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Complex Social Skills: Tools for Assessment and Progress Monitoring

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COMPLEX SOCIAL SKILLS:
TOOLS FOR ASSESSMENT AND PROGRESS MONITORING

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Arts in Education.

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To my sister, Christy, who opened my eyes to the world of autism.

“Education is a social process. Education is growth. Education is not a
preparation for life; Education is life.”
- John Dewey

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Ever since professionals began to diagnose children with autism, the steady increase of autism has sparked interest among teachers, medical clinicians and families around the world. Now, the most recent studies have estimated the prevalence of autism to be as high as 1 in 68 children. Parents look to their doctors for the best medical treatment, but they rely on schools to give their children the most appropriate and enriching education possible. As a family member and a teacher of individuals on the autism spectrum, I understand the struggles people face when working with autism. This chapter outlines my personal and professional interest in autism and the struggles we face when teaching students who have disabilities and deficits in complex social skills.

Early Experiences

Over the past twenty years, the word autism has taken over the disability airwaves and changed the lives of millions of people. Numerous studies report 1 in 88 children are being diagnosed with the communicative disorder. Despite these startling revelations, it has not always been this way. In the year 1990, my life, and the life of my family, changed forever.

My sister was born a happy baby; however, my parents realized there were problems by the time she was three months old. Night terrors

ended her desire to sleep and teething was so painful that she stopped babbling and withdrew from others. As she grew to be thirteen months old, the teething settled, but her regression in skills and behavior did not. Soon, she stopped acknowledging our parents and any object further than two feet away from her at any given time. She stopped communicating and threw temper tantrums all day, every day. Doctors told our family that she would grow out of it. Displeased with the lack of answers and support, my parents sought the advice of other professionals and conducted their own personal research. By the time my sister was two years old, she was diagnosed with autism and received intensive at-home therapy. At the time, the rate of diagnosed cases of autism was 1 in 10,000 children.

Growing older:

As I grew and became more aware of my world, I began to understand how different my sister was. I saw how she was not able to relate or communicate with others. I also watched how others looked down at Christy and my family because of her differences. It was easy to see who understood her, and who did not. During one of her elementary school years, she had a special education teacher who did not understand her. During that year, my sister's skills and behaviors regressed three years. The next year, the school hired a new teacher and she changed our lives for the better. She taught my sister coping skills,

communication, and the purpose of learning. It was at this particular time in my life when I decided to become a special education teacher.

As I grew and learned more, I realized it was not just my sister, or others who had autism, who struggled to relate to others and to communicate. In a crowded room, I could easily spot those who had disabilities and identify the education they had. It was easy to tell they did not understand how to interact with others or adapt to their environment. In school, these students were teased, bullied, and excluded. In the community, these individuals were ignored and scoffed at. I could not help thinking this could be prevented.

As I started my education to become a special education teacher, I was elated to be on my path and fascinated by the lessons my professors presented. I developed expertise in accommodations, modifications, supports, and interventions. I learned hundreds of methods and strategies to improve the lives of my students; nevertheless there was something missing. I still did not understand how to teach students the skills that they need to interact in real life situations or monitor their progress. I learned how to write goals, but the tools available did not allow for objective monitoring or evaluation. Guest speakers and professors emphasized the importance of teaching social skills to individuals with disabilities and many of them offered inspiring lesson plans but did not offer ways to ensure learning was taking place.

My world today:

Today, I work full time as a special education teacher for a rural Minnesota community. I work with students who have a variety of disabilities, but most of my day is spent working with students who are on the autism spectrum and have cognitive disabilities. Out of the thirty students I work with on a daily basis, fourteen of them have noticeable deficits in social skills and require interventions; eight of these students have autism. Approximately half of my students who have noticeable social skill deficits are aware of their disabilities and desire to improve their skills. The other fifty percent do not see themselves as having a disability; they believe their skills are adequate. However, when observed outside the classroom, these students are given strange looks and avoided by their peers due to their awkward social behaviors.

Without efficient and adequate social skills training or ample assessment these students will not be able to reach their full potential in a competitive and changing society. Neuro-typical individuals take one of the most basic social skills, the ability to unconsciously know what others are thinking and feeling and to change their behavior to match the situation, for granted. Individuals with a variety of disabilities are not born with this skill and do not learn it innately. These students need instruction to instill these thought processes and enable them to use them in all environments and situations. Without these skills, it is

almost impossible to maintain a job, develop meaningful relationships, or live a life one dreams of. In order to meet the needs of the students, I teach two hours of social skills interventions during the day. It is my goal to increase the students' skills to interact with others, understand how their brains are wired, and instill in them a desire to understand what others are thinking and feeling.

Teaching Social Skills and Evaluating Progress:

In the past, social skill curriculums aimed to accomplish one of two things; teach skills in an environmental isolation or teach skills to a specific situation. For example, the curriculum I used during my first teaching position encouraged group discussions of various social scenarios. Students were given a script or scenario to read which was open ended. Students analyzed the situation and decided what the most appropriate response would be or determined what they should do next. The scripts were useful for leading lessons; however, the curriculum assumed students had previously learned a number of responses to situations and could arrange a set of choices in their heads. This particular curriculum taught skills in environmental and situational isolation. If the student happened to have the exact situation happen to them in real life, they might remember what to do. If the environment or situation changed at all, the student did not have the skills to adapt or to change his or her responses. Because I didn't have the tools or

experience to expand the curriculum, students were not able to learn the complex social skills needed to interact with each other or to generalize the skills for other environments.

Since my first year of teaching, I have improved my skills by conducting research and attending various training conferences and seminars. Due to the increased need for social skill training, educators now have access to a number of evidenced based strategies for teaching effective social skills. I have the tools to teach social skills to my students; however, I continue to struggle with how to measure and monitor their progress towards goals and to allow student self-evaluation of their skills.

When students are taught skills, it is important for them to be able to reflect upon and to evaluate their own skills. Many social skill monitoring tools rely on numerical based rating scales. Students and teachers are asked to rate skills based on how often they are used. One rating scale I have used in the past, asked students to rate social skills in the following manner: 1 - almost never use the skill, 2 - seldom, 3 - sometimes, 4 - often, 5 - almost always. The first time I used this rating scale with students, it took three days to rate thirty basic social skills. The students did not understand the abstract number ratings and wanted to add parameters to the skills. For example, number one asks the student "Do you listen to someone who is talking to you?" One

student wanted to know who he was supposed to be listening to, and another wanted to know if he should choose how often he actually listens, or how often he pretends to listen. By the time we finished, it was apparent my students had received skills training instruction focused on situational isolation. Without all of the details, they were not able to rate their own skills. When my students, parents, and coworkers are asked to rate the social skills of students, the most common response is “well, it depends”.

Measureable Goals:

Not only is it essential to measure student progress to guide instruction, it is also my job as a special education case manager to gather the data and ensure each student has an appropriate Individualized Education Plan (IEP). This includes prescribed, measureable goals, based on their present levels, and data to support their progress. When I first started writing measureable social skill goals for students, I was at a loss. Most of the data collected on my student’s social skills was based on subjective observations and reports from other staff members. I relied on IEP goal banks located on the internet and changed them to reflect my student’s current skill levels. Three years later, I have improved how I write measureable social skill goals, but, they are not as objective or measureable as the academic goals for students.

When conversing with other autism teachers, I have found this to be a common struggle. Not only are teachers and specialists struggling to write measurable goals in accordance with state laws, but they are also struggling to collect objective data to determine if students are making adequate progress on their goals. The most common situation professionals in our area share are the lack of generalization of skills, which is important for us to track and measure. Students must be able to use skills in multiple environments and in a variety of situations. In order to assess skills in all areas, we need tools that students and staff can use to accurately assess skills on a regular basis and report to the social skill instructor.

The big question

Even though we now have evidence based social skill training programs and strategies for instruction, special education instructors continue to struggle with skill evaluation and progress monitoring. In the world of autism and special education, one person can have a million questions at any given time. As a special education instructor, my biggest question and concern is *“how do I measure and evaluate the learning of complex social skills in multiple environments for students with autism and developmental disabilities?”* The creation of progress monitoring tools will not only benefit my program, but it will also benefit the programs of other teachers and staff members who work with similar

populations. By creating data collection tools, I will be able to share the materials with other professionals and improve the education of many students.

Chapter 2 of this capstone will examine the history of autism, describe social skill instruction, and explore possible assessment models for evaluating social skills. From this information, I will develop a plan to produce a set of data collection tools. These tools will aim to improve the evaluation of complex social skills. Chapter 3 will outline the planning process of the data tools and will be followed by chapters 4 and 5. These chapters will outline the products of my planning and reflect on the process of their creation.

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Chapter one of this capstone clarified my personal and professional interest in autism spectrum disorders and the need for effective social skill data collection tools. This need for data collection tools has led me to the question *“how do I measure and evaluate the learning of complex social skills, in multiple environments, for students with autism and developmental disabilities?”* Before creating a plan and materials, I needed to conduct research to advance my knowledge of current autism information and social skill instruction. In this chapter, I synthesize the information in three discussion points; how autism has evolved over time, how students with disabilities, specifically autism, are educated in schools, and evidence based practices for teaching social skills on the autism spectrum.

Autism Spectrum Disorder Definition

Since first introduced as a specific disability in 1943, the definition of autism as evolved and changed many times. In 2013, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) made new changes to the definition and evaluation criteria for autism. According to the APA, autism, now known as Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), is a disability where a person demonstrates deficits in social communication and social interaction in all environments, not caused by general developmental delays. This

includes deficits in social-emotional reciprocity, nonverbal communication, behaviors for interactions, and the ability to make and maintain relationships. Individuals on the spectrum also demonstrate restrictive, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities. These behaviors can include stereotypes and repetition in speech, motor movements or use of objects, excessive adherence to routines, ritualized patterns and restrictive, fixated interests. Some individuals experience hyper- or hypo- reactions to environmental stimuli and other sensory aspects of their environment. Symptoms must be present in early childhood and impact daily functioning in order to be diagnosed with a clinical label of ASD. Although media and research has made autism or ASD a household term, autism as we know it today has evolved significantly (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Historical Background

Although the term autism was not coined until the 1940's, researchers have found autism described in other published works as early as the 1800's. In 1809, Dr. John Haslam published a textbook entitled Observations on Madness and Melancholy. This work contained a description of a boy who would be considered a textbook case of autism with modern criteria. The 5 year old boy had been institutionalized at the age of two after his skills regressed and his mother was no longer able to control him. When separated from his mother, he only cried for a minute

or two. At the hospital, staff observed classic symptoms, such as a preference to play by himself and avoid other children. He had an intense attraction to toy soldiers and an inability to form relationships with others. The boy often referred to himself in third person when speaking and his poor people skills and fascination with military objects continued into adulthood. Again in 1867, a book by Henry Maudsley, The Pathology of Mind, included a chapter describing childhood insanity. This chapter described a case study of a 13 year old boy who would likely be diagnosed with autism today (Deisinger, 2011).

