Guide to Instructional Design and Implementation Procedures

Based on:
Elias, M. J., & Bruene, L. (2005). Social Decision Making/Social Problem Solving: A Curriculum for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, Grades 2-3. Champaign, IL: Research Press.

Elias, M. J., & Bruene, L. (2005). Social Decision Making/Social Problem Solving: A Curriculum for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, Grades 4-5. Champaign, IL: Research Press.

Elias, M. J., & Bruene, L. (2005). Social Decision Making/Social Problem Solving for Middle School Students: Skills and Activities for Academic, Social, and Emotional Success. Champaign, IL: Research Press.

"*For students to enter the community of responsible adults prepared for a diversity of social roles, they must possess critical-thinking and problem-solving skills, as well as interpersonal sensitivity. Their future success in citizenship, parenthood, family life, and the workplace will require them to find appropriate answers to numerous difficult questions, and it is up to the schools to help provide a foundation from which to answer them.*"

(From Social Problem Solving Interventions in the Schools, M. J. Elias & S. E. Tobias, 1996, New York: Guilford Press, p. iii.)

The Social Decision Making/Social Problem Solving (SDM/SPS) Curriculum is an evidenced-based approach to building skills that students need for success in school and in life. They are the skills that are required for effective work in groups, persistent work on projects, handling frustration and challenge constructively, non-violent conflict resolution, caring about classmates and teammates, empathy and perspective taking, emotional regulation and self-control, and participation in democratic institutions, workplaces, and family life. In other words, SDM/SPS teaches essential life skills, skills

that students at one time may have learned in family and other contexts but now cannot be expected to master in the course of normal growing up. While we might lament that this is the case, we also must do something about it. When we do not, our classrooms are chaotic, our schools suffer, and our children can emerge from education as social casualties, either unwilling or unable to take productive roles in society or lacking the moral character to put their talents to use for good in the world.

Students Need Skills, Not Slogans

Students need skills, not slogans, and so SDM/SPS is geared to build skills. Ideally, students will have a multi-year exposure to the curriculum in elementary and middle school, but even one solid year can have benefits. This Instructional Guide is designed to give you a brief overview of the curriculum, the structure of its activities, and how you can use the teaching skills you already have to effectively carry out what is required.

The SDM/SPS curriculum is best thought of as a launching pad. Students cannot learn skills merely from engaging in activities on a topic. The curriculum provides a structure for introducing the skills, ensuring their relevance to students and a connection to their everyday lives, and providing numerous opportunities for practice and feedback. It is through this practice and feedback process that skills come to be internalized, though over a period of months, not days. The pedagogy of the SDM/SPS curriculum extends beyond the actual delivery of formal activities in the classroom. Teaching of SDM/SPS skills becomes infused into virtually all aspects of the school day, because there really is no part of the day where having solid life skills and exhibiting good character are

suspended. Both the content and pedagogy of SDM/SPS have been evaluated favorably.

The SDM/SPS curriculum is included in the list of Model and Promising Programs from

the U. S. Department of Education's Expert Panel on Safe, Drug Free Schools, and has

been designated as an SELect program by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and

Emotional Learning. (See the "Safe and Sound" guide to selection and implementation

of SEL programs, updated periodically, at the web site, www.CASEL.org.)

The instructional design is as important as the skills targeted in each topic area.

Systematic skill building procedures are used for all curriculum units.

Systematic Skill Building Tools for Social Decision Making/Social Problem Solving

The social and emotional skills focus on teaching self-control and social awareness

skills as important "tools for decision making".

Format for Each Topic

Activities are organized into Topics, rather than lessons. This is because of the

emphasis on skill building. Teachers must have the flexibility to stay on a topic for the

length of time necessary for a sufficient proportion of the class to grasp the concepts and

be ready to move on.

Topics begin with a statement of objectives, followed by Materials/Preparation

needed to carry out the main activities. A number of activities involve materials that are

handed out to students.   These are presented in this curriculum, but are contained in the

Social Decision Making/Social Problem Solving Curriculum Forms Book, to allow for

easy duplication. Among the materials are worksheets, Problem Diaries, various kinds of

assessments completed by students and teachers, stories, and take-home materials for

parents.   The vast majority of materials needed for activities are included in the curriculum and the Forms Book.

The next part of the Topic format is a set of Instructional Activities that incorporates the following components:

- Introducing the skills and concepts and providing motivation for learning; skills are presented in concrete behavioral components.

- Modeling behavioral components and clarifying the concept by descriptions and behavioral examples of using and not using the skill.

- Providing opportunities for practice of the skill in "kid-tested", enjoyable activities, to allow for corrective feedback and reinforcement until skill mastery is approached.

- Labeling the skill with a "prompt or cue" to establish a shared language that can be used to call for the use of the skill in future situations to promote transfer and generalization.

- Assignments for skill practice outside the structured lessons.

- Follow-through activities and planned opportunities for using skill prompts in academic content areas, classroom management and everyday interpersonal situations at school and in the home and community.

- Occasional take-home activities or information sheets for parents.

