At recess, I walked over to Chuckie and patted her on the head. My mother had shown me how to pet my poodle on the head to make friends with him. And my mother petted me sometimes, too, especially when I couldn’t sleep. So as far as I could tell, petting worked. All the dogs my mother told me to pet had wagged their tails. They liked it. I figured Chuckie would like it too. (Robison, 2008, p. 9)

In his book *Look Me in the Eye: My Life With Asperger’s*, John Elder Robison (2008) recounted the sometimes awkward social interactions of his childhood. Characteristic of someone with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), as a child Robison found it difficult to interact with his peers because he did not pick up on the social cues around him. For children with ASD, impairments in social skills can impact interactions with peers, family members, and the world (American Psychiatric Association, 2004). Impairments in social skills vary from person to person, and may include lack of eye contact, limited affect, or nonexistent verbal communication (Volkmar & Tidmarsh, 2003).

Researchers have investigated different ways to help students master the “hidden curriculum”—the social rules that exist and vary in every setting (Rutherford, Mathur, & Quinn, 1998; Smith Myles & Simpson, 2001).

One strategy for teaching social skills to children with ASD is to use a combination of video modeling and peer mentoring (Bellini & Akullian, 2007; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005). Videos can be played repeatedly, which is beneficial to students with ASD who learn through repetition. In addition, video models provide real-life examples of the desired skills, taking the mystery out of some facets of social interaction and creating a concrete visual for students to practice skills, provide feedback on the skills, and provide increased chances for social engagement (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005)—can foster a greater impact in providing social skills instruction.

**What Is Video Modeling?**

*Video modeling* is a promising practice, endorsed by the Council for Exceptional Children (Bellini & Akullian, 2007), which involves demonstrating desired behaviors and role-playing through video images. The student with ASD watches a video that demonstrates the desired behavior and then is asked to imitate the behavior. The video focuses on an event or problem situation, for example, a social interaction (Williams Glaser, Rieth, Kinzer,

**Videos can be played repeatedly, which is beneficial to students with ASD who learn through repetition.**

students with ASD (Bellini & Akullian, 2007; Sheerer et al., 2001). Combining video modeling with peer mentoring—using peers of students with disabilities

Colburn, & Peter, 1999). Video modeling strategies include video prompting, in-vivo modeling, video modeling, and video self-modeling (see Table 1).
In recent years, the benefits of video modeling for children with ASD have been increasingly documented. Video modeling responds to the unique characteristics of students with ASD—including their being visual learners; having restrictive, repetitive interests (e.g., watching the same video or TV show over and over); and having relatively strong imitation skills—and has been proven to be a valuable tool for teachers, practitioners, and family members. Video modeling can help students acquire new skills (Corbett & Abdullah, 2005), increase generalization of skills across settings (Bellini, Akullian, & Hopf, 2007), promote self-awareness (Charlop-Christy & Daneshvar, 2003), and enhance existing skills (Wert & Neisworth, 2003).

Video modeling also supports the learning of students with ASD by reducing stimulus overselectivity (Charlop-Christy & Daneshvar, 2003). *Stimulus overselectivity* refers to taking in too much visual information without the ability to effectively filter out unnecessary information. Minimizing the focus area (the TV or computer screen that the child is watching) increases the student’s ability to attend to the information. The student’s attention is drawn to the screen rather than focusing on other activities or objects in the environment.

Children with ASD can become preoccupied with reciting the same lines from a favorite TV show over and over (Bellini & Akullian, 2007), which makes video modeling a natural addition to teaching social skills. Videos are often a favored activity for students with ASD, so it is more likely they will attend to the models with greater focus. Video modeling also capitalizes on the power of observational learning (Delano, 2007) and incorporates the student with ASD’s ability to imitate behaviors (Ayres & Langone, 2005; Charlop-Christy & Daneshvar, 2003).

Temple Grandin (1995), an adult author with ASD, noted the differences between being told what a behavior is
Table 1. Types of Video Modeling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Application</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Video prompting</td>
<td>Showing a video clip of one step of a task and then allowing the student to complete that step before the next step of the task is shown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-vivo modeling</td>
<td>Traditional role-playing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video modeling</td>
<td>Creating a video of someone performing a target behavior and then showing the video to a student and prompting him/her to engage in the behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video self-modeling</td>
<td>The video features the target student performing the desired correct behavior</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

and actually seeing the behavior. If her mother told her to be nice, Grandin was not sure what that looked like. If her mother told her that being nice was giving someone flowers or giving someone a compliment, she could imitate those behaviors.

**What Is Peer Mentoring?**

Peer mentoring is defined by Carter, Cushing, Clark, and Kennedy (2005) as an intervention that "involves one or more peers without disabilities providing academic and social support to a student with disabilities" (p. 16). Peer mentoring activities might include working with a peer during classes on an assignment, participating in a social skills group, role-playing social situations, and video modeling.

