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Developing Students' Social Skills Through Scripting

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What is scripting?

Scripting is the practice of using focused scripts of typical situations and encounters to help teach students appropriate social skills and behaviors. Using scripts to role-play provides an organized plan for teaching particular social skills that include:

- Thinking about one's behavior before, during, and after speaking.
- Using appropriate eye contact, voice, tone, expression, and posture.
- Respecting someone's personal space.
- Learning to participate appropriately in groups.
- Being assertive without being pushy.
- Dealing with peer pressure.
- Taking charge of one's feelings.
- Giving and responding to criticism.
- Disagreeing with others.
- Settling conflicts.
- Compromising and negotiating.
- Dealing with failure or being left out.

Applicable to all students, but particularly autistic students or those with attention deficit disorder, social scripts help teach students how to interact with peers and adults, manage their anxiety, and address behaviors like aggression, fear, and obsessions. Using social scripts is like practicing for a play, but the play is real life. Students may feel awkward at first because their words are scripted, but with practice students become more spontaneous and comfortable. The goal of scripting is to help students transfer the social skills learned using the scripts to other situations.



Who needs scripting?

Students that don't seem to fit in with others in the class are easily identifiable by peers and teachers and may be isolated from their peers because of what they do or do not do. This isolation may continue throughout their lifetime, creating much unhappiness and may lead to maladjustment in school, delinquency, and problems adjusting as adults. Socially different describes students who are unable to maintain social acceptance. They may not use appropriate eye contact, not know how to open or close a conversation, or have trouble with self-control.

Students with social skill deficits usually have

1. a lack of knowledge
2. a lack of practice or feedback
3. a lack of cues or opportunities
4. a lack of reinforcement
5. the presence of interfering behaviors.



Four components in training a student with scripting include:

- modeling
- role-playing
- performance feedback
- transfer of training.





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What can a typical lesson of scripting provide for the student?

Daily observations of students' social abilities can help determine the skills that need practice as well as reports from others who interact with these students. Basic social abilities, such as greeting someone or starting a conversation, are a good place to begin. Eye contact, listening, starting and ending a conversation, and respecting personal space should be part of every scripting lesson. Skills should be applicable to the students' daily experiences, needs, and interests in order to help maintain their motivation.

Scripts need to match life experiences at home, at school, in their community, and possibly in their workplace. Students should share their experiences to help make the scripts more interesting and relevant. Personal experiences can also help identify cultural and regional differences for each social skill. Blending humor into the scripts or using silly names for the characters helps maintain motivation. Once students are comfortable with practicing the scripts, short field trips can provide opportunities to practice and enhance their skills.

The inclusion of skilled peers is often helpful to the social skills class or target group. Because socially challenged students tend to associate with other socially challenged students, the addition of skilled peers helps the students with social differences acquaint themselves with others outside their usual circle of friends. Skilled peers can model social situations appropriately for the target students.



There are no classes that focus on social skills at my school. What then?

If a "social skills class" is not available at your school, social skills training still can, and should be, integrated into the students' day. Besides social skills, teachers can also use scripting to enhance reading, English, and language arts classes. Real-life situations provide students with opportunities to respond orally or through written expression. Students can improve reading by practicing fluency and expression.

Any creative educator can integrate scripting into a variety of classroom experiences. Providing opportunities to learn appropriate behaviors will encourage a sense of self-satisfaction, accomplishment, and social-skill competence for students or individuals with social differences.

Resources:

Miller, Lynda. 2007. Scripting Junior: social skill role-plays. Super Duper Publications. Pp. 1-7

Mayo, Patty and Waldo, Pattii. 2008. Scripting: social communication role-plays for adolescents. Super Duper Publications. Pp. 1-8

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