The Reflective Summary

Each set of Instructional Activities concludes with a Reflective Summary. The purpose of this is to allow students a chance to think about what they have learned from

the Topic, as well as to allow teachers to see what students are taking away with them. Sometimes, the Reflective Summary can show when students have misunderstandings or uncertainty about what they have learned, suggesting the need for additional instructional activities before moving on in the lesson sequence. Here is the procedure:

"Ask students to reflect on the question, 'What did you learn from today's lesson/activity?' You can do this with the whole group, in a Sharing Circle format, by having students fill out index cards, or other formats as you choose. We recommend that you have some variety in formats. After getting a sense of what the students learned, reinforce key themes that they mentioned and add perhaps one or two that you would like them to keep in mind. Also discuss any Follow Up assignments or Take Homes."

After the Instructional Activities is a set of Tips for Teachers, with specific, practical suggestions for carrying out the activities most effectively, based on feedback from teachers who have used SDM/SPS in various settings. This is followed by a brief checklist with which teachers can keep records of their ongoing reflection about the instructional procedures and skill gains made by their students.

Systematic Skill Building for Social-Emotional Development

The set of skills that students learn does not change from Grades 2-8. They are listed in Table 1.1 [TO BE INCLUDED]. Think of these skills like the alphabet. There is a set of letters that does not change, but require rearrangement to deal with more developmentally advanced thoughts, etc. Combinations of the same basic letters become both possible and necessary as children develop and face new and more complex

situations. Ultimately the goal is for students to independently use the social and emotional skills being taught in the context of new, complex and ever-changing problems and decisions they will encounter. The activities in this curriculum start from the social and emotional skills your students have learned up to this point and build upon them to help your students learn to make socially competent and successful social decisions.

Primary Skill Area for Grades 2-3: Readiness

"Readiness" refers to a climate that must be established and a set of skills that must be learned as prerequisites to thoughtful decision making. To create the climate, students need to think of themselves as being part of a Problem Solving Team, and the first units of the curricula in Grades 2, 3, 4, and 5 all begin with that focus. To accomplish this, we recommend using a group gathering called a Sharing Circle to begin class discussions and skill building activities. In the Sharing Circle, students are asked to share their name and answer a question or two, such as one's favorite restaurant or, after a certain level of trust is established, how one feels about a school or classroom issue. This deceptively simple process allows students to share with one another, to learn to listen to and care about their classmates, to get some "air time," and to foster positive transitions from the pressures of home and the pace and action of lunch and recess during the school day. It is a format for reflection on the weekend past, the day or week ahead, and the weekend to come.

We also find it essential to have a visible, clear rule structure in the classroom. One format for this is the Classroom Constitution. This allows parallels to academics by introducing the idea that, just as is true for our nation, our classroom functions with a set of rights and a set of rules. Students are involved in making these, and they are posted

visibly in the classroom. Typically, when visitors walk in and view the Constitution, they are proudly oriented in the values and priorities of the classroom. The Constitution should be positively phrased, although some educators maintain that a couple of clear "Thou shall not's" are also worthwhile. When problems such as classroom disruption, lack of effort, or poor group work are observed, the Constitution is invoked and an Improvement Plan is created.

Parents are highly supportive of Classroom Constitutions and other visible, explicit rule structures, as these enable clear home-school communication about expected behaviors in school. This is an important point, in that teachers do not want to get into conflicts with students about different values/messages they may be getting from home. The Classroom Constitution or other rules for school are exactly that—expectations for how students will act in school and in school-related situations (e.g., on the bus, on school grounds, on the way to and from school, on school trips).

Against the backdrop of a climate that fosters social and emotional learning, specific Readiness skills can be built. This domain targets a repertoire of skill areas that are prerequisites for thoughtful social decision making. The Readiness domain includes skills that are prerequisites for thoughtful problem solving and decision making in all aspects of life. In addition to students learning the skills needed to become a problem solving team, Readiness also includes skills in Feelings, in understanding one's feelings and those of others, and learning how to manage strong emotions in everyday situations. This requires students to focus on the areas of Self-control and Social Awareness/Group Participation. Self-control refers to the personal skills necessary for self-regulation and

monitoring of emotions and interactive behavior; Social Awareness/Group Participation focuses on the skills and knowledge linked with successful participation in a group.

The Table of Contents shows clearly how Readiness is the focus of Grade 2 and much of Grade 3, in the units focusing on Becoming a Problem Solving Team and Feelings.

The Instructional Phase: Instruction in a Social Decision Making Process

The cornerstone of SDM/SPS, like any life skills, character education, or social-emotional program, is to provide students with a problem solving and decision making strategy they can internalize to use in a variety of everyday and challenging situations they encounter. This is accomplished through a combination of (1) introducing an overall strategy for guided self-talk, summarized with the mnemonic, "FIG TESPN," (2) exploring each element of FIG TESPN as a separate skill, and (3) practicing the FIG TESPN strategy in the context of a variety of hypothetical, age-appropriate, and open-ended choice and conflict situations. As each skill is emphasized and practiced, its link to the chain of skills that forms the overall strategy is strengthened.

