

Foreword

I am extremely impressed with this curricular program for teaching critically important social skills to young children who need mastery of them in order to succeed in school. I can think of no more important task than the effective teaching of such skills in natural settings (home, school, community) in which the teaching-learning process is carefully embedded in ongoing, daily routines. Long-term research shows that such skills-based programs can prevent the later development of a host of destructive outcomes, including violent delinquent acts, heavy drinking, teenage pregnancy, low achievement, school failure and dropout, and severe behavioral episodes in school (Hawkins, Catalano, Kosterman, Abbott, & Hill, 1999). Programs that teach specific skills that allow children and youth to cope more effectively with the challenges and demands of their daily lives are the ones that make a long-term difference in overall quality of life.

When children begin their school careers, they are required to make important social-behavioral adjustments in two areas: They must negotiate healthy relationships with both teachers and peers. Failure in either of these domains puts children or youth at some degree of risk for failure in school; lack of success in both domains is associated with school dropout and other destructive outcomes. It is essential that all students get off to the best possible start to their school careers.

Social Skills in Pictures, Stories, and Songs (SSPSS) is a superb tool for accomplishing this task. It begins by targeting the skill domains that key stakeholders (teachers, parents, administrators) indicate are most important for children to master as they begin schooling. The skill areas targeted by the SSPSS program are also validated by a large number of studies reported in the literature on the correlates of school success. The authors have constructed this elegant curriculum so that it fits seamlessly into the instructional scope and sequence of early childhood and kindergarten settings, indicating their awareness of the dynamics of the teaching-learning process. Reading the SSPSS materials leaves one with the inescapable impression that these authors are masters of instruction and skills acquisition “from the ground up” and that they have a thorough grasp of the key instructional principles that produce sound outcomes for diverse groups of learners.

I was privileged to observe the research and development of the SSPSS during the time my colleagues and I were part of the Head Start Mental Health Research Consortium, a collaborative effort of the U.S.

Administration on Children, Youth, and Families and the National Institute of Mental Health. This unique alliance gave university researchers the opportunity to participate as part of the consortium in developing and evaluating assessment measures, prevention and intervention programs for young children. I can certify not only that the SSPSS program is well conceptualized, carefully designed, and instructor friendly, but also that it is one of the most carefully researched curricular programs to be introduced within any field during the last 20 years. In short, the program works, and users like it—an extremely rare achievement in the field of early intervention.

I believe the SSPSS program is a seminal and rare contribution to the instructional and social skills literature in early childhood education. I greatly admire the authors for their work and their approach, and I predict the SSPSS program will be a huge success.

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Introduction

A good deal of evidence now exists to suggest not only that social-emotional development is an absolutely critical foundation for early learning but also that systematic teaching of social and emotional skills in the early years sets the stage for academic success throughout later schooling (Forness, 2005; Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004). This same evidence also suggests that such instruction in the early years may actually prevent emotional or behavioral disorders from occurring in children at risk for such disorders (Fox, Jack, & Broyles, 2005; Luby, 2006).

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Social Skills in Pictures, Stories, and Songs is the result of a six-year project designed to help young children develop the social and emotional skills necessary to succeed in their early school years. The program combines a number of sensory modalities, using stories, mnemonics, coloring books, songs, role-playing, and visual aids. Teachers and caregivers of children in child care, preschool, and the early elementary grades can use this guide to implement a comprehensive multisensory program. They may also select specific program components or adapt them as they see fit in response to their children's particular needs. Thoroughly field tested in clinical trials and a follow-up in Head Start preschool settings, the program is also appropriate for young children in child care situations and for school-age children in the early elementary grades. An overview of the program's development and evidence base is given in Appendix A.

