Classroom Culture and Social Interaction: Revisiting Foundational Programs

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The number of students with learning disabilities in schools who have social and self-regulation problems is substantial. Researchers point out that social problems among students with LD are not only widespread but also persistent and associated with poor psychological and emotional adjustment later in life. To build confidence, competence, and resiliency, students with LD must be explicitly taught skills that will provide a foundation for gaining success.

Developing critical thinking skills can play a vital role in any student's success. Facione (2011) describes critical thinking as not only being able to interpret, analyze, evaluate, and infer but also as the ability to provide explanations about the process of arriving at an opinion and then improving on that knowledge. Critical thinkers are characterized as being well-informed, self-confident, open-minded, and flexible in addition to being able to communicate effectively, raise important questions, gather and assess critical information, consider alternatives and modify assumptions, if needed (Ennis, 2003; Paul and Elder, 2006; Raiskums, 2008). These skills are essential not only for school success but for productive and meaningful employment (Facione, 2011). Employees must be able to evaluate information, communicate, make good decisions, and solve problems effectively. Unfortunately, these are the skills that students with LD often lack, and often the culture of the classroom does not support learners who struggle.

In fact, standards-based reforms in many states are emphasizing the idea that students should learn higher-order thinking skills and teamwork; however, teachers often are not prepared to teach these skills. Furthermore, research has shown that students with disabilities in general education classes are often ridiculed or ignored during cooperative learning activities, the very activities teachers frequently use to teach teamwork. To provide educators instructional options to meet these standards, research studies were conducted to develop and validate methods for teaching students in inclusive general education classrooms to use Cooperative Thinking Strategies and Community Building Series strategies successfully.

PROGRAMS IN THE COOPERATIVE THINKING STRATEGIES SERIES

The Cooperative Thinking Strategies are a group of strategies students can use to think and work productively together. Before learning these strategies, students first learn specific social skills (the *SCORE Skills*) to help them be positive, productive members of a team. Then they learn Cooperative Thinking Strategies to organize and effectively complete different types of academic activities to solve problems, study and learn information, and resolve conflict. These instructional programs provide ways to accommodate a diversity of learners in inclusive classrooms and enable students to learn complex higher-order thinking skills that they can use to work together harmoniously with others in school, leisure, family, community, and work settings. Interactive professional development CD programs are available for four of the five programs.

The SCORE Skills: Social Skills for Cooperative Groups
(Vernon, Schumaker & Deshler, rev'd 1996)

The *SCORE Skills* program serves as the foundational

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instruction in the *THINK Strategy*, students practice the *SCORE Skills* and learn how to analyze and identify a problem, examine what's been done in the past, brainstorm new solutions, discuss advantages and disadvantages of new solutions, choose the best solution (or combination of solutions), devise a plan to implement the chosen solution, and process how the group worked together.

The LEARN Strategy
(Vernon, Schumaker, & Deshler, 1999)

The *LEARN Strategy* enables students to work in teams to study and learn information together. As they apply the strategy, students practice the *SCORE Skills* and identify critical information in textbooks (e.g., social studies, science), indicate *key words* or *phrases* within the critical information, develop a mnemonic device, create flash cards, take turns as tutors or learners until all learners master the information, take a quiz/test over the information (teacher option), and process how the team worked together.

The BUILD Strategy: Resolving Controversial Issues as a Team
(Vernon, Schumaker, & Deshler, 1999)

The *BUILD Strategy* is used by students to work together to make a decision as a team. Specifically, students practice the *SCORE Skills* and examine an issue and define the opposing sides; gather facts about both sides of the issue; understand the consequences of potential decisions; identify possible compromises; review the facts; make a decision; conduct a team vote; and process how the team worked together.

Cooperative Thinking Strategies Series in the Classroom

Teachers in inclusive classes typically teach the skills in the Cooperative Thinking Strategies Series to all

program in the series. Students are introduced to the concept of creating a learning community and using social skills to accomplish that. They are taught what social skills are, and they learn five important social skills that are prerequisites for the more complex cooperative strategies presented in the remainder of the series. The five social skills are Share Ideas, Compliment Others, Offer Help or Encouragement, Recommend Changes Nicely, and Exercise Self-Control. The first letters of the names of the skills spell the acronym "SCORE," which is used throughout the Cooperative Thinking Strategies program to help students remember and use the *SCORE Skills*. The skills are easy to use and are not limited to interactions in groups. Instead, they are skills that, with practice, can be used to establish and maintain good relationships with others in most everyday situations.

The Teamwork Strategy
(Vernon, Deshler, & Schumaker, 1993)

The *Teamwork Strategy* provides a framework for organizing and completing tasks in small work groups. By applying the strategy, students analyze each assignment and divide it into specific tasks; equitably assign those tasks to individuals (or volunteer for tasks); offer and request help to complete individual jobs; ask for and give feedback to other group members; combine the individual jobs into one product or presentation; evaluate the process used to complete the project; and assess the interpersonal skills of group members.

