

Research: Socially Wise

Overview

The Socially Wise Strategy CD is a computerized program for teaching students eight complex social skills. This study was conducted on three social skills in the program: Apologizing, Including Others, and Responding to Peer Pressure. It was conducted with 39 youths who were participating in the Boys and Girls Club after-school program; 46% of them represented minority populations. They were randomly assigned according to gender and age (11-13 yrs. and 14-16 yrs.) to an experimental and a control group. A pretest-posttest control-group design was employed.

Students in the experimental group worked through the interactive computerized program independently. Students in the control group took part in regularly scheduled Boys and Girls Club activities. They took quizzes at various points during the program. They had to reach the mastery criterion in order to be allowed to progress to the next lesson or next portion of a lesson. Their final performance of the social skills was checked in a role-play situation with a researcher.

Before and after the experimental group worked through the CD program, all participating youths took written knowledge tests and a role-play test covering the three targeted social skills. The written tests required students to name the steps of each skill and to write information related to the skill. The role-play test involved a researcher reading several social situations to the student, one at a time. For each, the student was asked to interact with the researcher as he/she might in a real social situation just like the one described.

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Results

With regard to the knowledge tests, on the pretests, the experimental youths earned a mean of 17% of the points available. The control youths earned a mean of 17% of the points available. On the posttests, the experimental youths earned a mean of 88% of the points, and the control youths earned a mean of 22% of the points. The results of an ANCOVA on the **Apologizing Skill** test indicated that there was a significant difference between the posttest scores of the two groups [$F(2, 35) = 126.076, p < .000, \eta^2 = .783$], in favor of the experimental group. The results of an ANCOVA on the **Involving Others** test indicated that there was a significant difference between the posttest scores of the two groups [$F(2, 35) = 251.881, p < .000, \eta^2 = .878$], in favor of the experimental group. The results of an ANCOVA on the **Responding to Peer Pressure** indicated that there was a significant difference between the posttest scores of the two groups [$F(2, 35) = 85.841, p < .000, \eta^2 = .710$], in favor of the experimental group. These effect sizes represented very large effects between the groups. Results of a t-test showed a significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores for the experimental group. ANCOVAs conducted on the posttest scores of the subgroups (gender, minority status, and SES group) also indicated significant differences between the experimental and control youths in each subgroup case, again with very large effect sizes.

On the tests of student use of the social skills where youths performed the skills in role-play situations, the experimental youths earned an average of 38% of the points available on the pretest and 95% of the points on the posttest for the **Apologizing Skill**. The control students earned an average of 28% and 37% of the points on the pretest and posttest, respectively. An ANCOVA revealed a significant difference between the groups' posttest scores [$F(2, 35) = 108.158, p < .000, \eta^2 = .756$], in favor of the experimental group. For the **Including Others Skill**, the experimental youths earned an average of 42% of the points available on the pretest and 98% of the points on the posttest. The control students earned an average of 39% and 35% of the points on the pretest and posttest, respectively. An ANCOVA revealed a significant difference between the groups' posttest scores [$F(2, 32) = 88.864, p < .000, \eta^2 = .735$], in favor of the experimental group. For the **Responding to Peer Pressure Skill**, the experimental youths earned an average of 38% of the points available on the pretest and 93% of the points on the posttest. The control students earned an average of 40% and 29% of the points on the pretest and posttest, respectively. An ANCOVA revealed a significant difference between the groups' posttest scores [$F(2, 34) = 68.724, p < .000, \eta^2 = .669$], in favor of the experimental group. All of these effect sizes are very large. Results of a t-test revealed a significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores for the experimental group. ANCOVAs conducted on the posttest scores of the subgroups (gender, minority status, and SES group) also indicated significant differences between the experimental and control youths in each subgroup case, again with very large effect sizes.

Conclusions

The Socially Wise Strategy CD program when combined with some practice and feedback from an adult is an effective means of teaching the three targeted social skills to students. All students reached mastery on all the lessons in the program. Experimental youths' knowledge and use of the social skills increased significantly from pretest to posttest, and their posttest scores exceeded the scores of a same-age comparison group. Experimental youths' posttest scores were significantly different from the posttest scores of the control youths after the pretest scores were used as a covariate for the whole group and for subgroups of the youths indicating that the program was equally effective for girls and boys, those representing minorities and those not, and those living in poverty and those not.

References

Vernon, S. (2008). *Effects of a hypermedia program on the use of three social skills by at-risk youths*. Phase II Continuation report for SBIR Grant #2 R44