The "FIG TESPN" acronym reflects the following skills:

F-- Feelings

I-- Identify the problem

G-- Guide with a goal

T-- Think of many possible solutions

E-- Envision consequences

S-- Select the best solution

P-- Plan and be prepared for pitfalls

 N-- Notice what happened--Now what?

The skill areas can be summarized by stating that when children and adults are using their social problem solving skills, they are:

1. Noticing and labeling signs of feelings in themselves and others.

2. Identifying issues or problems and putting them into words.

3. Determining and selecting one's own goals.

4. Generating alternative solutions—brainstorming.

5. Envisioning—getting a mental picture of-- possible consequences (short and long term, to self and others).

6. Selecting the solution that best meets one's goal.

7. Planning and rehearsing the details of carrying out the solution, making a final check for obstacles, and anticipating what to do if they occur.

8. Noticing what happened and using the information for future decision making and problem solving.

In Grades 2-3, the emphasis is much more on Readiness than on teaching FIG TESPN. Students are formally introduced to FIG TESPN in Grade 3, in a unit on Social Decision Making/Social Problem Solving beginning with Topic 22. However, precursors to the FIG TESPN strategy are embedded in the context of many activities. This is especially true in areas in which there is academic application, which is a part of activities in most Topics as well as the Supplemental Activities. The latter can be introduced any time after the first 6-8 weeks of the school year and used repeatedly with

changing content. Tables 1.2 and 1.3 [in separate files] contain a specific Topic-by-Topic outline of how SDM/SPS is integrated with and includes a range of academic, standards-linked content areas.

The SDM/SPS-Academics Connection

Integrating SDM/SPS into the academic work of students builds their social-emotional learning (SEL) skills and enriches their academics by linking cognitive and social and emotional processes. Readiness skills are essential for students to accomplish the following academic and learning tasks, among many others too numerous to list here:

- understand assignments and test instructions accurately;

- examine passages of text patiently and extract necessary information across a wide range of academic subject areas;

- delay gratification long enough to think about difficult choices on exams, or to prepare well for those exams;

- participate in cooperative learning groups; and

- complete homework and short- and long-term projects in an organized way.

Beyond the Readiness skills, the critical thinking skills denoted by FIG TESPN are the cornerstone of academic understanding and sustained achievement. This is true both in terms of mastering the intricacies of any subject area and addressing the numerous everyday decisions that are part of life in school and among peers and family. Consider how well a student would function with deficiencies in any one, two, or three FIG TESPN skills. Imagine if the deficiencies occurred in only two or three school or home situations. Is there any doubt that the student would be at risk for academic difficulty, for substance abuse, and for not functioning as a healthy, productive adult citizen? Hence, applications

to academic contexts are a regular feature of SDM/SPS, building a broad array of literacy skills in students. As noted earlier, Tables 1.2 and 1.3 outline how each of the Topics in the Grade 2 and 3 curricula link with a range of academic areas.

In addition to direct instruction and application of a decision making process, students also benefit from having external coaching and facilitation of their learning process. This is carried out through a form of pedagogy refined over many years to help teachers systematically guide and coach students to use their SDM/SPS skills in a variety of situations. For this reason, the pedagogy of SDM/SPS is of equal importance to the activities and essential if SDM/SPS is to be implemented effectively and internalized by students.

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The SDM/SPS Instructional/Pedagogical Approach

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<u>**Gathering**</u>

Whether one calls it a Sharing Circle, Morning Meeting, Sharing Time, Advisory Group, Circle Time, or any of a number of related titles, the reality is that students welcome the chance to come together informally to address issues of emotional concern. Students benefit from a "buffer" between challenging parts of their day and applying themselves to serious academic work. Especially challenging parts of their day include their preparation for and trip to school, lunch and recess, and dismissal.   For this reason, schools find it useful to have gatherings to start the school day, after lunch/recess, and at the end of the day. Such activities recognize and help to implement the three essential SEL principles (from the "Lessons for Life" Video-Inservice Kit for staff members new to SEL, National Center for Innovation and Education, www.communitiesofhope.org):

1.   Caring Relationships Form the Foundation of All Lasting Learning: Gatherings bring everyone together and makes a statement that while agendas are important, relationships come first. They also set a climate in which learning is most likely to be internalized and lasting.

2.   Emotions Affect How and What We Learn: Academic work can't proceed when students' emotions are churned up, when they are anxious, fearful, or angry. The group focus during start of the day gatherings is on providing an opportunity for some expression of concern, or at least using a ritual beginning to give students a chance to get their own emotions regulated a bit. By so doing, they are better prepared for the academic tasks ahead of them. At the end of the day, addressing students' emotions makes it more likely that the day's learnings and good intentions with regard to homework and projects and such will get followed through.

3.   Goal Setting and Problem Solving Provide Direction and Energy to Learning: Gatherings provide a chance to reaffirm common goals, set personal goals, problem solve issues of general concern, or transition into the SDM/SPS activity about to be undertaken. Gatherings also reinforce goals by providing opportunities for testimonials about progress on projects, attempts to use new skills, and to get feedback on aspects of SDM/SPS with which on is having difficulty.