Leo Kanner: Even with doctors viewing and observing individuals with autism from the 1800's, the term autism was not used to categorize a specific disorder until 1942 when Leo Kanner, an Australian child psychologist, publish his famous work *Autistic Disturbances of Affective Content* (Irwin, 2011, Deisinger, 2011, Thompson, 2013.) Several researchers attribute our current understanding and definition of autism to Kanner's initial observations. Kanner, a doctor at John Hopkins University and Hospital, worked specifically with children who were mentally retarded or insane. While working with the children, he began to notice similarities of symptoms in a small population of patients. He observed, unlike children with schizophrenia, that these children regressed in behaviors and skills, not because of traumatic events, but due to some underlying neurological condition. Other characteristics

which Kanner described as autistics included a need for sameness, persistent interests, repetitive behaviors, lack of imagination, and language difficulties. Many of these characteristics continue to be used in some form today for evaluation and diagnosis (Deisenger, 2011; Irwin 2011, Roth, 2010). Kanner's focus was how children, who were autistic, were unable to relate themselves in an ordinary way to people or situations from the beginning of life (Irwin, 2011). As he continued his work, Kanner continued to document 120 more cases of autism at John Hopkins Hospital (Roth, 2010; Deisenger, 2011).

Refrigerator Mothers: In the beginning, Kanner noted the parents of the autistic children were highly intelligent and uninterested in others, but conceded that the children had no interest in others from birth. Therefore the children were born without the innate ability to emotionally connect with others. Later, Kanner coined the term "refrigerator mother" to describe mothers who withdrew from their children and caused them to revert to autistic tendencies. Kanner and his affiliate, Eisenberg, acknowledged cold, unaffectionate, and mechanical parents could not be the only cause for infantile autism. They did however believe it played a major role (Irwin, 2011, Kanner and Eisenberg, 1956).

Even though Kanner was the first to attribute autism to disconnected parents, Bettelheim later initiated a movement against parents. He published multiple works to spread the theory of refrigerator

mothers and pushed for intense therapy treatments. Bettelheim based his theories on observations he made while held in German concentration camps during World War II (Irwin, 2011). He also speculated on other documented incidents, such as the “wolf girls” of Midapore, India. Bettelheim claimed the girls’ behaviors were not a result of being raised by wolves; rather he saw the girls as being highly autistic. He concluded the girls had been physically and emotionally abandoned by their parents. The girls had been subjected to extreme emotional isolation and, along with their experiences of living in the wild, became feral children with autism (Bellelheim, 1959).

In order to treat autistic children, Bellelheim pushed for the separation of children and parents. Children under his therapy guidance were removed from the home and given new lives in institutions. Parents were treated with psychotherapy and only allowed to see their children a couple of times per year (Thompson, 2013). As more research was gathered, biological explanations became the focus of causation. As a result, the theory of refrigerator mothers was abandoned in the United States. This theory and form of treatment, however, is still present in some countries (Irwin, 2011).

Search for biological factors: When Kanner first published his theory of autism, he sought to differentiate between autism and childhood schizophrenia. He believed autism was a precursor to adult

schizophrenia and it could be prevented. However, as a result of his writings, autism, schizophrenia, and childhood psychosis were used interchangeably until the 1970's. Researchers spent less time differentiating between the various terms and channeled resources to find a biological factor, even genetic reasons, for the cause of autism (Deisinger, 2011). It was during this phase in history that researcher Kolvin and his colleagues began the first twin trials to provide a basis for genetic research, as it pertains to autism. Not only did their research find evidence to support a genetic link to autism, but it also ended the connection between autism and schizophrenia. As their results were published and validated by other researchers, the proof of biological factors as an explanation for autism mounted and support for psychogenic theories plummeted (Deisinger, 2011). Researchers refocused their attention towards studying the effect of seizures on the human brain, congenital defects, development in utero, brain material abnormalities, and the theory that autism is caused by multiple factors interacting with one another (Thompson, 2013).

Hans Asperger: During the 1970's, newly translated work by Hans Asperger also impacted the world of autism. In 1944, approximately the same time Kanner published his work on autism, Asperger, a German psychiatrist, observed similar traits in children. The children he observed, however, did not have the same level of communication

deficits. Asperger also used the term autistic to describe patients who demonstrated poor relationship skills, narrow focus of interests, extraordinary cognitive abilities, rote memory skills, no delay in language learning, and uncoordinated motor movements (Deisinger, 2011, Irwin, 2011). Since Asperger's work was published in German, his contributions went unknown until English Psychiatrist, Lorna Wing, called attention to his work and pushed to include variations of the autism diagnosis. More attention was brought to Asperger's work when it was officially translated to English in 1991 by Ulta Frith (Sanders, 2009).

Autism becomes a spectrum: Wing and her colleague, Gold, were some of the first researchers to complete a large epidemiological study of children with autism. Their data suggested there was a range of symptoms and variations of severity which could not be clumped into subgroups of categories. Other researchers also found this to be true. As a result, the new DSM III-R evaluation criteria for autism listed autism as a spectrum disorder.

As more research has been conducted, new versions of the DSM have been published. In 1994, the DSM IV represented the next shift in how individuals were diagnosed with autism. In the new publication, autism was no longer considered an intellectual disability or personality disorder. To emphasize autism as a spectrum, the diagnoses of autistic disorder, asperser disorder, Rett's disorder, and childhood disintegrative

disorder were all included under the category Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD) (Irwin, 2011, Rutter, 2005).

The most recent publication by the APA, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM V), published in 2013, created more in the autism community. According to Dr. Stephan Kanne, executive director of the Thompson Center for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders, many concerns arose after the preview of the new DSM V criteria was published. Some of the changes to the new evaluation criteria included a change in the category name and the elimination of separate autism disorders. In order to streamline diagnosis, the Axis II is no longer titled Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD) and has been replaced with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). If an individual meets the updated criteria, they will be diagnosed with an ASD. Clinicians no longer use the terms autistic disorder, Asperger disorder, or PDD to categorize individuals (2014).

While the category name change is welcomed by many in the medical field, some individuals, including clinicians, families and individuals with ASD are distraught over losing the variety of autism categories. For years, families and individuals have identified themselves as having Aspergers or being an “aspie”. This way, they were able to separate themselves from other, lower functioning individuals on the spectrum; their identity was taken away. Others were concerned the new

DSM V would not provide them with the individualized, detailed diagnoses (Kanne, 2014). Since the final publication in May of 2013, studies have found this to be incorrect. Studies have also found the new criteria could reduce the number of individuals diagnosed with ASD by as much as 30%. A large group of individuals who previously qualified under PDD-NOS, no longer meet the ASD diagnosis criteria (Kulage Et. Al, 2014).

Current ASD prevalence: According to recent data, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) estimates autism is currently diagnosed in as many as 1 in every 68 children. There continues to be a gender imbalance with the rate of 5 times more likely in males. There is no discrepancy in race or nationality, although country evaluations and treatment vary. The CDC also reports 1 in 6 individuals diagnosed with autism are also diagnosed with other disabilities. Individuals with autism are often diagnosed with secondary disorders such as speech/language disorders, cognitive disabilities, cerebral palsy, and Down Syndrome. Due to advancement in evaluations, technology, and communication, research shows diagnosis at age two is reliable, valid, and stable. In other words, those medically diagnosed at age two continue to qualify for diagnosis into adulthood. While medical practitioners have the ability to diagnosis children at the age of two, most diagnoses are not reported until children turn four years of age (2013). The dramatic increase in

prevalence, the need for early intervention and new education laws have led to more student rights in the public education system. This has improved not only how schools assess student needs, but also how services are provided.

Autism in schools

Today, medical practitioners are required to follow the DSM V criteria when diagnosing individuals with ASD. However, if an individual has a medical diagnosis, it does not mean they are guaranteed specialized education services in schools. In public schools across the United States, thousands of students receive services under the disability category of autism, but the diagnosis and criteria for services is different for each state. According to MacFarlane and Kanaya, school administrators and practitioners do not need to use the DSM V criteria to classify students with autism (2009).

Special education laws, including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA) determine the criteria for school classifications of disabilities (MacFarlane & Kanaya, 2009). A team of evaluators conducts assessments and follows guidelines outlined in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR). The criterion for autism services by the CFR was published in 1990, but schools were not required to follow criteria or provide services until 1992. Before this change, students with autism were often provided services under dissimilar disability categories

including: Mental Retardation, Emotional Disturbance, Other Health Disabilities, and Multiple Disabilities. The key difference between the CFR and the DSM criteria is educational need. In order to qualify for services in school, as determined by the CFR, a student's disability must negatively impact his or her education. There are many students who have been medically diagnosed with autism but have enough skills to function in all school settings. These students do not qualify for specialized instruction in schools. Other students may qualify under the category of autism for school services but never receive a medical diagnosis (Baio, 2008, MacFarlane & Kanaya, 2009).

When federal laws were put in place to protect students with disabilities, they gave individual states the power to determine their disability evaluation protocols and criteria. The states can change their disability criteria as long as it meets or exceeds the minimum requirements of the CFR. As a result, students may qualify for autism services in some states but not others. Due to these discrepancies, school service providers must be prepared to understand individual students and provide services to meet each student's needs.

Individualized programming: Every student who qualifies for specialized services in school, as determined by federal and state laws, is provided a case manager. These teachers and professionals are specially trained to work with students who have disabilities. Once a student

qualifies for services, a team meets with the family to construct their Individualized Education Plan (IEP). The IEP is an individualized plan created to guide service providers on how to teach each student.

Professionals use the document to improve each student's educational skills in the hopes of helping them achieve the same skills as their peers. By law, the IEP must include a student's present levels of performance, measureable goals, a list of services to be provided, accommodations, modifications that students will receive in the classroom, and a description of how they will participate in district and state assessments (Gartin & Murdick, 2005).

Professionals also use this data to ensure students are making progress with specialized instruction. The IEP is updated with the student's skills and needs at least once a year. Input from assessments, observations, teachers, parents, and evaluation data all contribute to the creation of an IEP. When a student with autism has an IEP, the most common services include speech/communication, social skill instruction, and academic supports. The amount of time a student receives services and specialized instruction is based on each student's specific needs. For specificity purposes, this paper will focus on the educational needs of students who spend at least 60% of their day with their peers and have minimal verbal communication deficits. In society, these individuals are often referred to as high functioning individuals.

