Improving Communication Skills Improves Achievement

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**Description and Rationale**

After completion of a class presentation I will create a small after school group to help students who are struggling with their communication skills. These students will all be third graders. Through classroom observation and the results of a pre/post survey from a psycho-educational presentation given to the class, I have selected ten students who need extra help with their communication skills. The perception data to get the program started will be collected mainly through classroom observation via the teacher and observation in the school in general via the school counselor. These skills include interpersonal communication, intrapersonal communication, nonverbal communication, and active listening. This program will last for eight weeks. The eight weeks will begin on October 1st and will continue every Monday until the 8th session which will be November 19th, the Monday before Thanksgiving Break. Each session will be forty-five minutes long. I will run the program myself alongside one of the available third grade teachers.

**Goals To Be Addressed**

One of the most important areas that students do not realize they use everyday in their academic career is communication skills. Therefore, my goal is to improve students’ academic achievement by helping improve the communication skills of students who are struggling in this aspect within a classroom. If the program is a success, students’ grades in the classroom and standardized testing will improve. Also, students will be more successful on group projects and will communicate with their teachers more effectively. There are two main goals for this small group: 80% of the students must improve in this area relating to achievement and they have to have a 90% attendance rate.

**Domains, Standards, and Competencies**

The title of this curriculum is Improving How We Communicate. The curriculum will complete the following standards Academic Development and Personal/Social Development standards from the American School Counselor Association [ASCA] National Standards for Students (2012): *A:A1.5* identify attitudes and behaviors that lead to successful learning, *A:A2.3* use communication skills to know when and how to ask for help when needed, *A:A3.2* demonstrate the ability to work independently, as well as the ability to work cooperatively with other students, *PS:A2.6* use effective communication skills, *PS:A2.7* know that communication involves speaking, listening, and nonverbal behavior (ASCA, 2012).

**Action Plan**

The four types of communication will be broken down into two sessions. The school counselor will run each session, but will be assisted by a third-grade teacher for all of the sessions. For instance, the first week the students will be given a pre-test over verbal communication. Then the students will be given information on verbal communication and how to improve their use of it. Then, the second session will involve the students role-playing what they learned the previous week and completing a post-test. Students will be assessed at the end of the eight weeks by a rubric determined by the school counselor and followed by all the fellow teachers. An example of the rubric will be attached. The long-term goal of this project is that better communication skills will lead to higher achievement in the classroom, often seen by improvement in grades or standardized testing.

Interpersonal Communication is the basic communication between two people in any given setting. These types of communication are essential within a school setting. Students need to learn how to properly use interpersonal communications not only to interact in a positive way with their fellow students, but also with their teachers. In interpersonal communication it is important to understand the other’s situation, the other’s manners, and becoming a positive influence in whatever situation one is communicating about. Learning these skills can help students work better in groups or with understanding their teachers. All of the sessions are going to follow a 1-2 format where the first session involves a pre-test and an informative lecture. The pre-test will be five simple yes or no questions for the students to answer. The second session involves a type of role-play and a post-test. For this particular skill set, students will role-play in small groups of 3-4 students where they work together on a common goal by using communication skills to come to agreements. This is very realistic to something they might have to do in class and should be an effective way of showing interpersonal communication skills. An example of this type of lesson plan is attached on Appendix A.

Intrapersonal Communication is harder to define than other types. Intrapersonal is how one communicates with themselves through daydreaming, inner-monologues, journals, written observations or thoughts, and dreams while sleeping. A lot of these types of intrapersonal communication can tell a person a lot about themselves and their own personality. In my opinion, it is essential for children to learn about intrapersonal communication to understand themselves and to help with their other types of communication skills in general. For a lot of students this could be as simple as actually thinking out what they want to say and what they will be meaning with their words before actually vocalizing them. Like the rest of the types of communication, this will be divided into two lessons. The first will include a five-question pre-test and an informative lecture. The second session will include the role-playing and the post-test. For this type of role-playing, students will be asking to write out their thoughts and observations instead of actually role-playing with another student. This will be used to show students how they can then use their thoughts effectively.

Nonverbal Communication is defined as a general term covering any and all aspects of communication that are expressed without the use of overt, spoken language (Reber, Allen, & Reber, 2009). This could include body language, posture, facial expression, hand gestures, eye contact, vocal quality or pitch, and many others. Each session will start off with a short definition and examples of the type of communication. For the first of the two sessions the students will be given ten minutes to take a pre-test. The pretest will list multiple types of communication that the students will have to select which ones are nonverbal. Examples of these will include eye contact, hand gestures, spoken words, papers, instructions from teachers, and different items like this. From this pre-test, I will give an informational lesson to the students that will most of the session. The informational lessons may include work sheets or may include role-playing between the counselor and the teacher. I will, of course, end the session with a summary of everything they learned and by informing them that the next week will include role-playing and a post-test.

Active Listening is when a student pays close attention to what the speaker is saying by using multiple techniques like open-ended questions, correct body language, repetition, and by being quiet. It is also important to not judge the person speaking, verbally or non-verbally. For these two sessions, I will once again start out with a five question pre-test and an informative lecture. The next session will be a different kind of role-play for the students. The students will practice role-play in two different ways: a one-on-one situation with another student and by actively listening to a student who is pretending to be a teacher. I will then go around and tell them things they need to work on. After that, the students will complete the post-test.

After the last session, I will give the students feedback based on a rubric that I create. The rubric will look at their attendance, their improvement from their pre-tests, and their skills during the role-play. This will give them their final “grade” so they know how they are doing. I will also give them a sheet to take home so they can actively work on what they are struggling with. If the program is successful, I will continue to do it on a yearly basis. I will check with the teachers once a week about the students that were in the program to see if the teacher has seen improvements. After a month I will stop doing check-ins and let the teacher come to me if she feels the students need extra help.

**Process, Perception, and Outcome Data**

For clarification purposes, the process data in this plan-to-monitor is that ten students will meet eight times for forty-five minutes over an eight week period. They will be meeting for a study skills group to improve their communication skills. The perception data will be determined by a rubric. The rubric will include their attendance, their role-playing after each informational session, and the improvement between pre- and post-tests. Also, information from the teacher about classroom behaviors will be used. This, along with my anecdotal notes from the role-play session, will be used to determine perception data. The outcome data will be determined through the students’ grades and also their overall achievement in school, like standardized testing and classroom improvement observed by the teacher. The program will be deemed a success if 80% of the students improve in this area relating to achievement and if they had a 90% attendance rate. Improvement from the pre-test to the post-test will also be considered when deeming the program a success for each individual student. To show this information in a clear way, I have attached a small-group action plan to this writing, which can be found in Appendix B.

References

American School Counselor Association (2012). The ASCA National Model: A Framework for School Counseling Programs, Third Edition. Alexandria, VA: Author.

Reber, A.S., Allen, R., & Reber, E.S. (2009). Nonverbal communication. In *Penguin Dictionary of Psychology* (Vol. 4, Pgs. 514). New York: Penguin Books.