Jones and Schwartz (2004) reported that preschoolers with ASD demonstrated increased skills following a peer mentoring intervention; the students also maintained the learned skills 2 weeks after the intervention. Lee, Odom, and Loftin (2007) similarly reported increased social engagement of students with ASD following a peer mentoring intervention; the effects of the peer mentoring support also generalized to a free-play condition where the students with ASD continued to demonstrate increased peer interactions.

**How Can Teachers Create Effective Videos Using Peer Models?**

Creating video models is a relatively simple process (see box, "10 Steps to Video Modeling"). The first step is to identify the behavior to be introduced or adapted/modified. Behaviors that need to be introduced and/or adapted/modified can be identified by observing the student or talking to parents, other teachers, paraprofessionals, or related service providers. A great resource for identifying social skills for students at the elementary level is the book *Skillstreaming the Elementary School Child* (McGinnis & Goldstein, 1997), which breaks down 60 prosocial skills for elementary-aged students into step-by-step processes. Creating video models with these steps could provide a framework for targeted skill areas. Goldstein and McGinnis (1997) also wrote a version of *Skillstreaming* focusing on adolescents, stressing social and problem-solving skills.

Step 2 is to collect data on the behavior identified in Step 1 and establish the student's skill level (see box, "Assessing Students' Social Skills"). Data collection does not have to be intensive or time consuming. It can be as easy as sticking a strip of masking tape on a pant leg and making a tally mark every time the behavior occurs.

One approach to collecting data on a behavior is to use a simple ABC (antecedent, behavior, consequence) chart. An ABC chart is a running record of behaviors and includes information on what happens before a

10 Steps to Video Modeling

Step 1: Identify the targeted behavior
Step 2: Collect baseline data
Step 3: Choose competent peers to help create the videos
Step 4: Secure parent/guardian permission and student consent
Step 5: Prep the peer models
Step 6: Prepare the environment
Step 7: Create the video
Step 8: Intervention
Step 9: Gather data
Step 10: Assess and reflect

Assessing Students' Social Skills

Prepare data recording forms.

Determine times to collect data and who will collect data.

Collect data at regular intervals or times.

Take notes as you collect data about any interesting/intriguing behaviors you observe.

Use a variety of data recording forms (see the Autism Social Skills Profile, Bellini, 2006, p. 73; Sargent, 1998; Social Skills Checklist, Project DATA, 2004).
behavior occurs (antecedent), what the behavior looks like (behavior), and what happens immediately after the behavior occurs (consequence; see Figure 1). An ABC chart can be used to collect data for video modeling to provide information on the kinds of social skills that require reinforcement or direct instruction, the types of social situations in which the student is engaged, and the function (or "why") of the behaviors observed or not observed.

After collecting data, choose competent student peers to participate as actors in the video models. Because of limitations for students with ASD to relate what they see to themselves, it is best to choose students who are classroom peers of the student. For example, don't choose middle school students to participate in a video for an elementary-aged student. Another benefit of using classroom peers in the video model is that the student will be familiar with and recognize the faces of his/her peers, which may increase the likelihood of generalizing the new skills to other environments. Another option for choosing students to participate in the video models is to seek out school service-oriented clubs and organizations. Some schools have peer mentoring programs in place and these programs can be a great source for getting actors for the video models.

The next step is to get permission from parents/guardians to film the students (see Figure 2). It is important that all parents/guardians are aware of the activities and give their permission for their child to participate, including the child with ASD, to protect the rights of all involved.

Step 5 is to prepare the actors for the skills they will need to model. Books such as Skillstreaming the Elementary School Child (McGinnis & Goldstein, 1997) or Skillstreaming the Adolescent (Goldstein & McGinnis, 1997) and The Hidden Curriculum: Practical Solutions for Understanding steps of the skill with the actors, it is important to practice role-playing the skills. Practicing before taping gives the actors an opportunity to think about the steps of the skills and how to model the skills for the video. This step also reduces the amount of retakes and facilitates later editing of the video.

Step 6 is to prepare the environment. For best results in the intervention, film the video in the setting where the skill is most needed. For example, if the skill is playing a game with a peer, film in the students sitting around a table with a game set out, or film on the school playground for more active types of play. To minimize noise and distractions, film the video when other students are not around.

Short, simple videos with clear steps have a stronger impact and are more likely to enable the student to master the skill.