Specialized services and interventions: By definition, individuals on the autism spectrum have deficits in social communication and interactions. When discussing, teaching, and evaluating social skills, professionals must be aware of the distinction between basic and complex social skills. Basic social skills can be defined as an isolated response to a single stimulus. This may include responding to a greeting with a wave or picking up a pencil someone dropped. Complex social skills are responses to multiple stimuli or required engagement in extended social interactions. An example of a complex social skill includes the ability to ask a peer a question after responding to a greeting. Another example is the ability to recognize a person is sad, approach them, stop the appropriate distance away, gain their attention, and inquire into his or her feelings with genuine concern. Complex social skills are more difficult to teach and increase in complexity when students become adolescents (Plavnick et. Al., 2013). Complex social skills also require individuals to assess situations, adapt accordingly, and understand the multiple perspectives of others. They are more difficult to teach, require unconventional rewards, and are more difficult to assess.

Dr. Simpson, with the Department of Special Education at the University of Kansas, described the need for autism curriculum in his 2008 article *Children and Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorders: The*

Search for Effective Methods. According to Simpson, there will never be a system that will work for all students with autism. Autism is a spectrum disorder; therefore the skills and needs of each individual are different. There are similarities between individuals that are exceptionally clear and must be used to create instructional tools (2008).

Since 2008, autism stakeholders generally agree that individuals with autism achieve outcomes with exposure to specialized instruction and tools from autism specialists. The argument therefore is not whether individuals need specialized instruction, but rather which interventions, strategies, treatments, and methods will be used. In general, individuals on the spectrum share skill deficits of varying degrees in social interaction, communication behavior, and learning skills. Without attention to these skill deficits, programs will be ineffective and Simpson would say pointless. Social targets in curricula and student IEPs must be included in a learners' programming (Simpson, 2008).

The range and diversity of skills requires instruction and tools, including direct instruction, coaching, peer development, and generalization of skills (2007). At the root of these skills also sits a need to advance perspective taking skills and adaptability (APA 2013). Programming and assessment tools must address all of these needs.

Least Restrictive Environment: When determining how to provide services, providers need to decide whether to teach a student in the

regular classroom, inclusion, or teach them in the special education classroom pull out system. According to the United States Department of Education (2010), inclusion in the classroom has increased dramatically over the last 15 years (2010), due to growing demands for equality and the cost of specialized education. On one hand, inclusion is a way to teach all students and give them access to the same education as their peers. On the other hand, some people believe inclusion dilutes education and takes away the individualized components of special education. (Rea Et Al, 2002).

In a study and research summary conducted by Rea and colleagues, data supports inclusion for individuals with disabilities. Without barriers, such as lower expectations, restricted curricula, and negative stereotypes, students included in the regular classroom achieved higher grades and performed better on assessments compared to their peers who received instruction solely in the special education classroom (2002). By being in the classroom and given supports, students are given models to learn from, specifically their peers. Individuals with autism get to learn with their peers and see social skills in a natural environment. This is not to say all instruction needs to be provided in the regular classroom. In order to teach skills and meet the needs of students, individuals need direct instruction, intervention, and coaching in small groups. In order to find the correct balance, IEP teams

are required to determine each student's least restrictive environment (LRE) on a case by case basis. Students must spend as much time as possible with their non-disabled peers.

Increasing Student Learning and Achievement

In order to prescribe interventions for social skill deficits, service providers require effective tools to determine the current needs of their students and measure progress. In order to create tools which will be useful and successful in the classroom, the tools must follow proven theories for student learning, include principles of curriculum design and include evidence based practices. Students on the autism spectrum have a range of deficits related to social skills, communication, and stereotyped behavior. The deficits in social skills and communication are also prevalent in individuals who have developmental disorders. In order to decrease student deficits and give them the tools to succeed in a competitive society, service providers need to teach the skills that students are missing in order to decrease skill deficits. Thanks to continued research and data collection, service providers have proven educational theories and evidence based strategies to teach a variety of skills. These tools, aligned with proven pedagogy, can increase the skill acquisition and success of students with social skill deficits.

Evidence Based Strategies: Once providers have determined where direct instruction and services will take place and what skills need to be

taught, it is necessary to choose the correct tool to teach the skills, match the strengths of the students, and meet the needs of the student, staff, and community. Due to the increasing demand for curriculum to teach social skills, thousands of interventions are now available for purchase; however, only a limited number of these interventions have been proven to be effective. As mandated by law, teachers are required to use teaching practices based on evidence of effectiveness, and the same is true for special education service providers. Interventions which researchers have shown to be effective are referred to as evidence-based practices (EBP). In order to determine which interventions are effective for teaching social skills, a group from the University of North Carolina, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, conducted a practice review and used intervention science to create a list of twenty-seven EBPs for teaching students with autism. Their results were published in the *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* in 2015 (Wong Et All, 2015). The article not only provides the results of their investigation, but it also includes summaries of each of the EBPs identified. Refer to table 1 for a list of the EBPs and descriptions of each practice. Continued research must be conducted in order to keep the list updated and relevant for professionals. There also remains the need for tools to allow service providers to effectively and efficiently collect data on the progress of their students and their continuously changing needs.

Table 1: Social Skill Evidence Based Practices	
Evidence Based Practice	Description
Antecedent-Based Intervention (ABI)	Reduction of behaviors through the arrangement of events prior to an undesirable behavior
Cognitive Behavioral Intervention (CBI)	Teach skills to control cognitive thought processes and impact behavior
Differential Reinforcement of Alternative, Incompatible or Other Behavior (DRA/I/O)	Provision of positive consequences for desired behaviors or reduction of undesired behaviors
Discrete Trial Teaching (DTT)	Instruction between one student and one instructor to teach appropriate behavior and new skills. Process includes presentation, response, consequence and pause.
Exercise (ECE)	Increase physical activity to increase desired behaviors
Extinction (EXT)	Complete removal of reinforcers interfering with behavior
Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA)	Systematic observations used to determine functions of behavior. Observations focus on the antecedents, behavior and consequences reinforcing behavior.
Functional Communication Training (FCT)	Act of replacing undesired communication behavior with more appropriate communication
Modeling (MD)	Instruction of skills and behavior through demonstrations
Naturalistic Intervention (NI)	Interventions and instruction to teach skills and behavior in their natural environments, with natural circumstances
Parent -Implemented Intervention (PII)	Parents provide instruction and interventions, with their child, at home and in the community
Peer-Mediated Instruction and Intervention (PMII)	Service providers teach non-disabled peers on how to provide support, teach and reinforce skills to their peers with disabilities
Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)	Learners use pictures to communicate with others. Six phases include how to communicate, distance and persistence, picture discrimination, sentence structure, responsive requesting and commenting
Pivotal Response Training (PRT)	Instruction focused on individual motivation, cues, self-management, and social interactions to alter behavior
Prompting (PP)	Verbal, visual, or physical assistance given to learner to learn desired behaviors and skills
Reinforcement (R+)	A provided event, activity, or circumstance after a desired behavior to increase occurrences

Response Interruption/Redirection (RIR)	Learner is distracted by prompts, redirections, or comments to divert attention and reduce undesired behaviors
Scripting (SC)	Written or verbal description of a specific event or desired behavior to be performed
Self-Management (SM)	Learners are instructed on how to discriminate between desired and undesired behaviors. Learners monitor and record their own behaviors and assign rewards with supervision
Social Narratives (SN)	Often referred to as social stories, learners are provided descriptions of events that include relevant cues and responses, to prepare for social situations
Social Skills Training (SST)	Group or individual instruction used to teach social skills, social interaction and social communication. Instructional meetings include instruction, practice and collaboration
Structured Play Group (SPG)	Small group activities supervised by service providers. Learners are given clear roles and scaffolding to support performance in activities
Task Analysis (TA)	Activities or behaviors are broken down into small, manageable steps for instruction
Technology-Aided Instruction	Technology is used to assist the learning of desired behaviors and support independence
Time Delay (TD)	While learners engage in desirable behaviors or skills, a short delay occurs between when the behavior should occur and prompts provided by instructors
Video Modeling (VM)	Video recording are used to demonstrate desired behaviors and teach new skills
Visual Support (VS)	Any visual display that provides a prompt for desired behaviors or skills to a learner. Examples include pictures, notes, objects, signals, schedules, lists, maps, labels, timelines, calendars, and organization

(Wong Et All, 2015)

Humanistic theory: According to Humanism, or Humanistic theories, humans learn differently from other species due to specific needs and interests. All behavior can be linked to intentional choices based on needs and personal values. As a result, education for students must focus on each person as a whole. In order to teach social skills

effectively, programs must address student needs, goals, emotions, and regulatory skills alongside academic standards. By providing a foundation for personal growth and development, educators create life-long, self-directed learners for the future (Huitt, 2009).

To determine implementation in the classroom, theorists have developed basic principles for humanistic education. These principles strive to provide students with opportunities to develop independence, take responsibility for their learning, develop curiosity, and explore their own learning. These objectives include the following:

1. Students learn best when they are interested in materials and know what they need to learn.
2. Knowing how to learn is more important than gaining knowledge.
3. Self-evaluation is the most meaningful assessment for student work.
4. Feelings are as important as facts.
5. Students learn best in safe, non-threatening environments.

Implementation in the classroom can include allowing students choices of tasks or activities, assisting students in writing realistic goals, cooperative learning, and group work. Teachers act as a facilitator in the classroom and constantly serve as a role model for attitudes, social skills

beliefs, and habits. As a result, students demonstrate increases in independence, cooperation, and positive attitudes (Huitt, 2009).

When providing specialized instruction for complex social skills, a humanistic approach to education allows educators the ability to teach to the whole student. Concepts such as independence, responsibility, emotions, and self-regulation are especially important for students with ASD to learn. When assessing student progress, it is vital to include students in the process and employ tools easily understood by the students expected to use them. This allows students to be included in the process and evaluate their own skills along the way.

Outcome-Based Education: Outcome-based education (OBE) is based on the theory that individuals learn better when they know what they are expected to learn. This is especially true for learners with social skill deficits. In OBE, service providers focus their attention primarily on the results of education and what students will be able to do after instruction is provided. According to Spady, writer and advocate for OBE, there are two types of outcomes which can be achieved through education. The first is the mastery of subject based academics. This includes core instruction and electives. He refers to this as traditional/transitional OBE. The second, and more relevant outcome related to social skills, is called transformational OBE. Learning emphasizes focus on long-term outcomes related to the future of the

students (1994). These are skills individuals need in order to succeed in life, beyond school, and to participate in society. Complex social skills are necessary for successful living placements, leisure activities, continued education, work, and all areas of transition.

In order to learn the transformational skills, Spady (1994) identified three basic premises for OBE.

1. All students can learn and succeed, but not in the same way or at the same pace.
2. Successful learning promotes even more successful learning.
3. Schools control the conditions that determine whether students are successful in learning.

From these premises, he then developed four essential principles.

1. Clarity of focus: everything teachers do must be focused on the desire for students to learn.
2. Designing back: the starting point for instruction is clearly defined by what the students will learn; all instructional decisions can be traced to the end result.
3. High expectations: providers must set high, challenging standards to encourage student engagement.
4. Expanded opportunities: quality education and instruction will be expected of all learners and not reserved for a few.

