Skill Streaming to Teach Students Desirable Prosocial Skills

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Abstract

Skill streaming is a psycho educational intervention- its roots in both psychology and education. Although used initially by therapists in the mental health field, its processes focus on four direct instruction principles of learning. These learning procedure-modeling, role-playing, feedback and transfer-have been used to teach a variety of behaviours, from academic competencies to sports, daily living skills, and vocational skills. They are applied in skill streaming to teach students desirable prosocial skills. Prosocial behaviors allow a child to interact with adults and children in a successful and appropriate manner (Wardle, 2003). The interaction should be beneficial to one, the other, or both parties involved. An added component is the "individual's ability to perceive the situation and be aware when a particular set of behaviors will result in positive outcomes" (cited in Cartledge & Milburn, 1986, p. 7). According to this, a child needs more than specific skills. A child also needs the ability to navigate specific situations.

INTRODUCTION

Prosocial behaviors allow a child to interact with adults and children in a successful and appropriate manner (Wardle, 2003). The interaction should be beneficial to one, the other, or both parties involved. An added component is the "individual's ability to perceive the situation and be aware when a particular set of behaviors will result in positive outcomes" (cited in Cartledge & Milburn, 1986, p. 7). Skill streaming is focused on Structured Learning a psycho educational intervention strategy that provides instruction in prosocial skills. The development of prosocial skills can be viewed as a three-part process. In the *recognition* step, a child must be able to determine if someone needs help. Secondly, the child must *decide* whether to help or not to act. Thirdly, a child must *act* by selecting and performing an appropriate behavior for that situation (Kostelnik et al., 1988).

THE PURPOSE OF SKILLSTREAMING

The purpose of the Skill streaming program is to systematically teach children and adolescents the social skills necessary to lead effective and satisfying personal and interpersonal lives. It focuses on the assumption that certain social and behavioral skills are missing in the person's repertoire and therefore these need to be taught in a systematic, patient, and encouraging manner. The program is based on social learning theory.

WITH WHOM CAN SKILLSTREAMING BE USED

This program has been developed to be used with children and adolescents of all ages who demonstrate deficits in social skills. Developmentally appropriate skills and lessons plans have been developed and can be bought separately. Three different programs exist: Skill streaming in Early Childhood, Skill streaming the Elementary School Child, and Skill streaming the Adolescent. The authors suggest that there are groups of children that particularly benefit from systematic social skill instruction. These groups include: withdrawn and aggressive children, normally developing children with periodic deficits in prosocial behaviour, and children with learning disabilities, communication disorders, behaviour problems or other handicaps. The program can also be used with adults of all ages with different needs (e.g., child-abusing parents, psychiatric patients).

THE FORMAT OF SKILLSTREAMING

As described in the table below, each of the three levels of the skill streaming program is described in a paperback book that outlines the assessment, teaching procedures, and lessons for teaching each social skill. Accompanying the book is a workbook with program forms, and a video for the elementary and adolescent versions.

TEACHING PROCEDURES SHOULD BE USED WITH SKILLSTREAMING

Skill streaming is focused on Structured Learning a psycho educational intervention strategy that provides instruction in prosocial skills. The Structured Learning approach differs slightly between the three age groups in its implementation.

Skill streaming provides a number of assessment techniques to measure the skill deficits and strengths of each child, so that treatment can be individually tailored. The number of specific prosocial skills ranges from 40-60, depending on the age of the child. There are eight cards that list the behavioural steps for each of the prosocial skills.

➢ **STEP 1 – DEFINE THE SKILL**

The teacher leads a short discussion about the desired skills to determine what the children know, and to ensure they understand the skills that will be taught in the session.

➢ **STEP 2 – MODEL THE SKILL**

Each child receives a Skill Card where the each step is broken down into constituent parts/behavioral steps and is clearly defined.

The group leader models all the behavioral steps, systematically in an expert manner, in at least two different examples. Examples must be relevant and modeling must display reinforced, positive outcomes. Models should "think aloud" through each of the behavioral steps.

➢ STEP 3 – ESTABLISH STUDENT SKILL NEED

The group leader now facilitates a discussion to determine when and with whom the modeled skill should be used.

➢ STEP 4 – SELECT ROLE-PLAYER

All children will role-play each skill taught.

➢ STEP 5 – SET UP THE ROLE-PLAY

The main actor chooses another student to play the other person; this person should remind the actor of the significant other to whom the skills is directed. A description of the setting, preceding circumstances, and mood is described by the main actor.

➢ STEP 6 – CONDUCT THE ROLE-PLAY

The children role-play the skill "thinking aloud" each of the behavioral steps while the other children watch for the display of each step. Each child is then given an opportunity to do a role play as the main actor.