To help students remember the steps of the strategy, the acronym "TEAMS" is used. Within each step, students use one or more of the *SCORE Skills* while completing the assigned group task.

The THINK Strategy: Solving Complex Problems as a Team
(Vernon, Deshler, & Schumaker, 1999)

Students working together in teams use the *THINK Strategy* to systematically solve problems in different content areas (e.g., science, literature, history). As part of the

students in the class; however, the programs can be adapted for small group instruction or for students working individually with an adult, for example.

COMMUNITY BUILDING SERIES

Another series of programs for use in inclusive programs is the Community Building Series. Developed as a part of the "safe schools" movement, the Community Building Series was developed to help students learn important skills that can turn every classroom into a true learning community. Within a learning community, all students are sincerely interested in one another and actively work to help each other learn. All members feel valued for what they can contribute. They feel safe and protected, and they are able to take risks as learners. They feel connected to one another. As a result, negative interactions and bullying are minimized, and students who need help and support can receive it within the structure of the class. In other words, within a learning community, caring and learning go hand in hand. Such characteristics are vitally important in today's schools, where large numbers of students representing different ethnicities, cultures, socio-economic levels, values, and abilities are enrolled. In this series, students learn confidence and competence-building skills associated with participating and working with partners, and they learn the concepts of respect, tolerance, and creating a learning community. They learn basic strategies for controlling their own behavior during discussions, for getting organized, taking notes, and following instructions. Specifically, the major outcomes associated with this series are that students feel both physically and psychologically safe, students become involved in activities without fear of ridicule or rejection, and students' learning and performance are enhanced. All of the manuals in this program have been experimentally validated in schools. Professional development interactive CD programs are available for four of the five instructional manuals.

Talking Together
(Vernon, Deshler, & Schumaker, 2000)

One of the guiding principles behind all learning communities is the concept of "respect." Thus, *Talking Together* is an instructional program designed for introducing the concepts of learning community and respect to students and for teaching them to participate respectfully in class discussions. As students proceed through the instruction, they learn how to take turns with classmates, how to give someone else a chance to speak and be heard, and how to express respect and kindness toward others. The skills and concepts learned in this program are foundational to all forms of communication and can be used by students throughout their lives.

All instruction is contained in six easy-to-follow lessons and usually can be completed within six hours. Cue cards, role-play situations, and a learning community "contract" are all included.

Following Instructions Together
(Vernon, Schumaker, & Deshler, 2001)

The *Following Instructions Together* program involves teaching students skills associated with following instructions. The program contains four basic lessons. In the first lesson, students review what they learned in the *Talking Together* program, including the prerequisite skills of participating and working respectfully with partners. In the next two lessons, students learn to follow simple and complex instructions. Specifically, students first learn to verify simple oral instructions with the help of a partner. Then they learn how to follow more complex written and oral directions using the RULES Strategy. In the final lesson, students learn to use the WAIT Strategy to check their written assignments before turning them in to ensure they have followed all the instructions. Initial classroom instruction can usually be completed within four hours.

Organizing Together
(Vernon, Deshler, & Schumaker, 2002)

"Organization" is not a concept easily understood or practiced by all students. Students often complain that there is "not enough time to

be organized," and they have only a vague notion of procedures that would help them be more productive and efficient in their daily lives. The *Organizing Together* program enables students to establish order in their daily lives. Time is structured into the class schedule to create an organized learning environment, and students have models and partners to help them learn, apply, and maintain organizational strategies throughout the school year. Specifically, students learn how to organize their notebooks, desks, lockers, and backpacks. They also learn how to use a weekly calendar to record and remember assignments and events. Cue cards, organizational checklists, and student calendars round out the instruction. Initial classroom instruction can usually be completed within five hours.

Taking Notes Together
(Vernon, Schumaker, & Deshler, 2002)

The *Taking Notes Together* program provides a framework for teachers to use to deliver information when they want students to take notes. The program consists of four lessons. One lesson is a review of the learning community concepts from the *Talking Together* program. The three other lessons relate to teaching students how to record information quickly and succinctly during lectures, reading assignments, and videotapes. Initial classroom instruction can usually be completed within six hours.

Focusing Together
(Rademacher, Pemberton, & Cheever, 2006).

Staying on task and following classroom rules can be a difficult job for some students. They don't know what it looks like or how to do it. When several of these students are in the same class, they can disrupt class activities, and the result is a lot of lost time that could have been spent learning.