In order to be successful for a life time, students must know what they are expected to learn, be given focused instruction, and held to high expectations. These concepts connect directly to publications titled Visible Learning.

Visible Learning: The first work published by Hattie in 2009, synthesized 15 years of research and over 800 meta-analyses related to student achievement. The goal of the book was to study teaching practices and student learning, to determine what positively and negatively impacts student achievement and to “generate a model of successful teaching and learning based on many thousands of studies” (239). The phrase visible learning is at the center of the model Hattie created from the research. In order to be successful, teachers must see through the eyes of their students and students must see themselves as their own teachers. Not only does Hattie present this basic model of teaching, his research focused on the effects of interventions and teaching practices over time. Through the synthesis of meta-analyses, he was able to identify 138 educational influences and determine their effect through a series of mathematical equations. His book, Visible Learning, presents the research and data collected as well as how to use the data to increase achievement in the classroom (Hattie, 2009).

According to the data, common practices such as television (-0.18) and summer vacation (-0.09), were found to have a negative impact on

student achievement. Other influences, such as teacher subject matter knowledge (0.09), ability grouping (0.12), and teaching test taking (0.22) had minimal impact on student achievement. The top ten variables and their impact follows:

1. Self-report grades/Student expectations (1.44)
2. Piagetian programs (1.28)
3. Response to Intervention (1.07)
4. Teacher credibility (0.90)
5. Providing formative evaluation (0.90)
6. Micro teaching (0.88)
7. Classroom Discussion (0.82)
8. Comprehensive interventions for learning disabled students (0.77)
9. Teacher clarity (0.75)
10. Feedback (0.75)

When developing curriculum and needs assessments for classroom use, the effects of educational influences must be considered. Positive influences directly related to complex social skill instruction include meta-cognitive strategies (0.69), self-verbalization/self-questioning (0.64), problem-solving teaching (0.61), concept mapping (0.60), direct instruction (0.59), mastery learning (0.58) and worked examples (0.57).

Hattie's latest book, Visible Learning for Teachers: Maximizing Impact on Learning, applies the research to classroom practices and provides practical applications for teachers who wish to maximize achievement. The "practice" of teaching, allows for flexibility and facilitates interaction between teachers and students. The book discussion focuses on the preparation, start, flow, and end of lessons.

When combined with the evidenced based practices for social skill instruction, these educational theories and data for student achievement can ensure students learn the complex social skills they need for life, leisure, work, and relationships. In order for providers to adequately use OBE for social skill instruction, they must know the outcomes and have goals to address individual student needs.

Rubrics: Rubrics are scoring guides used to assess student products and performances. Key features include a list of criteria to be included in a product for performance, a set of performance levels, and a brief description for each criterion in each performance level. The goal of rubrics is to take the mystery out of assessments and increase the validity of evaluation. Rubrics also make learning targets clear for learners and providers, guide instructional delivery, make assessment more clear, and provide students will tools for self-assessment and peer feedback (Wolf and Stevens, 2003). Rubrics also allow service providers focus on what is most important for them to teach and determine which

level their students are currently performing. When written well, the tools can be used to communicate expectations and standards with students, parents, other service providers, and authority figures. They provide opportunities for reflection and feedback which is necessary for self-assessment (Kappan, 2007). When teaching complex social skills, service providers can use rubrics to determine the current skill level of students, communicate with others, and measure student progress over time.

Summary

Since autism first became a public concern in 1943, the increasing prevalence has caused the need for effective programming and effective evaluation tools have increased dramatically. As we moved into the 21st century, research has provided educators and service providers with a variety of tools and evidence based strategies to increase student engagement, achievement, and skill acquisition. In order to teach the necessary complex social skills to students with disabilities, educators and service providers need tools to assess student skills and prescribe interventions based on current skills, strengths, and needs.

Before developing an effective needs assessment tool, a plan needed to be in place to ensure student achievement and accurate assessment. Chapter 3 of this capstone will outline my plan for answering my question, *“How do I measure and evaluate the learning of complex social skills in multiple environments for students with autism*

and developmental disabilities”, and outline my plan for the development of social skill assessment tools.

CHAPTER 3 METHODS

In order to answer the question “*how do I measure and evaluate the learning of complex social skills in multiple environments for students with autism and developmental disabilities*”, a plan has been developed to design and create an effective set of needs assessment tools. Chapter 1 of this capstone explained my personal and professional investment to this question. Chapter 2 synthesized years of literature and research to explain how autism has changed over time, how students on the spectrum are serviced in schools, and what instructional methods and theories are effective for teaching social skills. This information led me to the plan outlined in this chapter. I will explain relevant theories and curriculum design principles behind the development of the assessment tools, include an outline of the content for the tools, and state how the requirements of the Human Subject Research Review were met.

Curriculum outline and student profiles

In schools today, special education teachers service a variety of students on the autism spectrum and social skill deficits. Due to the spectrum aspect of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and developmental disabilities, it is not practical to create curriculum to teach social skills to all individuals. Service providers must use identified Evidence Based Practices (EBP) to fit the needs of their students and their programs. It is

then necessary to use tools to determine student needs and to monitor their progress. In order to assess student skills and growth, these assessment tools have been developed to evaluate individual social skills and to measure progress over time. In order to assess student skills and monitor progress, I have developed a plan to create a series of rubrics and answer the question “*how do I measure and evaluate the learning of complex social skills in multiple environments for students with autism and developmental disabilities*”.

These rubrics were specifically developed to assess the needs of students who have complex social skill deficits in a rural area of Minnesota. The school district services approximately 1,560 students k-12 from multiple communities. The majority of the student population is white (93%) and Latino decent (6%). The rubrics will be used with students between the ages of 12 and 21 who have ASD and developmental disabilities. Student prerequisites include low average to above average language ability, low average to high average intellectual abilities, and mastery of basic social skills. These tools are best suited for students who spend at least 50% of the school day in classes with their non-disabled peers. They are best suited for students who have deficits in complex social skills and need instruction to generalize skills and participate in complex social interactions. The number of students in the school district who meet these requirements in 2015 is 28. Although the

rubrics were specifically designed for a small number of students, they were created to accommodate the needs of students around the world.

The tools are presented in a rubric format and are reproducible. The rationale behind the rubrics, their design, and their content is discussed in depth in chapter 4 of this capstone. The social skills are separated into two categories including Social Communication and Social Behavior. Each category has its own rubric for skill assessment. These categories represent the three core areas assessed for ASD diagnosis and reflect the present level needs required in Minnesota school autism evaluation reports. The rubrics, formatted into grids, include 20-30 complex social skills and three performance levels. Individual skills were written in a positive way to increase student engagement. Performance level titles were chosen to reflect terms familiar to students in Minnesota. The first set of rubrics used the following grid organization.

Complex Social Skill Profile: Communication					
Skill or Behavior	Not Observed	Partially Meets Standard	Meets Standard	Exceeds Standard	Description

The second completed set of rubrics was given different titles for providers to have choices during the presentation process. These are useful for students who are not familiar with the standardized Minnesota

performance titles or are intimidated by them. The second set of rubrics used the following grid organization.

Complex Social Skill Profile: Communication					
Skill or Behavior	Not Observed	Emerging	Developing	Advancing	Description

At the end of each set of rubrics is a blank rubric. This allows for individualization as determined by a student's team. The team is comprised of the student, his or her parents, classroom teachers, and their service providers. All members of the team will use the rubrics to assess present levels and monitor progress in 6 – 8 week increments. This data will determine if prescribed interventions, motivators, and accommodations are successfully teaching the skills to the students.

In the future, after the completion of this capstone, the curriculum will be used to evaluate students within school, home, and community settings. Service providers and parents will use their knowledge of students and observations to circle the present performance level for each skill on the rubric. The team will discuss results, prioritize needs, and choose instructional EBPs to best fit the needs, strengths, and preferences of the student learning the skills.

By creating rubrics, students are held to high expectations and spend more time with their peers. According to Rea and Colleagues, this is essential for student achievement. Students who receive instruction

and support with their peers are more likely to meet their goals and have investment into their education (2002). The rubrics also allow for student self-evaluation, high expectations, clear learning standards, the opportunity for self-questioning, and instant feedback. All of these factors can lead to increased engagement and skill acquisition (Hattie, 2009)(Huitt, 2009)(Wolf and Stevens, 2003).

In order to meet the Human Subject Research requirements, written permission to create the curriculum was obtained. The high school principal and special education facilitator provided consent.

Summary

As the rate of autism continues to rise, so does the need for evidence based instruction and effective progress monitoring tools. Research and education have provided valid instructional tools and strategies to teach complex social skills; however tools for skill assessment and progress monitoring are still needed. Theories of humanistic learning, outcome based education, and visible learning provide insight into student learning and the need for relevancy, self-assessment, and clear expectations. This information, combined with the knowledge of rubrics as assessment tools, led to the plan detailed in chapter 3. Once the plan was written, it was carried out and used to create the enclosed assessment tools. Chapter 4 of this capstone describes the development process and presents the materials created.

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

In order to answer the question “*how do I measure and evaluate the learning of complex social skills in multiple environments for students with autism and developmental disabilities*”, a set of rubrics was created. Chapter 1 of this capstone explained my personal and professional investment to this question. Chapter 2 synthesized years of literature and research to explain how autism has changed over time, how students on the spectrum are serviced in schools, and what instructional methods are effective for teaching social skills. Chapter 3 explained the plan for creating a series of needs assessment tools and described the intended subjects for implementation. These chapters have led to the creation of the rubrics detailed in this chapter. Chapter 4 will describe the components of the tools and the development process, provide snapshots of the curriculum, and describe future implementation and assessment.

Effective Components

In order to create an effective set of assessment tools, components from four educational theories and models were combined. These theories and models work together to create a series of rubrics to assess and measure complex social skills in multiple settings

Humanistic: When considering the principles of humanistic learning, two key components contributed to the creation of the assessment tools. The first was to consider a student's emotions and needs for relationships. In order to function in vocational and leisure settings, individuals need complex social skills in the areas of communication and behavior. The second, and most important principle, is the opportunity for self-evaluation. According to Huitt (2009), this is essential for student engagement and success. By creating rubrics that are easy to understand and use, as well as flexible, it allows students to easily see what skills they currently have and what they need to work on. These principles also allow students to prioritize social skills they wish to improve with their team. This increases student engagement and motivation.

Outcome-Based Education: Outcome-based education (OBE) is based on the theory that individuals learn better when they know what they are expected to learn. In his research, Spady (1994) found students learn best when they know what they are expected to learn. This is especially true for learners with social skill deficits. By identifying skills and describing the skill for three different performance levels, students can easily and effectively determine where they are and where they need to go. By keeping the outcomes clear, the students, their team, and service providers have the ability to choose the best interventions to

teach specific skills. Another key concept of the OBE theory is the education of transformational skills. Transformational skills are those that are used across the life span (Spady, 1994). Complex social skills are needed in all environments, in all stages of life. The rubrics hold students to high expectations, provide clarity of focus, and open multiple opportunities for learning.