It is this flexible use of gatherings that led the activities in the SDM/SPS curricula to be described as "Topics," rather than, "Lessons." There are times when the immediate

needs of the group, including the need to review what went on in the prior meeting, will lead to less progress on the day's planned activities. However, because the emphasis on SDM/SPS is in long-term, generalizable skill development, when a choice exists between deep learning and coverage of more topics, the former is preferred.

<u>Caveats: Taking Care with Student Disclosure and Student Hurt</u>. In sharing circles or other gatherings, as well as in problem solving discussions, there is the possibility that students will share family or other personal home circumstances with peers. It is important to set up ground rules, from the very beginning, that family matters should not be topics of general discussions. Further, many groups establish a rule that they will not talk about people who are not in the room at the time. That being said, you also want to be sure to convey to students that they can and should individually approach you, a counselor, school psychologist or social worker, or other school professional whenever they are facing difficult personal or interpersonal problems or circumstances.

These considerations are especially powerful when students are coming to class with a great deal of emotional hurt. Often, they are in need of opportunities to express their strong feelings. And they may try to do so despite warnings that such personal disclosures are not appropriate for the group. Try to be aware of what is happening in the lives of students and offer those who are dealing with difficulties chances to meet with you or another member of the school staff on an individual basis. Your alertness to both the quiet and overt signs of student distress can make a large difference in the lives of students. The work of the PassageWays Institute is a valuable resource to teachers in addressing these concerns (www.passageways.org).

The Facilitative Approach of Open-ended Questioning

From the SDM/SPS point of view, the main role of the teacher is not to solve students' problems or to make their decisions for them. Instead, teachers are facilitators of students' decision making and problem solving skills. (It is analogous to the old adage about teaching a person to fish, versus catching fish for them.) The facilitative approach involves asking questions, rather than telling. However, all questions are not the same. Consider four types of questions:

✴ closed-ended ("Did you hit him?"),

✴ interrogative ("Why did you hit him?"),

✴ multiple choice ("Did you hit him because he was teasing you or because of something else?"), and

✴ open-ended ("What happened?").

Closed ended questions require a "yes" or "no" or other one word response from students, and do not elicit much reflection.   If one asks, "Are you angry?", much less information will be elicited than if the question is phrased in an open-ended manner such as, "What feelings are you having?" Students often do not react well to "why" questions because their insecurity can lead them to feel defensive and blamed. Most students are usually aware of, or able to articulate, the deep reasons behind their actions; this is especially true of students with behavioral and emotional difficulties.

An honest response to, "Why did you hit him?" is something very few students will say: "Because I lack self control and have an inconsistent social learning history with regard to getting negative consequences as a result of my violent actions" or "I think

it comes from a chaotic home, some poor parental modeling, and an overexposure to movies, TV, and video games that glorify aggression, with inadequate adult supervision." Instead, use open-ended questions so that a student's own thinking about the problem will be maximized. Further, getting students more invested in the problem solving process leads them to feel more ownership of and responsibility for the solution.

Giving several choices from which students can select certainly still its uses, such as with students who need to be brought along as problem solvers, those who are immature or have cognitive limitations, or who are initially resistive or draw blanks to open-ended questions. And at times, teachers will have to tell students the answer in an authoritative way. What SDM/SPS pedagogy recommends is that teachers first try to ASK open-ended questions, then SUGGEST options from which students can choose, and then TELL students, if necessary. Cognitive choices by students is good exercise for their intellect, as well as their social-emotional skills. SDM/SPS activities accomplish this by structuring the questions teachers ask, both verbally and in written formats, to be open-ended, initially.

The Two Question Rule: A Specialized Questioning Approach. The Two Question Rule is a powerful, simple way to stimulate students' thinking. In leading a group discussion, the rule is to "Follow up a question with another question." It reminds the leader to stay in a questioning mode and it "serves notice" on students that the leader is genuinely interested in hearing details. For example, the question, "How are you feeling?", can be followed up by, "What other feelings are you aware of?". The question, "What are you going to say when you go up to the lunch aide?", can be followed up by, "How exactly are you going to say it?." Examples in an academic context would be

following, "Why do you think the character in the book acted in that way?", with, "What do you think the character will do next?". A more general example is following a question like, "What are the ways that the body regulates temperature?", with "How do you know that is true?". The follow-up probe, "How do you know that is true?" is an especially useful tool for grounding and clarifying students' thinking. Overall, the more that students elaborate their ideas about a problem or issue under consideration, the better understanding teachers have of what they mean and what they are taking from the discussion. The Two Question Rule is valuable for clarifying students' thoughts, feelings, goals, and plans.