To help students learn how to stay on task and follow classroom rules, the *Focusing Together* program provides several simple lessons. Instruction begins with an overview of learning community and how students can help each other achieve success. Students discuss what expectations they have for a learning community. Then, in the remaining lessons, the different aspects of "focusing" are taught. Students learn how to respond to community expectations (rules) and how to make good choices with regard to their behavior. They learn a strategy for managing their own behavior and practice using that strategy. Finally, they commit to using the strategy throughout the school year.

SOCIAL SKILLS INSTRUCTION: THE SOCIALLY WISE PROGRAM
(Vernon, 2010)

Classwide instruction is important for creating a safe and supportive classroom culture. Expectations for all students can be clearly specified and opportunities can be created to strengthen the students' commitment and investment in building a respectful learning community. Nevertheless, some students may benefit from additional, more intensive social skills instruction. In fact, many opportunities for early social skills intervention are missed. Youth often spend several years committing minor offenses and exhibiting behavior problems before becoming part of the juvenile justice system. Learning disability is the most common disability found among incarcerated juveniles (Green & Twill, 2006). Statistically, students in a juvenile correctional facility are more than three times as likely to have a learning disability than their counterparts in general education (Smith, Esposito, & Gregg, 2002). Unfortunately students with learning disabilities and other exceptionalities often lack the skills to meet the social demands of school. Social issues combined with limited skills and poor academic performance can create persistent challenges and leave students with exceptionalities poorly prepared for the 21st century workforce. Dealing with authority figures, communicating effectively, and working with others cooperatively and productively is often not easy. Learning a variety of social skills builds confi-

dence for dealing with a variety of situations and provides a foundation to strengthen and maintain relationships. Social skills may be basic (such as giving compliments, apologizing, following directions, asking for or offering help, or supporting team members) or they may be more sophisticated (for example, accepting criticism, giving constructive feedback, accepting and giving advice, or dealing with peer pressure).

The *Socially Wise Program* is an interactive multimedia (IM) program for teaching social skills to adolescents and was created as an intervention for at-risk students. This computerized instructional program is designed for use in a variety of settings, including homes, general and special education classes, in-school suspension programs, group homes, foster-care homes, mental-health centers, probation programs, transition programs, and detention centers. The program provides self-paced instruction for youth in skills to enhance relationships with adults and peers and provides alternatives for behaving in situations that have the potential to result in negative consequences for youth if not handled appropriately. The program features youth actors and includes interactive instructional lesson modules and games, color graphics, animation, video segments, audio effects, and descriptive text. The skills in the program are basic to communication, are important when dealing with authority figures and peers, and typically are listed as areas of skill deficits for youth with social-adjustment issues. In addition, situations in which these skills can be used occur fairly frequently, and the skills can be taught as either a preventive or remedial tactic. The skills are Dealing with Critical Feedback, Coping with No, Accepting Advice, Negotiation, Apologizing, Involving Others, Responding to Peer Pres-

sure, Giving Feedback to Peers, and Designing Your Own Social Skills. Mnemonic devices have been created to help learners remember the steps of the skills.

ORAL LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION: THE SPEAKING WITH POWER SERIES
(Vernon & Schumaker)

The final series related to social interaction in the classroom involves teaching students how to effectively and confidently convey ideas and information to others formally and informally. Clearly, effective oral communication is required for success in the educational setting and is critical for success in the business world. Menial low-skill jobs are limited in number and will probably continue to decrease as more and more tasks become computerized. Employers expect employees to continuously build on skills that involve critical thinking, solving problems, communicating ideas to others, and collaborating effectively. A key skill in literacy learning is narrative language—listening, understanding, giving meaning to thoughts, and sharing them with an audience. Standards for the English language arts specify that students must be able to adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, and vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes. Understanding the interdependence between oral communication and the written language is essential to understanding literacy. Educators suggest that English language arts courses must include curricula that can be used for teaching students to successfully learn the different functions of language, including narrative, informative, and persuasive speech.

The Speaking with Power Series includes three interactive multimedia

programs that focus on giving narrative, informative, and persuasive speeches. The programs feature youth actors and include interactive instructional lessons with vignettes of examples and non-examples of skills and strategies, interactive flash cards, mnemonic devices, quick quizzes, interactive modules and games, color graphics, animation, video segments, audio effects, and descriptive text. The programs enable students to learn strategies related to the complexities of spoken language at levels required in middle and high school. The strategies are designed to help students listen, identify critical information, and effectively deliver that information to a variety of audiences. Instruction includes the differences between the use of formal and informal speech, discriminating when to use each, and practice to reach mastery with regard to formal speech.

The *Narrative Strategy* was designed for teaching students how to orally present information clearly and concisely after hearing a story and enables students to meet demands related to sequencing and cohesively presenting a series of events to their listeners. The program introduces the importance of communication protocols, such as the use of gaze, body posture, intonation, and expression. The IM program contains instructional segments related to listening to and preparing to tell a story, learning to connect to an audience, and practicing how to tell a story. The strategies help students sequence critical events or actions and their consequences and include interesting rhetoric when retelling the story. A special section of the program enables students to generalize the organizational segment of the strategy to writing a story. A video instructor's guide is included to provide an overview of the CD program

and provide teachers or instructional facilitators the information necessary to implement the program.