Visual Learning: In order to ensure the tools would positively impact student achievement, influences were taken into consideration from the top thirty identified by Hattie. Number one on the list is self-reported grades, which has a positive influence of 1.44 on achievement (Hattie, 2015). In order for students to learn, they need the tools and opportunity to identify their own achievement. By using the rubrics, students can apply their personal knowledge of their skills and share their strength, needs, and priorities with the team. They have the power to assess their own progress and determine if interventions are successful. The key is to teach students how to write personal goals based on high expectations and to follow through with monitoring their progress and rewarding their achievement.

Another influence high on the list is self-concept. According to Hattie (2009) when students believe they can achieve, they are more likely to try harder and reach their goals. By following the rubric and assessing their personal achievement, students can visually see their

skills increasing. These visual progressions allow students with ASD and DCD to turn abstract concepts of social skills into a concrete aspect of their skills. The key to this process lies on the service providers, students, and their teams to determine effective motivators for students. Students with social skill deficits are not often motivated by conventional tools. Dialogue must be opened with the team to determine realistic motivators for achievement and build them into the intervention plans.

Other influences built into the assessment tools, which have proven to have a positive effect on achievement, include teacher clarity, feedback, self-questioning, goals, and meta-cognition. According to Hattie (2013), students need to be taught how to assess their own learning and think about how they learn. The rubrics keep students thinking about their own learning and give them the ability to assess their learning.

Rubrics: With the assessment tools laid out in a rubric format, the criterion for each skill or behavior is clear and concise. Three performance levels allow for clear progress and tools to create attainable goals. Feedback for students is instantaneous and they are able to assess their own skills effectively. The expectations are clear and it opens up clear communication lines. The rubric format also allows for feedback from multiple connections. The tools are easy to read, easy to use, and do not require any training or education. Not only can they be used by any person, they can be used to measure skills in multiple environments

and assess generalization of skills. These characteristics also increase the validity of evaluation (Wolf and Stevens, 2003) for the assessment of student skills.

Each of these theories and models emphasizes the need for high expectations, student driven learning, clear learning goals, and timely feedback. Along with diagnostic criteria and careful descriptions of each complex social skill, all four principles have been combined into a single set of rubrics.

Development Process and Characteristics

The first step taken to generate the rubrics for the complex social skills was to determine the most comprehensive language for performance levels and the skills to be assessed. The rubrics are formatted to minimize visual distractions and allow for individualized learning. At the top are the titles of the assessments and the titles of the performance levels. In order to reach a variety of audiences, two sets of rubrics were written. The performance levels are titled in two different ways. The first set of rubrics, found in Appendix A, include performance levels chosen to mimic Minnesota State Assessment results. These are terms familiar to students from Minnesota and allow for uniformity across assessment tools. The levels are 1) Partially meets Standard, 2) Meets Standard, and 3) Exceeds Standard. The second set of rubrics, found in Appendix B, has performance titles similar to skill based

assessment categories. They are titled 1) Emerging, 2) Developing, and 3) Advancing. Service providers will choose the titles best understood by their students and team.

Once the language for the titles and performance levels were determined, the next step was to choose skills and behaviors to include in the assessment. Sources for the behaviors and skills included two diagnostic tools specifically used for identifying students with ASD and social skill deficits. The first was the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM V) discussed in chapter 2. This manual is used by medical practitioners to diagnose ASD and social disorders. Skills and behaviors were pulled from the diagnostic criteria. The second tool used was the Underlying Characteristics Checklist – High Functioning (UCC-HF). The UCC, developed to be used in conjunction with the Ziggurat Model, is a non-standardized assessment tool used to identify characteristics of autism in individuals. School districts in Minnesota use it as an observation tool to determine deficits and compose present levels for evaluations.

Once the skills and behaviors were chosen for the rubrics, they were rewritten to include positive language. Descriptors for each performance level were written for each skill and positioned into the rubric. In order to inform users of its intended purpose, describe the target subjects, and provide instructions, a cover page was created for

each set of rubrics. The cover page includes subject information lines to track subject data and descriptions of each performance level.

Each rubric consists of six columns. The first column states the complex social skill or behavior to be assessed. The second column is to be marked if the individual being assessed has not demonstrated the skill or it has not been observed by the assessor. The third, fourth, and fifth columns carefully describe what the behavior looks like at each performance level. The sixth column is blank. This column is meant for notes or specific descriptions to be added to the assessment. The sample below is from Appendix A.

Complex Social Skill Profile: Communication					
Skill or Behavior	Not Observed	Partially Meets Standard	Meets Standard	Exceeds Standard	Description
Listening	N/O	Looks at others when they are speaking	Looks at others, thinks about what is being said	Looks at others, thinks about what is being said and makes relevant comments	

Although the titles of the performance levels change from Appendix A to Appendix B, the skills and performance level descriptions remain the same. Each set of rubrics includes blank rows at the end. This was included to allow for individualization of assessment. If a student needs to work on a specific skill not described in the assessment, service providers and the student's team have the ability to write their own skills and performance descriptors. This is especially important due to the vast

differences found within the spectrum of Autism Spectrum Disorders and Developmental Cognitive disabilities.

To further allow for individualization and personalization, each set of rubrics includes a blank grid. This allows teams to have the ability to use a student's language to write performance descriptors and to improve their personal social skills and behaviors.

Trials, Implementation, and Assessment

At this time, no trials have been conducted to determine effectiveness of the tools. Local service providers were consulted to determine readability of language and gather feedback on the skills and behaviors included in the assessment.

In the coming months, the curriculum will be used in the special education classroom to gather data on student skills. The tools will be given to students, teachers, service providers, and parents to complete. Once information is gathered, a meeting will be held to discuss the data, prioritize skills, and write goals for skill improvement. Students will be an integral part of the process and will lead the meetings. Once goals have been written, evidence based interventions will be chosen to teach the skills. The rubrics will be completed every 6 – 8 weeks to measure student progress and determine the effectiveness of the chosen interventions. Feedback will be gathered from all participants to improve

the rubrics. The effectiveness of the rubrics will be based on ease of use, participant understanding, and participant feedback.

Summary

Once the plan was set for the creation of the assessment tools, the theories, principles, and research were combined to create the enclosed tools. This chapter describes the effective components of the theories used to create the plan, the procedure for the creation of the tools, the characteristics, and the plan for future implementation. These tools will allow students to evaluate their own skills and lead their educational team to create individualized programming. Clear expectations and the ability to monitor their progress will engage and motivate students to achieve their goals. Students must believe that they can succeed and these tools give them what they need to make sense of abstract and complex skills.

Chapter 5 is composed of a reflective narrative and provides insight into the lessons learned throughout the completion of this capstone, considerations of limitations, recommendations for future research, and a plan for communicating results following implementation.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this process, I have strived to answer the question “*how do I measure and evaluate the learning of complex social skills in multiple environments for students with autism and developmental disabilities*”. Chapter 1 explained my personal and professional investment to this question. Chapter 2 synthesized years of literature and research to explain how autism has changed over time, how students on the spectrum are serviced in schools, and what instructional methods are effective for teaching social skills. Chapter 3 explained relevant theories and curriculum design principles behind the development of the assessment tools and described the intended subjects for implementation. Chapter 4 documented how the project proceeded, discussed the process, and shared details of the completed rubrics. Chapter 5 is a reflective narrative. I will describe my personal learning and growth experience while writing this capstone, revisit the literature review in chapter 2, and share the possible implications and limitations of the tools created. The final section of the chapter will focus on the future research necessary to improve the system and how results will be communicated.

Personal Learning and Growth

While preparing myself and writing this capstone, I have been given the education and opportunity to advance as a researcher, a writer, and a learner. As a student, I have conducted research and written papers in the past, but I have never started a research project with a question in mind. By having a question, I was able to focus my data collection and streamline the process. When I first began my research, I did so with the intention to create a social skills curriculum. While conducting research, I discovered the evidence based practices for teaching social skills. I realized I already had what I needed in order to teach social skills, but I did not have the tools to neither assess the skills of my students nor monitor their progress. During discussions with local service providers, I came to the conclusion that this was a common problem. This changed the path of my capstone from a curriculum writing project, to a needs assessment project.

Along with the flexibility to change my plan with the synthesis of literature, I was also able to improve as a researcher by setting deadlines and keeping to a schedule. I learned how to use the bibliographies of strong published works as a means to find other strong sources of information. As a researcher, I also allowed myself to open up and ask others for help. They led me to new resources, fresh ideas, and essential advice to keep me focused.

As a writer, I improved my methods of organization and my writing process. In the past, I have attempted to keep information on note cards and arrange them; however, this was not an effective method for me. By creating a tabbed binder, I was able to keep all of my sources in one place, organize them by topics, and take notes along the way. This was especially important when composing the bibliography. In the past, I have also written works out of order. By keeping myself to a deadline and keeping my question in mind, I was able to write one chapter at a time and use each to write the following chapters. My biggest struggle was creating the descriptors for each performance level for all of the different skills and behaviors. I am a very social person and social skills came naturally to me. I found it difficult to break down complex social skills into performance levels and describe them in a clear and concise manner. I relied on friends, peers, and family to check my readability and ensure the rubrics could be used by anyone who needed them. I look forward to using the finished project to write measureable goals for my students in the future.

During this process, I have also learned more about myself, which has improved my skills as a learner. I knew I was a visual learner, but now I know the best environments for me to learn. I learn and focus best in environments that have little visual distractions and have some noise. This meant my best work was conducted at my school desk after my

students had left. By taking the time to make my environment work best for me, I improved my focus and quality of work. As a learner, I also learned how to ask the right questions. When I was searching for specific information and was not finding what I needed, I changed my approach or how I asked the questions. These improvements led to a strong paper and will improve my future writings.

Connections to Literature Review

The literature review in chapter 2 focused on the history of autism, how instruction is provided in schools, and evidence based practices for teaching social skills. Although all of the research and information I gathered was fascinating and valuable, there was information that was more significant to the completion of my capstone and to my growth as a professional.

The most influential information for the rubrics came from Wong and his group of researchers at the University of North Carolina. Without their information on the evidence based strategies for teaching social skills, I would have never been able to create the needs assessment rubrics. Prior to locating this source of information, I planned to create a social skills curriculum. The list of EBP showed me I already had the tools to teach the skills, but I still lacked the necessary tools to determine student skills and measure their progress. This problem was reiterated when I came across a publication by Simpson. He explained

there will never be one system to teach all students social skills. Due to the spectrum aspect of autism, service providers must use a variety of tools and strategies to teach skills (2008). With this knowledge, I changed my question from focusing on the creation of a social skills curriculum to reach 8 students to creating rubrics to reach students around the world.

