

Social Skills and Social Judgment Training
R.W. DuCharme, Ph.D.
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One of the primary aims of activities provided during the academic day and extended school day is the improvement of student ability to apprehend and demonstrate the reciprocal requirements of social interaction.

Social skills are a complex interrelationship between verbal communication, as in the ability to have and use the lexicon for social interaction, the knowledge of social norms and the ability to process social cues to elicit needed responses. The pragmatics of social relations are the elements of focus for the extended day activities.

The importance to understand that social skills are more than principles of etiquette is reflected by elements associated with social skills in the settings of the school community, classrooms, home, larger family context and community. These social settings are different and require different skills.

The classroom student role is specific to the expectations created by the parameters of the physical school environment, teacher management skills, instructional methodologies, response requirements of students, institutional sanctions applied, etc. The social skills that may be generalized and applied across settings may be priorities. However that assumes effective analysis and descriptions of the prerequisite behaviors required to perform effectively in the specific settings, e.g. classroom for science, math and other subjects of varying degrees of structure.

Social skills (the ability to demonstrate social conventions and roles) are basic understandings prerequisite to social judgment. Social judgment is much more complex, however.

Social judgment requires perceptual adequacy to apprehend cues present, cognitive speed to process and interpret the cues as representations for a response, and identifying the need to decide to act. Then the student must choose between alternative actions, assess the proportionality of acts and general consequences, the consequences for acts need to be understood, i.e. how they affect the student's priorities for future aims.

The mastery of social skills does not necessarily predict the ability to demonstrate social judgment. Piaget discusses in his book on moral judgment, how moral judgment is concurrently related to both cognitive development and social experience through developmental stages. Piaget illustrates the relevance of the match between social and cognitive development over time. He also discusses the valence of the social actor's reliability of offering the contiguity of needed experience with child readiness to process and internalize that experience.

Parent reliability of appropriate, timely response to needs, and peer offerings of the “rules of the game,” provide external authority and sanctions to a child’s personal experience. Piaget did not anticipate, however, the impact of social media and its access to children and adolescents. The flood of opportunity to access others is replete with new syntax, special lexicon, ever changing idols and new connectivity to distant sites. Virtual reality creates a new test for authentic experience and actual models rooted to the earth. Fantasy becomes interconnected with extraordinary “powers.” How these new competitors to actual reciprocity with adult models and peer social interactions in real time and space is not fully understood. But the impact is apparent on child “speak” and action. Young children age 3 to 4 years manipulate IPODs, DVDs and other than parent’s lap top with alacrity and dexterity.

Piaget starts his observation with pre-verbal, motor level behaviors and progress through higher stages, and actual social levels of complex reciprocity. The extended day activities use these understandings, with the addition of task analysis, matched personal interests and developmental levels of children and adolescents to create and structure groups and activities.

Standards of behavior are define and applied by staff. Personal goals and objectives are established through collaboration between student and clinician. Daily objectives are set and reviewed at the beginning and end of each day’s activities. Staff group leaders rate performance for each student and each student rates themselves as well.

The aim is to both improve student skills and judgment and use the measure of congruence between staff and student ratings as indices of progress. Further, performance vis a vis established objectives is also measured daily to track behavior gains, regression and concurrent influence on other behaviors measured.

Other protocols such as the TILSA, Pragmatic Language Survey are examples of measures used quarterly as well as those used as daily progress measures.

Goal setting skills, prospective planning, a results orientation for data use and correlated earned degrees of freedom from supervision are assessed. Implicit self-regulation and accuracy of self-estimation are made evident through the daily assessment and the assessments each quarter over time. Data based decision about goal modification, time to work on skills and adjusted future goals are made explicit by the process of student planning activities, engaging in activities and assessing personal results.

The progress of each student is measured and reported each quarter. Results are sent to referring agencies and parents as well as reviewed with each student by their respective therapist.