The *Informing Others* program teaches students to listen, manage, and build effective communication in a variety of contexts as they present new information. Their goal is to inform or teach. They learn to research a topic; organize the information into main ideas; create a well-formed introduction (with an attention grabber), body, and conclusion; include supporting statements (examples, reasons, and comparisons) and details; and practice presenting the information concisely and smoothly.

The *Persuading Others* program helps students become confident, well organized, and knowledgeable as they effectively and responsibly offer hope, inspire, and motivate people. They learn to identify persuasive rhetoric (e.g., loaded words, testimonials); create a clear statement of position; distinguish between fact and opinion; present supporting details and compelling evidence (e.g., reasons, examples, statistics, anecdotes, emotional appeals); and choose persuasive words as they provide an introduction, the body of information, a summary, and a final appeal.

These programs serve as a supplement to traditional curricula and instructional methodologies or as a remediation tool for use with students with expressive language deficits. The programs may be used in a variety of settings to provide instruction and practice to ensure that students achieve mastery in commu-

nication skills by meeting standards and performance benchmarks for speaking. Settings might include English classes, language arts classes, special education classes, classes for English language learners, study hall, summer school programs, home school, or after-school programs, for example. The interactive, multimedia CD format provides self-paced validated instruction to students.

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KUCRL 35

1978-2013

The 2013 International SIM™ Conference (July 10-12) is almost upon us, and we hope you plan to be here with us as we celebrate our achievements as a Center and as a SIM Network during the past 35 years.

It's been three-and-a-half decades since a small group of researchers won the grant that established the Institute for Research in Learning Disabilities, which eventually became the Center for Research on Learning. A lot of good things have happened in those 35 years, especially the development of the Strategic Instruction Model™ and the founding of the SIM Network.

In addition to celebrating the Center's anniversary, this conference provides a formal opportunity for the SIM Network to wish Don Deshler well in his retirement and to meet the Center's new co-director, Kathleen Lane. Don has announced plans to retire in 2014, and Kathleen has been appointed to serve as co-director, beginning this August. You will have a chance to meet Kathleen on Friday.

KEYNOTE

Another highlight of the conference will be the keynote address by Elaine Allensworth, interim executive director of the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research.

Allensworth is well known for her research on issues related to education policy, especially her studies of high school graduation and college readiness. She also has published work related to school leadership and school organization and is one of the authors of *Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago.* Her research on early indicators of high school graduation, including the study "What Matters for Staying On-Track and Graduating," has been used to create student tracking systems used in Chicago and districts across the country.

Her keynote, *School Practices that Matter Most for High School and College Readiness,* will address her work at CCSR. She will share lessons from studies she has con-ducted in high school curriculum, the transition to high school, and non-cognitive factors (academic behaviors, perseverance, mindsets, learning strategies, and social skills) leading to college readiness.

NEW MATERIALS

In addition to the special anniversary events, we're excited to introduce our effort to create tools using the iBook format. Look for two new interventions—the *Cause-and-Effect Routine* and the *Text Pattern Strategy*—to lead the way as we explore new ways to put SIM materials in the hands of teachers and professional developers.

HANDOUTS

All conference handouts will be posted to the conference website. If you are attending the conference, you will be able to download them to your laptop or print them before your arrival in Lawrence. **We will *not* distribute handouts on a USB drive or on paper; handouts will be available *only* on the website.**

**See you in Lawrence
for the 2013 International SIM™ Conference!**

VISIT THE CONFERENCE WEBSITE: HTTP://SIM.CONFERENCE.KUCRL.ORG

Visit the conference website to find up-to-date information and multiple ways you can stay in touch as conference plans come together.

The Contact & Connect page offers an easy email form for sending us questions or suggestions, and the Airport Transportation Buddy list (find it here: http://sim.conference.kucrl.org/registration/hotels) is a way for you to plan to share rides to and from the airport.

KUCRL CALENDAR

June 24-28, 2013
    CAL-SIM Learning Strategies
Potential Professional Developers
Institute
Pasadena, Calif.

June 25-27 and August 15-16, 2013
    SIM Learning Strategies Potential
Professional Developers Institute
St. Cloud Minn.

June 25-27 and August 15-16, 2013
    SIM Content Enhancement
Potential Professional Developers
Institute
St. Cloud, Minn.

July 10-12, 2013
    2013 International SIM
Conference for SIM Professional
Developers
Lawrence, Kan.

Dec. 5-6, 2013
    Ohio Update
Toledo, Ohio

Jan. 28-30, 2014
    Florida Update

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