Next came the information regarding the history of autism and social skills training. In education, teachers are told year after year to learn about our students, who they are, where they come from, and what influences are present in their lives. We cannot fully understand our students if we do not have knowledge into their past, present, and future. I now know this to be true for disabilities as well. In special education, we often focus on the labels given to students and their immediate goals; however, by understanding where the disability labels came from, how they are defined today, and how they could change in the future is crucial in order to completely understand our students. Prior to conducting the research, I had no idea the in-depth history of the term autism and I have a better understanding of how we have developed the criteria over time. This allowed me to focus my attention while creating the rubrics, while attempting to predict how it could be used in the future.

Once I had determined the path of this capstone and understood the history of autism, I was able to focus on the rubrics. My goal was to

create rubrics that could be used for all students, not just those who I work with. They needed to be user friendly, flexible, and require no training or experience. By creating rubrics that do not require additional education, training, or experience, they can be used by parents, students, teachers, and service providers from all backgrounds and around the world. It was also necessary to ensure students would be able to use the tools to engage in their education and measure their own achievement.

Finally, the information I found regarding student achievement and learning was vital. When working in the diverse fields of autism and developmental disabilities, service providers must find tools to teach their students that are effective and valuable. In the field of education, they must also be affordable. The research conducted by Hattie (2009) allowed me to include and account for influences that are proven to positively impact student achievement. The information on rubrics I found from Wolf and Stevens (2013) and Kappan (2007) allowed me to create a template for the skills that are user friendly and universally understood.

When choosing the skills and developing the rubrics, it was essential to use criterion and skills from the DSM 5. It was also essential to include skills used in the commonly used UCC. This was not an easy process. At this time, the criterion found in the DSM V and the UCC,

used for autism evaluation in Minnesota schools, does not match. The DSM V breaks down criterion into two main categories, social communication and behavior. The UCC follows the old three category system which includes social communication, social interaction, and behavior. In the UCC and Minnesota criterion, it is difficult to sort skills into the correct categories, since social communication and social interaction are very similar. The DSM V is much easier to understand and is clearer in its requirements for diagnosis. Because the tools are not aligned, it is confusing to parents and makes it difficult for evaluators to write reports and communicate the present skill level of students.

For my capstone, I asked Jennifer Koenen, school psychologist, to act as my secondary reader. She plays a vital role in the school evaluations and has struggled to write reports in the past due to the misalignment in diagnostic criteria and the nature of social skill. According to Jen, describing a student's present level in social skills is very challenging. The social skill evaluation tools have little validity, because the skills are open for interpretation. By aligning the rubrics with the DSM V diagnostic criteria, and describing the performance level for each social skill, it takes the guess work out of the evaluation. The tools I have created are user friendly, follow the new criterion, and will allow professionals to write clear, objective observation reports. She looks

forward to using the rubrics in the future to describe student educational needs and describe their present levels in her progress reports.

Implications

With the use of my rubrics, it is possible to improve many aspects of my students' learning and my educational practices. The first is an increase in student engagement and success. The rubrics are written to positively speak to students and allow them to have choices over their education. The rubrics are outcome based, which tell students where they are and what it will look like when they have met their goals. They also allow students to monitor their own progress and take ownership of their learning. This could possibly increase student motivation and achievement of their social skill goals.

The second implication is a more positive relationship between team members and improved communication. When students need to improve their complex social skills, it is often difficult for teams to determine what their present levels are and which skills are most important to improve. The rubrics will allow teams to use common language, compare data in a variety of environments, and create timelines for prioritized goals. Not only can the team have a list of skills to choose from, they also have a detailed description to write measureable goals. This creates a positive experience for all members of the team and opens opportunities for positive communication and

learning opportunities. This builds a strong team and support structure for students.

The third implication is an increase in student learning and generalization of skills. By increasing student engagement and achievement, along with team communication and support, it is possible that students will increase their skills more capably and apply them to multiple settings. Although there are many positive implications of the creation and use of my rubrics, there are also weaknesses and limitations that must be acknowledged.

Limitations

Due to the spectrum trait of autism and developmental disabilities, it is impossible to create assessment tools to meet the needs of all students. In order to minimize this limitation, I created rubrics for a specific subject audience and provided opportunities for individualization. This way, the tools can be adapted and accommodated to be used for students worldwide. When the rubrics and descriptions I have written do not work for a student or a specific need, the team has the ability to follow the outline and personalize the tools for individuals.

The created tools are also specific to a limited range of disabilities. Many students who have dissimilar disabilities, such as emotional behavioral disorders, traumatic brain injury, or other health impairments, also have complex social skill deficits but for different

reasons. In order to meet the needs of students, instruction and assessment must align with the characteristics of the disability and the students who have them. This curriculum is best suited for students with autism and developmental disabilities. As the tools are used in accordance to guidelines, there will be a need for continued research and communication to improve the tools.

Future research and Communication

As the research and knowledge of autism and social skills continues to advance, so must the creation of intervention and assessment tools. As my rubrics are implemented I will need to add, remove, and edit the skills, behaviors, and descriptions. I will rely on new research and feedback from my teams to guide the improvements. I will also need to invest time into researching possible technological applications. If the assessment tools were accessible in an app form for smart phones and tablets, students, service providers, and parents could communicate in real time and continuously collect data. Other data collection tools can be incorporated to track frequency, duration, and effectiveness of the skills. It would also allow more students to access the tools for their own knowledge and achievement.

Along with improving the completed tools, it is also crucial to create similar tools to reach a wider audience. The rubrics I created are best suited for students who are high functioning. It is also necessary to

create tools for students who have fewer communication skills or have different types of disabilities. The positive implications would be the same and the tools would be available for more students. Possible publication and expansion of the tools could open opportunities for students and their teams around the world.

Summary:

Throughout the course of this capstone, I have advanced as a researcher, a writer, and a learner. I was able to synthesize years of research to build my understanding of autism and identify needs for assessing complex social skills. The final rubrics have the possible implications to increase student achievement and generalization of skills. I will be able to document students' needs in the areas of complex social skills and monitor their progress in multiple settings. There will always be a need to update materials as more research is published, but it will continue to benefit my students and possibly others in the future. I will continue to do my best to improve my classroom and therefore the future of my students. This also includes creating more tools to meet the needs of students who have different disabilities and needs. The next step is to research technological applications for the assessment tools and increase accessibility for students and their teams. As the tools continue to develop and improve, I will share my creations with other teachers and improve the lives and opportunities for students around the world. I hope

to share my rubrics with the state department in order to align the Minnesota criterion with the DSM V and improve evaluation tools for service providers and the families they work with.

0APPENDIX A STANDARD BASED COMPLEX SOCIAL SKILLS NEEDS
ASSESSMENT

Complex Social Skill Needs Assessment

Samantha G. Jung

Hamline University Curriculum Capstone

Student's Name (First/Middle/Last): _____
Birthdate (MM/DD/YYYY): _____ Age: _____ Sex: Male or Female
School (Name/City): _____ Grade: _____
Assessor's Name (First/Last): _____
Relationship to Student: () Parent/Guardian () Teacher () Service Provider () Other: _____
Street Address: _____
City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
Phone: () _____

The following rubrics provide a series of complex social skills and descriptions of how they are performed in social scenarios. The purpose of these rubrics is to give service providers and families tools to determine present levels, write measureable goals, and monitor progress over time. For assessment, read each skill and the performance level descriptions. Choose the description that best fits the individual being assessed. If the skill is rarely seen or not developed, check the box labeled not observed. You may use the "description" box to describe specific examples or details of an individual's skills or behaviors. Once the team has discussed the data, these tools can be used to write prioritized, measureable social skill goals.

The Assessment tools are broken down into two skill categories:

- Social Communication:
- Social Behavior/Interests/Activities:

The following performance levels are used to assess and monitor student skills. The goal is for students to meet or exceed:

- Not Observed: Mark this box if the student has never or rarely demonstrated the skill.
- Partially Meets Standard: This performance level describes skills sometimes demonstrated by students or is restricted to one environment.
- Meets Standard: This performance level describes skills often demonstrated by students and in multiple environments.
- Exceeds Standard: This performance level describes skills always demonstrated by students and in all environments.

Complex Social Skill Profile: Communication

Skill or Behavior	Not Observed	Partially Meets Standard	Meets Standard	Exceeds Standard	Description
Listening	N/O	Looks at others when they are speaking	Looks at others, thinks about what is being said	Looks at others, thinks about what is being said and makes relevant comments	
Introducing Self	N/O	Tells others his/her name	Greets others and shares name, asks others for their name	Chooses the right time to introduce self, shares info to start conversation	
Introducing Others	N/O	Shares names of others when given prompts	Names people to others when they do not know each other	Names people to others and shares info to help them to get to know each other	
Joining In	N/O	Walks into activity and starts talking	Decides to join what others are doing and joins when invited	Decides to join what others are doing and asks to join	
Apologizing	N/O	Says "sorry" when given prompts	Says "sorry" on their own	Says "sorry" to others, what they did wrong and how they will fix it	
Saying Thank You	N/O	Says "thank you" when given prompts	Says "thank you" on their own	Says "thank you" in a kind tone and shares why they are thanking them	
Understanding thoughts of others	N/O	States what others are thinking in pictures and fictitious stories	States what others are thinking in real time	Makes choices or changes own behavior based on thoughts of others	
Understanding feelings of others	N/O	States what others are feeling in pictures and fictitious stories	States what others are feeling in real time	Makes choices or changes own behavior based on the feelings of others	
Sharing with others	N/O	Gives others material items with prompts	Shares material items when asked	Asks others if they would like to borrow their materials (interest or need)	
Helping others	N/O	Gives others assistance with prompt	Notices others in need, gives assistance with prompt	Notices others in need and asks if they need assistance	

Skill or Behavior	Not Observed	Partially Meets Standard	Meets Standard	Exceeds Standard	Description
Sharing Personal Information	N/O	Identifies own written information	Able to state and identify name, phone, address and emergency contacts	Able to state and write name, phone, address, DOB and share only when necessary	
Being a Self-Advocacy	N/O	Identifies personal abilities and needs	Identifies personal abilities and asks for needs to be met with prompts	Shares abilities and needs with others and asks for needs to be met in appropriate ways	
Knowing Friends	N/O	Identifies friends by stating names	Identifies friends by names and states what they like and what they do together	States multiple qualities of friends and spends time with them in multiple settings	
Being a good sport	N/O	States "good game" with prompt	Thinks about how the game was played and congratulates others	Provides others and self with true complements when winning or losing	
Deciding something to do	N/O	Makes choices from a list or follows schedule	Chooses enjoyed activities and asks for permission	Chooses enjoyed activities, considers other's interests and asks others to join	
Gathering Information	N/O	Asks questions or for directions with prompt	Determines what information is needed and asks others	Determines information needed, best way to get it and acts on decision	
Arranging problems by Importance	N/O	Sorts problems into categories, based on qualifiers	Determines if problems are small, medium or large and how to solve them	Lists problems from least to most important and deals with most important first	
Maintaining Personal Space	N/O	Moves away from or closer to others with prompt	Maintains correct space in familiar settings	Maintains correct spacing in familiar settings and changes spacing based on nonverbal cues	
Remaining Respectful to Others	N/O	Acknowledges others when they speak	Smiles at others' jokes and recognizes authority	Smiles at others' jokes and keeps neutral tone when upset; follows directions from authority	
Not Taken advantage of or Bullied	N/O	Sorts requests into safe and unsafe categories, based on qualifiers	Determines if requests are safe or unsafe and responds to them accordingly	Says no to questionable requests and keeps personal information to self	