Pictures, Stories, and Songs

While developing the program, we recognized that teaching social and emotional skills should not necessarily be separated from daily routines at home, care settings, or school. Teaching children these types of skills may actually be more effective if the skills can be integrated into whatever naturally occurs in such settings. Such integration may well make parents, caregivers, and teachers more willing to undertake such instruction. Many mental health professionals, for example, have tried

to develop programs to foster social-emotional development in child care and preschool settings but have failed because caregivers and teachers have seen such programs either as extra work or as interruptions to their daily routines. Even though they may see some value in these programs, they are not always convinced that adding on such programs is worth the effort.

With these issues in mind, we cast about for a way to make the important work of teaching social and emotional skills a more integral part of the natural caregiving and school environment. When we looked more carefully at different settings for children in their early years, the settings seemed to have in common three instructional elements: pictures, stories, and songs! Picture books, posters and other visual displays, and the like are ubiquitous in just about any care setting for young children, preschool, or elementary classroom. Stories are likewise the lifeblood of childhood, as bedtime rituals at home, storytime before afternoon naps in day care, and daily lessons in school. And most of us still fondly remember the songs from our early years: *Wheels on the Bus*, *The Itsy Bitsy Spider*, and other standards.

Pictures, stories, and songs not only represent wonderfully familiar opportunities in which to embed the important work of developing social and emotional competence, they also offer the possibility of *integrating* all these modalities in pursuit of a common purpose. Such a multisensory approach takes advantage of the different ways children learn. Some children, for example, might learn more readily from seeing concepts presented in pictures. Others might learn more effectively by listening to a story or, in the case of older children, reading it. Some might grasp these concepts best when hearing them presented musically and being able to sing along.

Skill Selection

Because children must master several social-emotional skills in early childhood, we decided to select those skills that teachers, parents, and administrators consider most critical to school success in the early grades. After reviewing studies in this area, we conducted a social validation study with teachers, parents, administrators, and social workers/psychologists to determine what skills were most important. The results of the literature review and social validation study indicated four critical skill areas: (a) following directions, (b) sharing, (c) managing one's own behavior, and (d) problem solving (Forness, Serna, Kavale, & Nielsen, 1998). We then developed simple mnemonics to depict and encapsulate the essential components of each skill: BEST, PALS, TEAM, and WORK. As you will see, across the stories, pictures, and songs for each of the four skills, the mnemonics not only help children remember

the skill steps, but also serve as cues or reminders that teachers can use throughout the day to prompt children to use each skill when the occasion demands.

PROGRAM COMPONENTS

In addition to this teacher’s guide, *Social Skills in Pictures, Stories, and Songs* includes a storybook, a music CD, and a set of four coloring books.

Storybook

The storybook presents the exploits of four animals: a roadrunner, a prairie dog, a raccoon, and a porcupine. Each story involves a different animal character and shows how that character learns to use a specific skill. The stories and their associated mnemonics are as follows:

Rosie the Roadrunner Learns to Follow Directions (BEST)

Prairie Dog Pete Learns to Share (PALS)

Roscoe the Raccoon Learns to Manage His Behavior (TEAM)

Prickles the Porcupine Learns to Solve Problems (WORK)

These stories follow a predictable format in which children are introduced to the main character, the main character’s problem is defined, and the main character—with the help of friends—solves the problem by learning and using the skill. The skill of following directions (BEST) serves as a foundation for the other skills; after children learn this skill, they may learn the other skills in any order. The TEAM and WORK skills require children to develop cognitive skills along with the main social skill, however, and as such are more complex and probably best taught last.

Music CD

The music CD bound at the back of this teacher’s guide includes four songs, one for each story. Each song involves one of the animal characters and presents a skill and its related mnemonic. A vocalist plays the guitar and is joined by children, who add their voices and dialogue to the songs. In addition to being used as indicated in the skill lessons, the songs can be played and sung at other times during the day, either in the group or by individual children. A song sheet, including music and lyrics, follows each set of lessons in this guide.

Coloring Books

Four separate coloring books, one corresponding to each story and skill, give children a hands-on way to assimilate the skill information. Based on the storybook illustrations, these pages show the main characters learning the skills and include captions to reinforce key ideas. The lessons suggest pages from these books for the children to color, but teachers should feel free to assign pages as appropriate for their groups and should not be limited by the drawings in the coloring books. Having the children create their own drawings is always an option.