➢ STEP 7 – PROVIDE PERFORMANCE FEEDBACK

A discussion is held to determine how well the actor adhered to the steps and to evaluate the effectiveness of the steps at accomplishing the desired goal. The group leader provides social reinforcement in the form of praise, encouragement, and approval when the actor has performed successfully; the facilitator should increase the reinforcement as the role-plays become closer approximations of the desired skills. Positive feedback should be provided first, and then proceeded by constructive negative feedback with suggestions for improvement. The child then can repeat the role-play to provide an opportunity for improvement.

➢ STEP 8 – ASSIGN SKILL HOMEWORK

Students are instructed to practice their newly acquired skill in real-life settings. There are three levels of homework:

Level 1:

The child thinks of a situation in which he or she feels the need to practice the skill. This situation is written on the Homework Report along with the skill name and steps. The child then uses the skill and evaluates how well they performed the skill steps.

Level 2:

When the child has achieved mastery of the skill, self-recording or monitoring is done independently throughout the week whenever the need arises. Self-evaluation is

conducted on the sheet and the leader writes reinforcing comments on the form after a specified time period.

Level 3:

Numerous skills are listed on a cue card and the student keeps a tally of skill practice during the week.

Group Self-Report Charts with stickers for each child can aid in the reinforcement of skills and homework completion. Skill contracts, self-recording forms, and skill awards (e.g., extra recess for the class) can also be used as motivation. Token rein forcers and tangible rein forcers can be used (e.g., stickers, activities, food).

THE FOLLOWING TECHNIQUES ARE SUGGESTED TO ENCOURAGE THE TRANSFER OF TEACHING:

♦ Ensure the child understands the rules and strategies that leads to success
♦ Over learning
♦ Training loosely using multiple role-pays with different students
♦ Ensuring that the role-playing situations are as realistic as possible

♦ Ensure that the child him or herself is self-recording, self-reinforcing, self-punishing, and self-instructing.

THE FOLLOWING TECHNIQUES ARE SUGGESTED TO ENCOURAGE MAINTENANCE:
♦ Unpredictable and slowly decreased reinforcement
♦ Delayed reinforcement
♦ Fade prompts
♦ Provide booster sessions
♦ Prepare for real-life non-reinforcement

♦ Program for natural reinforcement; use natural reinforcers

TYPE OF SETTING CAN SKILLSTREAMING BE USED

Skill streaming is a psycho educational intervention that is primarily designed for use in school settings. It provides special education, general education and resource teachers, social workers, psychologists, and school counselors strategies for group instruction in prosocial skills. It can also be used in mental health and residential facilities.

TO WHAT EXTENT HAS RESEARCH SHOWN SKILLSTREAMING TO BE USEFUL?

Research has clearly demonstrated that systematic social skills interventions that are focused on specific skills are effective at teaching children necessary social skills.

Social learning techniques have shown to be a successful way to teach these skills. This program improves on many in that it stresses and incorporates techniques to promote generalization. Skill streaming was found to be effective in meeting the needs of the individual throughout development.

THE FORMAT OF SKILLSTREAMING.

THREE CATEGORIES	EARLY CHILDHOOD	ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILD	ADOLESCENT
MATERIALS INCLUDED	Book Program Forms Booklet	Book Program Forms Booklet Skill Cards Student Manual Video	Book Program Forms Booklet Skill Cards Student Manual Video
PROSOCIAL SKILLS	40 Specific Prosocial Skills	60 Specific Prosocial Skills	50 Specific Prosocial Skills
SKILL GROUPS	6 Skill Groups	5 Skill Groups	6 Skill Groups
	1. Beginning prosocial skills	1. Classroom survival skills	1. Beginning social skills
	2. School-related skills	2. Friendship-making skills	2. Advanced social skills
	3. Friendship-making skills	3. Dealing with feelings	3. Dealing with feelings
	4. Dealing with feelings	4. Alternatives to aggression	4. Alternatives to aggression
	5. Alternatives to aggression	5. Dealing with stress	5. Dealing with stress
	6. Dealing with stress		6. Planning skills

PROSOCIAL SKILLS

Prosocial behaviors allow a child to interact with adults and children in a successful and appropriate manner (Wardle, 2003). The interaction should be beneficial to one, the other, or both parties involved. An added component is the "individual's ability to perceive the situation and be aware when a particular set of behaviors will result in positive outcomes" (cited in Cartledge & Milburn, 1986, p. 7). According to this, a child needs more than specific skills. A child also needs the ability to navigate specific situations.

Prosocial behaviors can be grouped into three distinct categories: sharing (dividing up or bestowing), helping (acts of kindness, rescuing, removing distress), and

cooperation (working together to reach a goal) (Marion, 2003). Other experts include showing sympathy and kindness, helping, giving, sharing, showing positive verbal and physical contact, showing concern, taking the perspective of another person, and cooperating. Kostelnik et al. (1988) placed prosocial behavior in two categories: cooperation and helpfulness. The authors defined cooperation as the act of working together for a common goal. Helpfulness was defined as the act of removing distress from another person.