Skill or Behavior	Not Observed	Partially Meets Standard	Meets Standard	Exceeds Standard	Description
Starting a Conversation	N/O	Responds to social greetings	Initiates social greetings	Makes small talk with others and continues conversation when others are listening	
Maintaining a Conversation	N/O	Answers questions and speaks with prompt	Talks and listens to others as they speak, answers questions	Talks to others and asks questions to advance the conversation	
Ending a Conversation	N/O	Stops talking or says "bye"	Uses social closure to end with prompt	Uses social closure to end conversation and thanks others for conversation	
Asking a Question	N/O	Asks questions to familiar people with prompt	Asks questions to familiar people to gather information	Asks questions to familiar and unfamiliar people, for a variety of reasons	
Giving a Compliment	N/O	Compliments others with prompt and/or from a list	Compliments others as practiced or scripted	Compliments others to make them feel good and recognize accomplishments	
Asking for Help	N/O	Tells others they need help with prompt	Tells others they need help on own	Asks others for help on specific tasks, only when they need it	
Giving Instructions	N/O	Tells others what to do for them	Decides what needs to be done and tells others what to do and why	Provides instructions to others, asks for feedback and makes changes as needed	
Convincing Others	N/O	Tells others their ideas and opinions	Shares ideas and opinions and why they are good	Shares ideas, asks others what they think and why their idea is better	
Expressing Feelings	N/O	States feelings with prompt or chooses from a list	States feelings on own	Shares feelings and what made them feel that way	
Expressing Affection	N/O	Smiles at others they like	Physically shows others they like them in appropriate ways (high five, hug, shake)	Verbally and physically expresses feeling in appropriate ways at appropriate times	

Skill or Behavior	Not Observed	Partially Meets Standard	Meets Standard	Exceeds Standard	Description
Asking Permission	N/O	Tells others what they want to do	Tells others what they want to do and asks if it is okay	Asks permission from correct person, at the appropriate time	
Making a Complaint	N/O	Tells others what they don't like	Tells others what they don't like and what they would like done differently	Tells others what they do not like, what they would like done and ask how they feel about it	
Answering a Complaint	N/O	Listens to complaint	Listens to complaint and offers ideas to solve problem	Listens, offers ideas and accepts blame if appropriate	
Dealing with Conflicting Messages	N/O	Listens to messages	Listens and tells others they do not understand	Listens, tells others they do not understand and asks clarifying questions	
Getting Ready for a Difficult Conversation	N/O	Asks others to go with them	Asks others for help to script and practice conversation	Practices conversation and expresses emotions; asks for advice	
Using Facial Expressions and Gestures	N/O	Nods head and points to show others	Smiles to encourage others to talk, answers questions nonverbally	Demonstrates actions and feelings nonverbally	
Responding to Authority	N/O	Complies with requests	Says "okay" in neutral tone and complies with requests	Says "okay", complies with requests and reports back when finished for feedback	
	N/O				
	N/O				
	N/O				

Complex Social Skill Profile: Social Behavior/Activities/Interests

Skill or Behavior	Not Observed	Partially Meets Standard	Meets Standard	Exceeds Standard	Description
Knowing Your feelings	N/O	Defines and describes basic feelings	Describes a variety of feelings and what causes the feelings	Verbally shares feelings and cause in both calm and stressful situations	
Dealing with Someone Else's Anger	N/O	Identifies angry body language, facial expressions and voice	Identifies others' anger and the cause	Identifies others' anger, cause and seeks help or offers assistance	
Dealing with Fear	N/O	Defines fear and at least two causes	Expresses own fears in multiple situations	Determines the cause of fear, if it is realistic and reduces the fear with coping strategies	
Rewarding Yourself	N/O	Chooses reward from a list after completing work	Chooses reward before completing a task and follows through	Sets deadlines for multistep projects and rewards for each step; follows through	
Using Self Control	N/O	Defines and demonstrates two coping strategies when calm	Uses coping strategy to calm self-given prompt	Uses coping strategies to calm self and completes tasks; sets time limits for preferred activities	
Waiting	N/O	Waits up to 10 minutes for activity with prompts	Waits 1 or more days for a preferred activity	Waits 1 or more weeks, or an unspecified amount of time	
Responding to Teasing	N/O	Defines teasing and accurately determines when being teased	Accurately determines when being teased and seeks help	Stands up for self and others when being teased	
Avoiding Trouble with Others	N/O	Categorizes situations into safe or unwise based on parameters	Says no to unwise situations	Says no to unwise situations and suggests other things to do	
Keeping out of Fights	N/O	Expresses negative emotions to others in a safe way	Stops to think about why they want to fight and consequences	Chooses other ways to handle fight situations and follows through	

Skill or Behavior	Not Observed	Partially Meets Standard	Meets Standard	Exceeds Standard	Description
Dealing with Embarrassment	N/O	Defines embarrassment and lists times someone feels embarrassed	States when feeling embarrassed and what caused the feeling	Uses coping strategies to feel less embarrassed	
Dealing with Being Left Out	N/O	Defines "left out" and accurately determines when being left out	Accurately determines when being left out and seeks help	Asks to join others when being left out or decides something else to do	
Responding to Persuasion	N/O	States thoughts or opinions on given topic	Listen to others ideas on topics and compare their beliefs	Knows when being persuaded and tells others which ideas they like better and why	
Responding to Failure	N/O	Accurately determines when they have failed at something	Determines when they have failed and why	Uses knowledge of failure to prevent it from happening in the future or to try new ideas	
Making Mistakes	N/O	Defines mistakes and examples of common mistakes	Determines when they have made a mistake and why	Uses knowledge of the mistake to make corrections in the future, remains positive	
Dealing with an Accusation	N/O	Defines accusation and accurately determines when being accused	Accurately determines when being accused and why	Asks clarifying questions, accepts blame when appropriate, offers solutions	
Dealing with Group Pressure	N/O	Listens and determines what the group wants to do	Shares with a group what they want to do and why	Chooses to follow group or leave based on activity and consequences	
Setting a Goal	N/O	Determines reasonable goals with prompt or list	Determines what goal they want to meet and writes plan to reach it	Set goals for self-independency tracks progress and reaches goals	
Deciding on Your Abilities	N/O	Sorts skills into current, attainable and unrealistic categories	Describes personal strengths, weaknesses and goals to others	Uses information from a variety of sources to create an accurate ability profile	
Interpreting Figurative Language	N/O	Defines common idioms and figures of speech	Uses idioms and figures of speech correctly in sentences	Understands and uses idioms and figures of speech in conversations with others	

Skill or Behavior	Not Observed	Partially Meets Standard	Meets Standard	Exceeds Standard	Description
Following Instructions	N/O	Follows one step instructions with prompt or cues	Follows 2-3 step instructions with prompts or cues	Follows written and verbal multistep instructions and asks clarifying questions	
Starting a Task	N/O	Listens to directions and begins task with prompt	Gathers materials to complete task and works without prompt	Asks clarifying questions when unsure of how to start or complete task	
Concentrating on a Task	N/O	States given task and steps to complete	Chooses best work environment based on needs and preferences	Alters working environment to enhance concentration	
Completing a Task	N/O	States to others when finished	Puts away materials and reports to supervisor	Asks for feedback on completion of task and advice for future projects	
Transitioning from one task to another	N/O	Finishes current task, then moves to next activity	Asks for more time to complete current task and complies with response	Leaves work unfinished and changes task; may return later	
Sharing Other's Interests	N/O	Identifies likes and dislikes of others	Asks others about their interests and learns more about them	Uses knowledge of others interests to engage in conversations and plan time together	
Engaging in Social Media	N/O	Sets up account to social media with parent permission and supervision	Follows the policy of the account and shares activities and interests	Considers future consequences and the thoughts and feelings of others before posting	
	N/O				
	N/O				
	N/O				

Complex Social Skill Profile: Personalized for

Skill or Behavior	Not Observed	Partially Meets Standard	Meets Standard	Exceeds Standard	Description
	N/O				
	N/O				
	N/O				
	N/O				
	N/O				
	N/O				
	N/O				
	N/O				

APPENDIX B SKILL BASED COMPLEX SOCIAL SKILL NEEDS
ASSESSMENT

Complex Social Skill Needs Assessment

Samantha G. Jung

Hamline University Curriculum Capstone

Student's Name (First/Middle/Last): _____
Birthdate (MM/DD/YYYY): _____ Age: _____ Sex: Male or Female
School (Name/City): _____ Grade: _____
Assessor's Name (First/Last): _____
Relationship to Student: () Parent/Guardian () Teacher () Service Provider () Other: _____
Street Address: _____
City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
Phone: () _____

The following rubrics provide a series of complex social skills and descriptions of how they are performed in social scenarios. The purpose of these rubrics is to give service providers and families tools to determine present levels, write measureable goals, and monitor progress over time. For assessment, read each skill and the performance level descriptions. Choose the description that best fits the individual being assessed. If the skill is rarely seen or not developed, check the box labeled not observed. You may use the "description" box to describe specific examples or details of an individual's skills or behaviors. Once the team has discussed the data, these tools can be used to write prioritized, measureable social skill goals.

The Assessment tools are broken down into two skill categories:

- Social Communication
- Social Behavior/Interests/Activities

The following performance levels are used to assess and monitor student skills. The goal is for students to meet or exceed:

- Not Observed: Mark this box if the student has never or rarely demonstrated the skill
- Emerging: This performance level describes skills sometimes demonstrated by students or is restricted to one environment.
- Developing: This performance level describes skills often demonstrated by students and in multiple environments.
- Advancing: This performance level describes skills always demonstrated by students and in all environments.