Unstated Rules in Social Situations (Smith, Myles, Trautman, & Schelvan, 2004) can be very helpful. These resources provide step-by-step breakdowns of social skills that explain each part of the skill. After reviewing the

Step 7 is to create the video. When creating the video, remember: Simple is best. Because of the weakness in attending that many children with ASD display, short, simple videos with clear steps have a stronger impact and are

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Dear Mr. and Mrs. Jones,

To promote social skills awareness and acquisition, we are going to start doing some video modeling in our classroom. Video modeling is a research-based technique for increasing social skills in students who have autism spectrum disorder.

We will be creating the videos in different places in the school. All of the videos will stay in the school and will not be used for anything except working on social skills with our students. Your son/daughter has been selected to participate in creating these videos.

Please sign and date the form below to provide us permission to video your son/daughter in school for this purpose and return the signed form to us by January 30, 2011. You can keep the top half of this letter for your records.

As always, I would be glad to answer any questions you have. You can reach me via e-mail at TeacherName@emailprovider.com or 123-456-7890.

All my best,

Ms. Fisher

______ Yes! I give my permission to video my child for the purpose of social skills training. I understand that the videos will be kept in the school.

______ No. I do not give permission to video my child.

____________ Child Name

____________ Parent/Guardian Name

(Please Print)

Parent / Guardian Signature

Date

Implementing the Intervention

Step 1: Introduce the skill to the student and peer mentor

Step 2: Review the steps of the skill

Step 3: Show the video model to the student and peer mentor

Step 4: Have the student practice with his/her peer mentor

Step 5: Review the steps of the skill

more likely to enable the student to master the skill. There are a variety of relatively inexpensive video cameras on the market today that are also very user-friendly; several are sold packaged with video editing software. Many of these cameras feature “point and shoot” filming without confusing buttons and dials and connect to a computer via a USB or FireWire cable. Many point-and-shoot video cameras are sold packaged with video editing software; both Windows and Mac operating systems include programs for producing movies (i.e., Moviemaker and iMovie/iDVD). Sending the video (or an online link to it) to the student’s family enables the student to watch and practice the video at home, which increases the likelihood of mastery and generalization.

What’s the Best Way to Implement the Video Modeling Intervention?

Once the video is prepared, it’s time to implement Step 8, the Intervention with the target student. Implementation comprises a five-step process, incorporating the video model and peer mentors into social skills instruction (see box, Implementing the Intervention).

First, explain the social skill by talking about the skill and asking students when they might use that skill. For example, if the skill is initiating a conversation, ask about settings for having a conversation with a peer and appropriate topics. After introducing the skill, review each step. Some options for review include writing the steps on a piece of paper or white board or creating a poster. The written procedures allow the student to hear and see the words of the each step in the skill.

Next, show the video model to the student. The video should be shown more than once to capitalize on the visual learning strengths of students with ASD. Be sure to provide time for the student to practice the skill with her/his peer mentors; note that the peer mentor should be prepared to work with the student and understand the procedures for video modeling. The
student may need several practice sessions to reinforce and master the steps of the skill; it’s helpful to review the steps of the skill until the skill is mastered. Providing opportunities for the students with ASD to watch the video model and practice the skills on a daily basis, preferably with peer mentors, will better enable them to learn and internalize the skill.

How Can Teachers Assess the Effectiveness of the Video Modeling Intervention?

After the intervention, it’s essential to complete Steps 9 and 10, collect data and assess the student’s skill level, using the same techniques as preintervention. Review the data considering key questions:

1. Did the student demonstrate the skill?
2. Did the skill occur in other settings?
3. What seemed to work in using the video model?
4. What did not work?
5. Collecting data on the skill and assessing what was learned from the experience can help in fine-tuning the process and the presentation of other skills.

Final Thoughts

Creating video models can present some obstacles as far as technology, but seeking student support and bearing in mind that with video modeling simple is best can make the process easier. Video can be taken over and over again and it is okay to practice and try new approaches. Empower the peer mentors or students in your class to use the equipment and produce the social skill video clips. If creating videos is not part of your skill base, consider partnering with a technology course instructor or seeking support from your school’s technology specialist to produce the video clips. There are also several helpful Internet websites offering tips, samples, and

The more frequently students watch the video and practice the skills with their peer mentors, the more likely they will be to learn, maintain, and generalize the skills.
Internet Resources

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hjzc3ZFYiAK
A short video about Activity Trainer, software with premade videos and supports to create your own

http://www.socialskillbuilder.com/howtochoose.html
Software developed to assist in social skills development through interactive games

http://www.knowledgehound.com/topics/film.htm
A link to hints about creating videos

http://www.webvideofordummies.com/videtutorials.html
Great web site with a link to free tutorials

software for producing videos (see box, "Internet Resources").

Remember, the more frequently students watch the video and practice the skills with their peer mentors, the more likely they will be to learn, maintain, and generalize the skills. Social skills are not just for "the movies," but essential to everyday life.

References


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