Role Play/Rehearsal and Practice

Role playing provides an opportunity for students to rehearse and practice the responses they would make to actual interpersonal situations. Many students find this to be an enjoyable and valuable supplement to classroom discussions. For teachers, it is an opportunity to give students supervised practice and feedback in reacting to a simulation of everyday events. There are four basic steps involved in a role play, and these can be explained to students:

- *Prepare the script*. Select a relevant interpersonal situation, and establish the problem and conflict. Choose participants who are willing to accept roles and whom you believe can successfully handle the roles. Do not place a student in his or her "typical" life role. Carefully explain the overall situation and the expected actions of each character. Characters should have distinct feelings, motives, and goals in the situation. Where applicable, students should know what alternatives

to state and what consequences to expect. There is a clear analogy here with the script of a play.

- *Run through the action*. There are two aspects of this rehearsal. First, have the class discuss the situation and encourage audience participation and constructive suggestions during the run-through process. Be prepared to model, or to have students model, specific examples of any desired behavior that will be the focus of the role play. Then have the actors discuss among themselves what they will say and do and how they will do it. Have them practice expressions of feelings, verbalize alternatives, or run through any other parts of the overall situation that you feel require emphasis.

- *Action* on the set. Have the students enact the situation. Teachers are director-coaches and should feel free to help the actors portray their roles as the action is occurring. By actively coaching, you are providing students with feedback and support. This makes role-playing less threatening and confusing for them and also helps move the action along. Discontinue role-playing if a student shows any sign of emotional upset or if the actors or the audience begins acting in a silly or off-task manner.

- *Review* the performance. After the performance, the audience should share their views of the thoughts, feelings, and actions expressed by the characters. Students can also be asked how it felt to be involved in, or to watch, the role-play. A valuable way to provide closure is for the teacher to discuss how the role-play could be done differently in the future, emphasizing how the various skills that the students are learning fit together.

To help students get started, you can share the four-step outline with students and then proceed by introducing a situation to role play.   Choose a situation such as:

- You have a new student in your class and you want to welcome him/her.

- You are having trouble doing a math problem and you want to ask the teacher for help.

- You are a new student in the class and want to make friends.

Choose volunteers and brief the role players on their parts. Have them plan what they will say and possibly let them rehearse by themselves.   Many topics will feature role play as part of skill building and practice for generalization.

When would I use role playing? Role playing is useful to:

- Highlight feelings of self and others when involved in a problematic situation.

- Act out a possible solution to a problem and make it more real.

- Compare two or more solutions.

- Teach planning skills.

- Teach reactions to obstacles.

- Help children integrate their various social decision making and problem solving skills.

What exactly does the audience do during the role play? Members of the audience should be assigned specific points to observe, to keep them actively involved. Some major categories are:

- Verbal or nonverbal behaviors such as BEST (tone of voice, volume of speech, the way a message is put into words, speed of speech, posture, movement of arms and legs, eye contact-- see Table of Contents for topics in which BEST is presented)

- Specific social decision making and problem solving steps (specify which ones to watch for)

- All problem solving steps

- One actor (specify which one)

- All actors

Of greatest importance is that students learn to give positive feedback before making any critical comments or suggestions. Teachers should be sure that reviews of performances begin on a positive note. Over time, this encourages the class to work as a problem solving team and to participate in the role plays.

What if students are reluctant to become involved or are not "ready"? By following the procedures outlined earlier, especially running through the action and coaching while the action is occurring, teachers ensure that most students will wish to be involved. It is also important to establish a positive working atmosphere in which students know that teasing or ridicule is not tolerated. Beyond this, teachers should attempt gradually to phase students into more and more direct involvement. Role playing with puppets is often a good beginning point for a reluctant class. Students also enjoy making the puppets. Observation of a videotaped interaction also helps sharpen students' skills at observing and giving feedback. A student can also be assigned a specific observational task, such as watching for signs of feelings or for verbal behaviors. The student can be asked to report these observations during the review. Finally, reluctant students can be made "extras" and be involved in non-speaking parts, such as a bystander or passer-by. One of the most successful ways gently to encourage participation is to say to a student "Do it as if you were_____" (a sports figure, actor or actress, cowboy,

musician, school principal, and the like). Teachers can judge from students' reactions to these gradual steps when they might be ready to move into greater involvement.

Use of the Four "R's" to Aid Retention

Students' forgetting and confusion will inevitably interfere with learning, much as occurs in the context of other school instruction. Therefore, activities are designed to reflect four "R's" that can increase retention: review, repetition, reminders, and reinforcement.

Review

Each meeting should include a review of both group discussion rules and what occurred in the previous meeting. This helps bring previous absentees up to date and also lets the leader accurately gauge the group's starting point.

Repetition

Especially with youngsters in lower elementary grades, our recommended procedure is to maximize tolerable repetition. Many students' attention, memory, or depth of understanding is not sufficient to permit one-trial learning. They benefit from repetition through different modalities (speaking, reading words, viewing pictures, pantomiming, singing, and whispering) and from different sources (teacher, group of peers, dyad).