Complex Social Skill Profile: Communication

Skill or Behavior	Not Observed	Emerging	Developing	Advancing	Description
Listening	N/O	Looks at others when they are speaking	Looks at others, thinks about what is being said	Looks at others, thinks about what is being said and makes relevant comments	
Introducing Self	N/O	Tells others his/her name	Greets others and shares name, asks others for their name	Chooses the right time to introduce self, shares info to start conversation	
Introducing Others	N/O	Shares names of others when given prompts	Names people to others when they do not know each other	Names people to others and shares info to help them to get to know each other	
Joining In	N/O	Walks into activity and starts talking	Decides to join what others are doing and joins when invited	Decides to join what others are doing and asks to join	
Apologizing	N/O	Says "sorry" when given prompts	Says "sorry" on their own	Says "sorry" to others, what they did wrong and how they will fix it	
Saying Thank You	N/O	Says "thank you" when given prompts	Says "thank you" on their own	Says "thank you" in a kind tone and shares why they are thanking them	
Understanding thoughts of others	N/O	States what others are thinking in pictures and fictitious stories	States what others are thinking in real time	Makes choices or changes own behavior based on thoughts of others	
Understanding feelings of others	N/O	States what others are feeling in pictures and fictitious stories	States what others are feeling in real time	Makes choices or changes own behavior based on the feelings of others	
Sharing with others	N/O	Gives others material items with prompts	Shares material items when asked	Asks others if they would like to borrow their materials (interest or need)	
Helping others	N/O	Gives others assistance with prompt	Notices others in need, gives assistance with prompt	Notices others in need and asks if they need assistance	

Skill or Behavior	Not Observed	Emerging	Developing	Advancing	Description
Sharing Personal Information	N/O	Identifies own written information	Able to state and identify name, phone, address and emergency contacts	Able to state and write name, phone, address, DOB and share only when necessary	
Being a Self-Advocate	N/O	Identifies personal abilities and needs	Identifies personal abilities and asks for needs to be met with prompts	Shares abilities and needs with others and asks for needs to be met in appropriate ways	
Knowing Friends	N/O	Identifies friends by stating names	Identifies friends by names and states what they like and what they do together	States multiple qualities of friends and spends time with them in multiple settings	
Being a good sport	N/O	States "good game" with prompt	Thinks about how the game was played and congratulates others	Provides others and self with true complements when winning or losing	
Deciding something to do	N/O	Makes choices from a list or follows schedule	Chooses enjoyed activities and asks for permission	Chooses enjoyed activities, considers other's interests and asks others to join	
Gathering Information	N/O	Asks questions or for directions with prompt	Determines what information is needed and asks others	Determines information needed, best way to get it and acts on decision	
Arranging problems by Importance	N/O	Sorts problems into categories, based on qualifiers	Determines if problems are small, medium or large and how to solve them	Lists problems from least to most important and deals with most important first	
Maintaining Personal Space	N/O	Moves away from or closer to others with prompt	Maintains correct space in familiar settings	Maintains correct spacing in familiar settings and changes spacing based on nonverbal cues	
Remaining Respectful to Others	N/O	Acknowledges others when they speak	Smiles at others' jokes and recognizes authority	Smiles at others' jokes and keeps neutral tone when upset; follows directions from authority	
Standing up for Self	N/O	Sorts requests into safe and unsafe categories, based on qualifiers	Determines if requests are safe or unsafe and responds to them accordingly	Says no to questionable requests and keeps personal information to self	

Skill or Behavior	Not Observed	Emerging	Developing	Advancing	Description
Starting a Conversation	N/O	Responds to social greetings	Initiates social greetings	Makes small talk with others and continues conversation when others are listening	
Maintaining a Conversation	N/O	Answers questions and speaks with prompt	Talks and listens to others as they speak, answers questions	Talks to others and asks questions to advance the conversation	
Ending a Conversation	N/O	Stops talking or says "bye"	Uses social closure to end with prompt	Uses social closure to end conversation and thanks others for conversation	
Asking a Question	N/O	Asks questions to familiar people with prompt	Asks questions to familiar people to gather information	Asks questions to familiar and unfamiliar people, for a variety of reasons	
Giving a Compliment	N/O	Compliments others with prompt and/or from a list	Compliments others as practiced or scripted	Compliments others to make them feel good and recognize accomplishments	
Asking for Help	N/O	Tells others they need help with prompt	Tells others they need help on own	Asks others for help on specific tasks, only when they need it	
Giving Instructions	N/O	Tells others what to do for them	Decides what needs to be done and tells others what to do and why	Provides instructions to others, asks for feedback and makes changes as needed	
Convincing Others	N/O	Tells others their ideas and opinions	Shares ideas and opinions and why they are good	Shares ideas, asks others what they think and why their idea is better	
Expressing Feelings	N/O	States feelings with prompt or chooses from a list	States feelings on own	Shares feelings and what made them feel that way	
Expressing Affection	N/O	Smiles at others they like	Physically shows others they like them in appropriate ways (high five, hug, shake)	Verbally and physically expresses feeling in appropriate ways at appropriate times	

Skill or Behavior	Not Observed	Emerging	Developing	Advancing	Description
Asking Permission	N/O	Tells others what they want to do	Tells others what they want to do and asks if it is okay	Asks permission from correct person, at the appropriate time	
Making a Complaint	N/O	Tells others what they don't like	Tells others what they don't like and what they would like done differently	Tells others what they do not like, what they would like done and ask how they feel about it	
Answering a Complaint	N/O	Listens to complaint	Listens to complaint and offers ideas to solve problem	Listens, offers ideas and accepts blame if appropriate	
Dealing with Conflicting Messages	N/O	Listens to messages	Listens and tells others they do not understand	Listens, tells others they do not understand and asks clarifying questions	
Getting Ready for a Difficult Conversation	N/O	Asks others to go with them	Asks others for help to script and practice conversation	Practices conversation and expresses emotions; asks for advice	
Using Facial Expressions and Gestures	N/O	Nods head and points to show others	Smiles to encourage others to talk, answers questions nonverbally	Demonstrates actions and feelings nonverbally	
Responding to Authority	N/O	Complies with requests	Says "okay" in neutral tone and complies with requests	Says "okay", complies with requests and reports back when finished for feedback	
	N/O				
	N/O				
	N/O				

Complex Social Skill Profile: Social Behavior/Activities/Interests

Skill or Behavior	Not Observed	Emerging	Developing	Advancing	Description
Knowing Your feelings	N/O	Defines and describes basic feelings	Describes a variety of feelings and what causes the feelings	Verbally shares feelings and cause in both calm and stressful situations	
Dealing with Someone Else's Anger	N/O	Identifies angry body language, facial expressions and voice	Identifies others' anger and the cause	Identifies others' anger, cause and seeks help or offers assistance	
Dealing with Fear	N/O	Defines fear and at least two causes	Expresses own fears in multiple situations	Determines the cause of fear, if it is realistic and reduces the fear with coping strategies	
Rewarding Yourself	N/O	Chooses reward from a list after completing work	Chooses reward before completing a task and follows through	Sets deadlines for multistep projects and rewards for each step; follows through	
Using Self Control	N/O	Defines and demonstrates two coping strategies when calm	Uses coping strategy to calm self-given prompt	Uses coping strategies to calm self and completes tasks; sets time limits for preferred activities	
Waiting	N/O	Waits up to 10 minutes for activity with prompts	Waits 1 or more days for a preferred activity	Waits 1 or more weeks, or an unspecified amount of time	
Responding to Teasing	N/O	Defines teasing and accurately determines when being teased	Accurately determines when being teased and seeks help	Stands up for self and others when being teased	
Avoiding Trouble with Others	N/O	Categorizes situations into safe or unwise based on parameters	Says no to unwise situations	Says no to unwise situations and suggests other things to do	
Keeping out of Fights	N/O	Expresses negative emotions to others in a safe way	Stops to think about why they want to fight and consequences	Chooses other ways to handle fight situations and follows through	

Skill or Behavior	Not Observed	Partially Meets Standard	Meets Standard	Exceeds Standard	Description
Dealing with Embarrassment	N/O	Defines embarrassment and lists times someone feels embarrassed	States when feeling embarrassed and what caused the feeling	Uses coping strategies to feel less embarrassed	
Dealing with Being Left Out	N/O	Defines "left out" and accurately determines when being left out	Accurately determines when being left out and seeks help	Asks to join others when being left out or decides something else to do	
Responding to Persuasion	N/O	States thoughts or opinions on given topic	Listen to others ideas on topics and compare their beliefs	Knows when being persuaded and tells others which ideas they like better and why	
Responding to Failure	N/O	Accurately determines when they have failed at something	Determines when they have failed and why	Uses knowledge of failure to prevent it from happening in the future or to try new ideas	
Making Mistakes	N/O	Defines mistakes and examples of common mistakes	Determines when they have made a mistake and why	Uses knowledge of the mistake to make corrections in the future, remains positive	
Dealing with an Accusation	N/O	Defines accusation and accurately determines when being accused	Accurately determines when being accused and why	Asks clarifying questions, accepts blame when appropriate, offers solutions	
Dealing with Group Pressure	N/O	Listens and determines what the group wants to do	Shares with a group what they want to do and why	Chooses to follow group or leave based on activity and consequences	
Setting a Goal	N/O	Determines reasonable goals with prompt or list	Determines what goal they want to meet and writes plan to reach it	Set goals for self-independency tracks progress and reaches goals	
Deciding Your Abilities	N/O	Sorts skills into current, attainable and unrealistic categories	Describes personal strengths, weaknesses and goals to others	Uses information from a variety of sources to create an accurate ability profile	
Interpreting Figurative Language	N/O	Defines common idioms and figures of speech	Uses idioms and figures of speech correctly in sentences	Understands and uses idioms and figures of speech in conversations with others	
Following Instructions	N/O	Follows one step instructions with prompt or cues	Follows 2-3 step instructions with prompts or cues	Follows written and verbal multistep instructions and asks clarifying questions	

Skill or Behavior	Not Observed	Emerging	Developing	Advancing	Description
Starting a Task	N/O	Listens to directions and begins task with prompt	Gathers materials to complete task and works without prompt	Asks clarifying questions when unsure of how to start or complete task	
Concentrating on a Task	N/O	States given task and steps to complete	Chooses best work environment based on needs and preferences	Alters working environment to enhance concentration	
Completing a Task	N/O	States to others when finished	Puts away materials and reports to supervisor	Asks for feedback on completion of task and advice for future projects	
Transitioning from one task to another	N/O	Finishes current task, then moves to next activity	Asks for more time to complete current task and complies with response	Leaves work unfinished and changes task; may return later	
Sharing Other's Interests	N/O	Identifies likes and dislikes of others	Asks others about their interests and learns more about them	Uses knowledge of others interests to engage in conversations and plan time together	
Engaging in Social Media	N/O	Sets up account to social media with parent permission and supervision	Follows the policy of the account and shares activities and interests	Considers future consequences and the thoughts and feelings of others before posting	
	N/O				
	N/O				
	N/O				
	N/O				

Complex Social Skill Profile: Personalized for

Skill or Behavior	Not Observed	Emerging	Developing	Advancing	Description
	N/O				
	N/O				
	N/O				
	N/O				
	N/O				
	N/O				
	N/O				
	N/O				
	N/O				

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