Teacher's Guide

This teacher's guide provides specific instructional procedures in the form of skill lessons, as well as a range of supplementary materials useful in conducting the program.

Skill Lessons

Each skill is accompanied by four to six lessons. The lessons specify a range of pages in the storybook to read aloud, then use the story content as the basis for instruction. Because the instructional procedures follow the text of the stories for each skill, like the stories, the lessons also follow a predictable sequence:

1. Children are prepared for skill learning by hearing how the story characters define the skill and seeing them illustrate the need for it.
2. In a small-group or whole-class format, the teacher guides children in exploring the situations in which the skill may be useful and understanding the rationale for using the skill.
3. Children are next introduced to the specific skill steps, which are reinforced through repetition and example. The lessons include guidelines for reinforcing learning of the skill steps by having children listen to and sing the song associated with the skill.
4. The teacher models the skill steps for the children and asks them for feedback on the accuracy of skill performance. The children are next given the opportunity to role-play the skill.

It is important to note that these lessons need not be seen as a separate part of the children's daily routine—they can be applied at any time, especially during normal story times. Elsewhere, we describe how these lessons can serve as prereading or reading lessons within the general framework of literacy skills in preschool and the early grades (Serna, Nielsen, Curran, Higgins, & Forness, 2002).

Following each set of lessons are patterns for making felt board cutouts of the story's characters, whole-page displays of the skill definitions and skill steps, and song sheets.

Related Activities

Appendix B in this guide includes a number of ideas for using large-group, small-group, and individual activities in the form of learning centers to enhance skill learning and generalization. These activities include opportunities to sing the songs, make clay sculptures and puppets of the story characters, perform a puppet show for parents, and engage in additional role-playing practice. Other possibilities include playing bingo and using flash cards for review.

Role-Playing

Role-playing serves two purposes in the program: It gives students the opportunity to practice the skill steps, and it shows teachers what their students have learned. As noted previously, the lessons include a specific role-play procedure that presents the skill steps. Role-play practice also takes place incidentally, in the classroom and on the playground, as natural opportunities present themselves during the course of the day. When an opportunity for skill use presents itself (or when the teacher creates one), the teacher praises the child for using the skill appropriately or provides corrective feedback if the child missed the opportunity to use the skill or did not follow the skill steps appropriately. To provide corrective feedback, the teacher may refer to the skill stories and characters, picture cues, songs from the original lessons, previous class discussions about the skill, and other role-play experiences.

Appendix C describes the way we used role-play evaluations to measure students' skill acquisition and includes a role-play evaluation checklist for each skill.

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

Caregivers or teachers may use all or part of this program, as the needs of the children in their care dictate. Field testing of the *SSPSS* program, however, included all components of the program, and thus the most effective use of the program will involve the entire series of lessons and related activities.

Most of the materials needed for these lessons and accompanying activities are included in the package for this program. Not included are a CD player to play the music CD, a felt board and felt to construct

the character shapes; an easel pad or dry erase board, if appropriate; and crayons or colored markers. These items are readily available in child care and early childhood education settings, as well as in early elementary classrooms. Each child will also need a copy of the coloring book for the skill being taught. Additional art supplies are helpful in conducting additional activities to enhance skill learning activities, as specified in Appendix B. Finally, if someone can play a piano or guitar, that person can use the song sheets to contribute live musical performance.

If children are already reading, teachers may wish to present the skill definitions and component steps on posters or easel pad pages for them to read and also have children read parts of the story aloud as the lesson progresses. If children have not yet mastered reading skills, more focus can be given to the narrative and pictures. The mnemonics, pictures, and songs are thus designed to foster preliteracy and beginning reading skills.

The following pages provide some basic tips for storytelling and strategies for children who have difficulty listening. These tips apply to all of the lessons.