For the most part, teachers do not repeat ALL the lessons from one year to the next. Rather, a developmentally sequenced flow is designed for each grade. However, a key aspect of instruction, we have found, is children's own maturing way of responding to situations. Therefore, there will be times when similar content is presented from one year to the next, with the goal being to help children deepen and elaborate their repertoire

of feelings, thoughts, and actions around that content. It is also the case that students tend to appreciate structure. Therefore, instruction in most topics begins with a sharing circle and a review of the previous lesson. These features are not described in detail in the Instructional Activities because the review segment will be tailored to one's unique classroom context. It is worth noting that many teachers like to begin each lesson with a sharing circle as a way to accomplish a review of the previous lesson, as a "refresher" and to help absentees "catch up."

Reminder

In our view, the elementary school years are best viewed as a skill acquisition period. It is not consistent with developmental or educational expectations to look for significant internationalization and generalization of skill concepts based sole on their presentation in the classroom lessons. The more children are reminded by group leaders, classroom teachers, aides, peers, bus drivers, building administrators, counselors, and others to use their new skills, the more likely they are to find them salient and worth remembering and developing further. The most effective reminders are tangible ones, such as posters depicting the skill components (e.g., keeping calm, having a successful conversation, or the steps of making sound decisions). As an example, teachers using our lessons have made signs showing ways to get help, both in words and in pictures, and have referred students to these signs when they seem in need of help. Posting stories, worksheets, or other products generated from SDM/SPS activities also serves as a tangible reminder of the skills. In addition to the classroom, other good locations include guidance offices, group rooms, the main office, and on bulletin boards.

The Use of Prompts and Cues. Prompts and cues are defined as a special type of reminder. They are verbal requests or directives to use a certain set of skills. The set of skills generally has components that have been taught in formal group meetings, and the total sequence of these components is given a label. (For example, the skill of self-calming has four components in this curriculum and these components together are given the label "Keep Calm"). Nearly all the readiness topics contain labels that can be used as prompts or cues. Some examples, as well as indications of when to use them are as follows:

- Speaker Power: a sign not to talk out of turn

- Listening Position: a cue to sit and orient one's attention appropriately

- Keep Calm: a prompt to use deep breathing and "self-talk" to calm down

- BEST: a prompt to behave in a polite, socially acceptable way; attending to body position, eye contact, speech and tone of voice.

- Problem Diary: a way of monitoring one's problems, and a tool for thinking about them (by writing out a diary) and, at times, for planning ways to handle them.

- Role Playing: a set of behaviors to enact a problem-solving situation and to take others' points of view.

- Friendship Behavior: a prompt to think about how one relates to others, and how to maintain a positive relationship or to change an unsatisfying one.

- Giving and Getting Help: a prompt to share one's problems and to be willing to help others solve theirs as well.

Examples of when to use prompts include:

- Two children are arguing over a pencil; you see the situation escalating.

Prompt: "I would like to see you both use Keep Calm…Now, let's see what happens if you two try to use BEST".

- One child is squirming in his/her seat while you are reading something to the class.

  Prompt: "I will continue when everyone is in Listening Position".

- A child runs to you, upset about a problem; you are not quite ready to deal with this outburst right now.

  Prompt: "I can see you were really hassled. Please go fill out a Problem Diary and then come back and see me, and we can talk about it".

Examples of when to use social awareness prompts include:

- One child is being negatively influenced by another, and you are concerned about it.

  Prompt: "Is Billy your friend? What does it mean to be Billy's friend? What friendship behaviors does he use that you like? What does he do that are not good friendship behaviors? How do you feel when he does these things?"

Testimonials. To capitalize on the known potency of peer modeling as an influence on learning, it is advisable to regularly incorporate testimonials into readiness lessons. Testimonials are opportunities for students to tell about situations in which they used skills that they have been taught. A teacher might say, "Let's go around and everyone share a time in the past week they used Keep Calm, or tell about something that happened to you or something you saw where Keep Calm or BEST might have been helpful." The reports of the students sharpen their recognition of suitable times to use the skills, provide examples of how the skills can be used in practice, and, for the teacher, give an opportunity to provide feedback and encouragement that will help promote further skill use. Testimonials may be conducted as part of the sharing circle or as a

second activity. Some teachers prefer to elicit testimonials on non-lesson days as a way of extending students' involvement with the material.

Reinforcement

The fourth "R" reflects learning theorists' belief that, in the absence of incentives and feedback, proper skill learning is unlikely to occur. Group leaders and others in the child's environment should be alert to students' attempts to use their skills. At such times, the attempt should be reinforced with praise or whatever tangible reinforcers may be applicable in the setting. The opportunity should also be taken to provide specific feedback about which of the student's behaviors would be worth remembering and repeating on future occasions.

If the student can handle it, it would be beneficial to add constructive feedback about what he or she might try next time to make it more likely that his/her goals can be achieved.

Modeling

Instruction is important, but seeing adults use problem solving skills is much more effective than just telling students to problem solve. As students hear adults try to use SDM/SPS skills, they realize that it is normal to have negative feelings, adults do not always have the perfect solution right at their fingertips, and that adults turn to problem solving when then have difficult situations or choices. Teachers need to find ways of modeling aspects of the program. When introducing a skill, teachers can discuss when they used the particular skill in their own lives. When a conflict takes place, teachers can talk about how they are calming themselves down and using the skills in the curriculum to address the situation. And when staff members interact with one another in the

presence of students, it is important to take a positive, respectful, problem solving approach, even during disagreements.

