaching single-word vocabulary in a fun, interactive way. It is also an ideal format for social skills lessons since most social situations do not follow a linear format. Students find this tool extremely engaging due to its hallmark zooming feature. In Photo 3, screenshots were taken of Boardmaker® symbols and placed on the canvas. Although any images can be used in Prezi, these symbols were chosen specifically because they were meaningful to the students. The students utilized a variety of access methods to move through the custom zooming path. Paired with a Step-by-Step™, the students heard each vocabulary word/definition as the presentation advanced.

The same Prezi was modified from green to red (Photo 4) and used again in the Talk About module. The students were expected to choose a vocabulary word and share any information they learned. A Step-by-

Step was provided for students who needed the accommodation to hear each vocabulary word aloud. The familiarity with navigating Prezi allowed the students to focus more on sharing their knowledge about the topic.

Voice Thread:
www.voicethread.com

VoiceThread is a simple, accessible digital presentation/collaboration tool. Various types of media, including images, audio, video and documents, can be uploaded to VoiceThread and annotated. By simply sharing a weblink, collaborators are invited to comment on the media in a variety of ways: via text, audio (microphone, telephone, pre-recorded) or webcam video. The app version of VoiceThread allows for content creation and presentation on Apple mobile devices. With its ease of use and built-in access features, VoiceThread is an ideal tool for use in social skills instruction.

In Photo 5, a talking dictionary activity (color-coded green) was created in PowerPoint and uploaded to VoiceThread.com. The teacher then annotated the slides with verbal comments and highlighting to illustrate the key single-word vocabulary for the Learn About module of the "Having a Conversation" unit.

The same PowerPoint presentation was modified for use as a Read About activity (color-coded blue). Building on the single-word vocabulary presented in the Learn About activity, students were engaged in reading about the vocabulary in sentences to gain additional knowledge. Because the students were not yet at an independent reading level, the teacher verbally narrated the text by using the record audio feature in VoiceThread. (Photo 6)

For the Talk About module (Photo 7), students were expected to respond to the audio prompt from the teacher, "What would you say next?" by commenting on the Pixton comic images uploaded to VoiceThread. Students had the added benefit of seeing and hearing the comments that had already been left by their classmates. A weblink sharing the completed product was shared with parents as a student learning artifact.

SpiderScribe:
www.Spiderscribe.net

While there are many mindmapping tools on the market, SpiderScribe's clear interface paired with the ability to upload text, images, files, calendar events and geographic locations to graphic organizers makes it a standout application. Because social skills can often be tricky for our students to "decode," graphic organizers assist in clarifying relationships among targeted social concepts by displaying information in a simple, visual format.

A mindmap outlining the concept of appropriate commenting was created for the receptive Read About module of T.H.E. P.A.C.T and color-coded blue (Photo 8). Boardmaker symbols were uploaded and examples of appropriate/inappropriate comments related to the topic of baseball were inserted. The students could either read the content on the Web or use the low-tech version with a talking pen (Penfriend or AnyBook Reader™.)

This same Web 2.0 tool was utilized to create an expressive Write About activity (color-coded yellow) in which the students sorted comments related to the topic of baseball into either the "appropriate comment" or "inappropriate comment" category (Photo 9). This activity could be completed either electronically or in printed form. In this example, a reusable file folder pocket and double stick tape were utilized to create the low-tech version (see Table 1).

Pixton (For Fun): www.pixton.com

Pixton is an online tool for comic-making and sharing with poseable characters and a wide range of templates, backgrounds and props. Comic strip conversations can increase students' perceptions of social situations, their ability to generate solutions to difficult social situations and demonstrate an increase in target behaviors (Pierson & Glaeser, 2005). Although there are a myriad of comic-generating websites and apps, this tool is perfect for social skills activities as the facial expressions/emotions and positioning/body language of the characters can be changed.

In Photo 10, a social story was created in a comic book format as a Read About activity. The speech and thought bubbles were color-coded blue and contained sentences with the target vocabulary words. Staff read the comic with the students, making sure to point out the expressions and emotions of the characters. A low-tech version of this activity was also printed out as a book. The pages were placed in a binder, and voice output was added with an AnyBook Reader so the students with beginning literacy skills could independently complete the activity (Photo 11).

This activity was then easily modified to create a Write About activity, in which the students were engaged in demonstrating their knowledge about the target vocabulary. The speech and thought bubbles were simply changed from blue to yellow, and the text was removed. The blank speech and thought bubbles allowed the students to either create their own comic with the target vocabulary or use a low-tech version to choose appropriate responses (Photo 12).
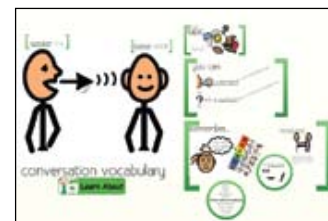

Photo 3: Screenshots were taken of Boardmaker symbols and placed on the canvas.
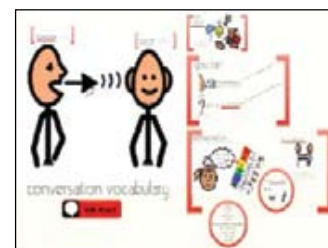

Photo 4: The same Prezi was modified from green to red and used again in the Talk About module
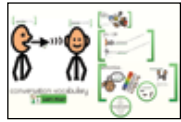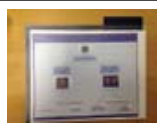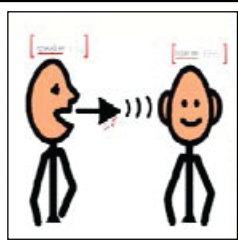

Photo 5: A talking dictionary activity. Color coded green, learn about module.

