

EPSS in the Classroom: Self-Management Tools for Kids

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Introduction

In a recently developed series of training materials designed to help school personnel work with youngsters with behavioral problems, *Teacher Problem-Solving Skills in Behavioral Disorders*, interactive multimedia case studies were combined with electronic performance support system (EPSS) tools for teachers. Funded in part by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education (Semrau & Fitzgerald, 1993-1997), the goal of the project was to develop interactive training programs to enhance problem-solving skills of teachers to better serve children with social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties. Through authentic, case-based problems, users learn to plan therapeutic instruction, design behavioral interventions, and create cognitive-behavioral intervention materials to teach children self-management procedures (Fitzgerald, Standifer, & Semrau, 1998).

To supplement the training materials for educators, initiatives are underway which attempt to extend the real-world use of the training materials by developing a companion series of EPSS software programs for children to use in classroom settings (Fitzgerald & Semrau 1998). The software programs for kids are compatible with the cognitive-behavioral strategies in the instructional materials for teachers. The self-management materials provide a set of electronic tools that children and youth can use to create their own behavior plans for self-management. By helping children take responsibility for their own behavior, internal controls for behavior are established and the need for external control of behavior are reduced.

Computer-based training and support mechanisms are an innovative approach for helping students gain control over personal behaviors. Although there are limited data on the use of computer-based instruction to support behavior change in students to date, research results are promising. Fitzgerald and Werner (1996) reported success with a computerized verbal mediation essay as a cognitive retraining procedure to assist a student with significant behavioral disorders in changing his behavior; the computerized essay provided consistent practice and focused the child's attention and thoughts on behavioral choices and consequences. In another case study, the same researchers reported a procedure in which software templates were developed for a student to create self-monitoring materials. This study was the pre-cursor to this work to develop and investigate the use of EPSS tools with children.

Instructional Design of Program

The EPSS programs are designed as easy-to-use templates that can be individualized by children and/or their teachers. To use the templates, the child simply clicks on "hot words" on the template form to enter personalized content and then print it for use in the classroom. The program automatically enters the child's name, the date, and establishes a datapath for recordkeeping purposes. When complete, the templates will be appropriate for youngsters at two levels: elementary and middle school/junior high. The programs are created with *Authorware 4* and operate on both Macintosh and Windows platforms.

KidTools incorporate several literacy-related design features to make them suitable for children's use. The teacher tools were modified, making the templates child friendly and incorporating the use of natural language of children. Graphic characters were added to serve as "guides" to the different tools. Audio support now supplements simplified text instructions.

The following graphic displays an example of a KidTool. This is a *point card* for monitoring success on three behaviors. The child selects pictures from a graphics library to represent the behaviors. Each behavior is given a simple descriptive name. The monitoring grid is printed on the card to allow the child to monitor success on the behaviors four times during the school day.

1 Raise my hand.		2 Share my things.		3 No bus problems.	
1	2	1	2	1	2
3	4	3	4	3	4

Name: Sally Student Date: 3/11/99

Formative Evaluation

Teachers from three elementary schools in rural and urban areas in Missouri participated in designing and evaluating KidTools. A small cadre of teachers in each building shared the materials with interested teachers and contributed suggestions for template adaptations as well as additional forms needed in their schools. Project staff observed children's use of the software using think-aloud techniques. User datapath records were examined to determine common template usage and to gain samples of natural language from children. At the close of the school year, interviews were conducted with teachers who implemented the materials. Based on formative evaluation data, KidTools will be revised during the summer months for full implementation in the schools during the 1999-2000 school year. Recommendations will be forthcoming regarding effective implementation of EPSS tools with elementary-age youngsters.

References

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