The Application Phase: Infusion into Academics and
Everyday Interpersonal Interactions

A particular area in which the SDM/SPS approach is distinctive is the way in which the skills are integrated into everyday academic and interpersonal contexts in classrooms and schools. A teacher who wants to build students' SDM/SPS skills during language arts, health, social studies, civics, science, art, gym, or music will find well-articulated strategies and activities to help this take place in what we call the Application Phase.

The Application Phase of SDM/SPS instruction provides students with ongoing opportunities to apply and practice skills taught in the readiness and instructional domains in real-life situations and within the context of academic content areas. This is accomplished through a combination of a) structured practice activities/lessons and b) facilitative questioning on the part of adults.

Structured Practice Opportunities. Relevant curriculum materials can be found within many of the Topic areas (see Tables 1.2 and 1.3) and are emphasized in Supplemental Activities. They take the form of a wide variety of sample structures, frameworks, and materials for infusing a decision-making approach into how almost any subject area taught, as well as a method for addressing real-life problems and decisions. These lessons and methods are easily adapted to address specific instructional objectives and are flexible enough to use with a variety of content themes, topics, stories, or situations.

For example, worksheets and procedures from lessons for a decision making approach to social studies or for analyzing literature can be utilized, with minor variations, with a wide variety of specific topics addressed in social studies or history or for a variety of authors and works of literature.

The FIG TESPN framework can be used to help students think more deeply about and personalize issues in a way that strongly fosters retention and internalization of knowledge. Brain research has provided many insights about how to create more vivid and sustained learning situations, and these are built into the SDM/SPS approach. Consider a series of FIG TESPN-derived questions focused on the topic of immigration, or explorers:

1. How did they feel about leaving their countries? How might you have felt?

2. What countries were they leaving?

3. What problems were going on that made them want to leave?

4. What problems would leaving bring about?

5. What would have been their goals in leaving or staying?

6. What were their options and how did they envision the results of each possibility? What do you think you would have done?

7. What plans did they have to make? What kinds of things got in their way at the last minute? How did they overcome the roadblocks? How else might they have tried to deal with their situation and solved their problems?

8. Once they arrived, how did they feel? What problems did they encounter at the beginning? What were their first goals?

To help students find fact-based answers to questions posed and check their own views, further reading and research can be assigned. And there are obvious parallels to be drawn in the context of understanding the current diversity of one's classroom, school, or community. Note that students from Grades 2-8 can answer the same basic sets of questions, bringing to it knowledge, experiences, concerns, and ideas that reflect their developmental differences.

Consider an Application Phase approach to holidays or ethnic/cultural commemorations, such as African-American History or Latino Heritage months. After students learn some background, you can use FIG TESPN questioning to help students think, as a whole class, in cooperative learning groups, or individually, about how members of different groups feel about the holiday and how they might celebrate it. First, they begin with the group who is celebrating the holiday. Then, to broaden their perspectives, they are asked to take the perspectives of other groups, e.g., those who are not African-American, African-Americans who lived before the Civil War, people in the United States from different countries. Students can think about ways alternative ways to recognize the event, the consequences of doing so, and then can plan their own way to recognize the event.

The application of frameworks taught in the curriculum can extend to unanticipated events in the life of the classroom, school, or nation. Although the evidence is only anecdotal, there is reason to believe that schools in which SDM/SPS and related SEL programs already existed were well able to address and respond to the events of September 11, 2001 at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. Teachers were prepared to address the social-emotional needs of students, while the

mental health and crisis teams were still being organized and mobilized. FIG TESPN and related problem solving strategies were used as tools to help students sort through an incredibly complex and charged set of facts and feelings at appropriate developmental levels. Perhaps most importantly, the tools of SDM/SPS were found to be instruments not only of reflection but also of action. Students were helped to think through how they would cope with the situation most immediately and then what they could do to help. And the problem-solving/decision-making approach continued to be used regularly in the days afterward to continuously enhance children's understanding and channel their need for contribution.

Similar applications have been made in the context of bullying, school tragedies, and planning positive school-wide events.

Encourage Students to be Thoughtful Decision Makers and Problem Solvers

The SDM/SPS approach is built on promoting generalization and application, and for this, confidence-building is essential. Foremost, teachers, counselors, other implementers, and parents are encouraged to communicate with students in a manner that stimulates students' own thinking. Through the use of open-ended questions and dialoguing that facilitates students' higher-order thinking skills ('What are all the ways that you can think of to handle that problem with Lee?"), adults keep the channels of communication open. They let students know that they *can* solve their own problems and that their ideas are worthwhile. Moreover, they see adults around them listening to them and caring about and respecting what they say. This helps students feel a sense of empowerment. In addition, they are learning skills they can use every day. They are prompted, coached, and guided to practice using the skills, and given feedback aimed

toward helping them increase their effectiveness. Success is an important source of confidence, but so is giving students praise for effort and progress and *giving students the expectation that they are on a pathway to success*. This is an important message for self-doubting students who may be prone to see even a 90 percent full glass as 10 percent empty.