Photo 6: The same PowerPoint presentation was modified for use as a Read About activity (color-coded blue).

Photo 7: For the Talk About module, students were expected to respond to an audio prompt from the teacher.

T.H.E. P.A.C.T. Module	Learning Objectives	Tool	Image of Low Tech Activity	Assistive Technology Tools / Strategies
Learn About	Students will listen to the definition of nine vocabulary words	www. prezi.com		Step-by-Step
	Students will explore converation vocabulary	www.voicethread.com		Talking Photo Album
Read About	Students will read/attend to a social story containing conversation vocabulary.	www.pixton.com		AnyBook Reader
	Students will listen to related and non-related comments on a topic.	www.spiderscribe.net		AnyBook Reader
	Students will read/attend to conversation vocabulary in sentence format.	www.voicethread.com		Talking Photo Album
Write About	Students will arrange related and non-related comments on a topic	www.spiderscribe.net		Magnetic Manipulatives
	Students will place comments and thoughts in corresponding speech and thought bubbles	www.pixton.com		Word Bank
Talk About	Students will share knowledge of conversation vocabulary by stating three facts learned.	www.prezi.com		Step-by-Step
	Students will formulate a response, given the prompt "What would you say next?"	www.voicethread.com		AnyBook Reader

Unit: Having a Conversation | **Vocabulary**: conversation, speaker, listener, topic, taking turns, volume, personal space, body signals, comment, questions

Product Information: Talking Photo Album from Attainmentcompany.com $39 | Step-by-Step from Ablenetinc.com $165 | 15-hour Franklin Any Book Reader from Amazon $29.99

Conclusion

There is a broad range of research in the area of social communication that outlines effective instructional methods. While we focused on the use of various Web 2.0 tools to create engaging electronic activities for a social skills unit, multimedia software (e.g. Clicker 6, Boardmaker Plus or Studio, Intellitools Classroom Suite) could be used to design activities as well. Using the same tools multiple times during a curricular unit builds consistency and predictability for the students and ultimately builds confidence and success. Once students are comfortable with a particular tool/format, they can focus their cognitive energy on the content and not on simply navigating the tool. It is also a time-saver for the teacher, who can use the same format for various activities while targeting different learning objectives. By consistently engaging students in social skills lessons that are fun, creative and allow for successful demonstration of knowledge in multiple ways, our students are more likely to become socially effective communicators.

References

Bellini, S., Peters, J., Benner, L., & Hopf, A. (2007). A Meta-Analysis of School-Based Social Skills Interventions for Children With Autism Spectrum Disorders. Journal of Remedial and Special Education, 28(3), 153-162. Retrieved from http://nichcy.org/research/summaries/abstract75

Center for Implementing Technology in Education-CITEd (2009). MultimediaInstruction of Social Skills. Retrieved from http://www.cited.org/index.aspx?page_id=154

Hartup, W. W. (1992). Having friends, making friends, and keeping friends: Relationships as educational contexts. ERIC Digest. ED345854.

Kavale, K.A., & Forness, S.R. (1996). Social skill deficits and learning disabilities: A meta-analysis. Journal of Learning Disabilities, 29, 226-227.

Macomber, P. T. (2010). The Power of T.H.E. P.A.C.T. West Windsor, VT: Phyl T. Macomber

National Association of School Psychologists (2002). Social Skills: Promoting Positive Behavior, Academic Success, and School Safety. Retrieved from http://www.nasponline.org/resources/factsheets/social-skills_fs.aspx

Pierson, M. R., & Glaeser, B.C. (2005). Extension of Research on Social Skills Training Using Comic Strip Conversations to Students without Autism. Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities, 40(3), 279-284. ∎
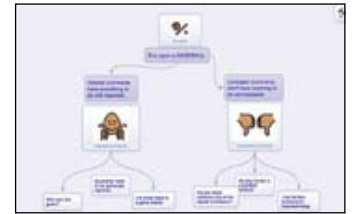
Photo 8: A mindmap outlining the concept of appropriate commenting was created for the receptive Read About module.
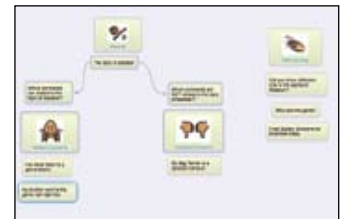

Photo 9: This same Web 2.0 tool was utilized to create an expressive Write About activity.

Photo 10: A social story was created in a comic book format as a Read About activity.

Photo 11: Pages were placed in a binder, and voice output was added with an AnyBook Reader so the students with beginning literacy skills could independently complete the activity.

Photo 12: The blank speech and thought bubbles allowed the students to either create their own comic with the target vocabulary or use a low-tech version to choose appropriate responses.