DEVELOPING PROSOCIAL SKILLS

A child must develop cognitive competencies, emotional competencies, and specific skills in order to develop prosocial behavior (Marion, 2003). To develop prosocial skill child must have:

- The cognitive ability to recognize him/herself as able to make things happen.
- The emotional capacity to empathize with the other person.
- The ability to perform a specific skill.

It is the combination of these three elements that result in the formation of a social skill such as sharing.

Another expert, Vygotsky, viewed socialization as two fold. First, cognition is related to social engagement, and secondly, language is a critical tool for communication within a social context (cited in Berk & Winsler, 1995). Vygotsky emphasized the importance of socio dramatic play. Play is a means by which children interact, but it is also through this social interaction that cognitive development occurs. Researchers have found that precollegeers who spend more time at pretend play are more advanced in intellectual development, have a higher capacity for empathy, and are seen by teachers as more socially competent (Berk & Winsler, 1995).

The development of prosocial skills can be viewed as a three-part process. In the *recognition* step, a child must be able to determine if someone needs help. Secondly, the child must *decide* whether to help or not to act. Thirdly, a child must *act* by selecting and performing an appropriate behavior for that situation (Kostelnik et al., 1988).

I. Crick and Dodge(2000) looked at the social problem solving aspect of social development (cited in Berk, 2002). They developed an information-processing model that looked at

II. a child's ability to engage in several information-processing activities at a time,

III. a child's mental state, and

IV. peer evaluation and response.

They listed the activities a child must do in order to deal with the problem and come up with a solution. They are:

- Notice social cues
- Interpret social cues
- Formulate social goals
- Generate possible problem solving strategies
- Evaluate probable effectiveness of strategies

- Enact response (cited in Berk, 2002, p. 378).

In addition, the child must have knowledge of social rules, memory of past experiences, and expectations for future experiences. Lastly, peer perspectives and responses to a child's problem solving techniques greatly impact future interactions between the children involved (Berk, 2002).

CURRICULAR PERSPECTIVES IN PROMOTING PROSOCIAL SKILLS

A curriculum is prescriptive, and is based on a more general syllabus which merely specifies what topics must be understood and to what level to achieve a particular grade or standard. A curriculum may also refer to a defined and prescribed course of studies, which students must fulfill in order to pass a certain level of education. For example, an elementary school might discuss how its curriculum, or its entire sum of lessons and teachings, is designed to improve national testing scores or help students learn the basics.

"Curriculum is that it is a body of subjects or subject matter prepared by the teachers for the students to learn." It was synonymous to the "course of study" and "syllabus". The curriculum encompasses the entire scope of formative deed and experience occurring in and out of college, and not only experiences occurring in college; experiences that are unplanned and undirected, and experiences intentionally directed for the purposeful formation of adult members of society.

The curriculum emphasizes respect for self, family, friend, community, animals, and the environment. In addition to promoting students' academic achievement, this agenda focuses on helping students interact in socially skilled and respectful ways; practice positive, safe, and healthy behaviors; contribute ethically and responsibly to their peer group, family, college, and community; and possess basic competencies, work habits, and values as a foundation for meaningful employment and engaged citizenship. The curriculum should give more importance to promote the roles of social value based activities, social communication, social transactions and social expectations. These social based roles develop a new behaviour what is called as prosocial behaviour or people oriented behaviour. Prosocial behavior is essential to the well being of children. Children must learn to act in an appropriate manner, one that is both beneficial to them and to others. With so many children participating in group settings, positive interactions are a necessity. The development of these skills allows children to interact with others in a socially accepted manner.

There are basically four different categories of approaches to developing social competencies in a college setting:

1. Integrate a focus on social development within traditional methods of teaching;
2. Develop academic lessons and units that utilize an instructional approach that highlights a focus on developing social competence;

3. Develop a holistic approach to instructional design with corresponding connections to curriculum and assessment that identify social development as one of several domains that will be the focus of competency development; and
4. Directly teach social skills.

Teachers and principals should systematically review course content, instructional strategies and assessment procedures and make the program changes needed to improve their students' achievement in performing prosocial behaviour.

Conclusion

Teaching prosocial skills is a valuable intervention for any students. The students can be assisted in mastering daily school routines and can learn to follow through with adult expectations, solve interpersonal conflicts and deal effectively with emotions. Just as we know we must teach youngsters to tie their shoes and understand that sounds are associated with the letters of the alphabet, so must we teach the behavioural skills that lead to happier school, home and community experience.

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