Because SDM/SPS is grounded in the social world of students—even when the applications are to academic areas—students who otherwise seem disaffected, unengaged, or at high risk feel included. Many teachers find that social decision making activities lead to increases in students' involvement in cooperative learning activities. Thus, it is more than the content of social decision making that is important in skill building. The instructional principles built into every activity that follows from the social decision-making tradition are designed to enhance a range of social and life skills and build self-confidence by helping students feel that they are valued members of something that is worthwhile. Whether it is being used in a classroom, group, club, advisory, counseling or clinical context or in after school programs, the SDM/SPS approach helps students (and adults) feel like part of a cooperative problem-solving and decision-making team. It is the powerful combination of direct instruction and external support that has led to significant and lasting student skill gains using the Social Decision Making/Social Problem Solving curriculum.

Getting Started: Prepare Your Students, Their Parent/Guardians, and Your Colleagues

The first Topic in the curriculum at each grade level is an introduction to SDM/SPS and the way activities will be structured. It is essential to set a regular meeting

time, as students will come to look forward to this part of the school routine. In addition, as students have more experience with the SDM/SPS pedagogy and as they build their skills, they will be able to "save" a discussion of problems, conflicts, or other interpersonal issues for the regular SDM/SPS meeting time.

SDM/SPS is built on having a set of classroom rules and procedures, ideally developed with students' input. If there is no order and organization in the classroom, it will be difficult to carry out SDM/SPS or any academic or social development activities. Hence, time is taken in the beginning to establish a climate of mutual respect and teamwork. These procedures are outlined in the first few Topics at each grade level.

Also essential is communication of SDM/SPS to parents and guardians. At the beginning of the year, send an email, letter or other communication to parents and guardians letting them know what you are about to begin and when and how it will take place. The curriculum incorporates regular communication to the home. These take the following forms:

✴ pages to send home that help parents and guardians to reinforce skills taught in class,

✴ activities that students can do with their families, and

✴ suggestions to parents and guardians of ways that they can build their children's SDM/SPS skills by making some small changes in their home routines.

Also strongly recommended is a paperback book for parents and guardians that supports all of the skill instruction in this curriculum: **Emotionally Intelligent Parenting: How to Raise a Self-Disciplined, Responsible, Socially Skilled Child** (2000), by Maurice J. Elias, Steven E. Tobias, and Brian S. Friedlander (published by Three Rivers Press/Random House). Note that the book is published in Spanish and 10

other languages; ordering information can be obtained from any good bookstore, the publisher, or from the authors at www.EQParenting.com.

Table 1.4 contains is a sample copy of a letter that can be modified and sent to parents on school letterhead and/or via email, to introduce them to the SDM/SPS curriculum and explain any details you would like them to know as you begin.

Finally, be sure your colleagues know what you are doing. Let specials teachers and student support services personnel know what you are covering and how they might be able to use the prompts and cues the students are learning.   Find time to share about the activities during grade-level meeting and general faculty meetings.   Begin to create a conversation about character in your school, so that it becomes as clear to others as it is to you that school is not just about preparing students for tests, it is about preparing them for the tests of life.

Table 1.4
Sample Letter to Parents/Guardians to Introduce SDM/SPS

Dear Parents/Guardians,

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce you to a program that we are initiating in our school. The program is called Social Decision Making/Social Problem Solving (SDM/SPS). It teaches children valuable skills in the areas of self-control, problem solving, decision-making, and getting along with others. We will be doing SDM/SPS lessons once per week, usually every _____ at _____ .

These skills require time and practice to develop. You will be receiving information and ideas for activities that will assist you in helping your child practice these skills. I would like to encourage you to reinforce these skills when your child is at home and during extra curricular activities. Your continued support and encouragement will enable your child to gain strength in this area and experience success now and in the future.

I am excited about implementing this program in our school. Please feel free to contact me or our building principal with any questions or ideas.

Sincerely,

<u>Developmental Standards</u>

CASEL has delineated a "scope and sequence" for SEL skills from preschool through high school. In light of New Jersey's increasing emphasis on early childhood education, we present below the standards for preschool through Grade 2, to illustrate not only the key developmental skills involved but to show the structure of these standards, which include the conditions needed for the skills to develop, over and above the provision of any formal SEL skill-building curriculum. Indeed, it is clear that attainment of developmental standards is dependent on the environment provided by young children's caretakers.

Personal

Affect

•Appropriately express and manage fear, helplessness, anger, affection, excitement, enthusiasm and disappointment

•Differentiate and label negative and positive emotions in self and others

•Show adequate frustration tolerance for classroom routines

Cognition

•Begin to take a reflective perspective--role taking-- what is the other seeing? what is the other feeling? what is the other thinking? what is the other intending? what is the other like?

•Generate alternative possibilities for interpersonal actions

•Attention-sustaining skills, recall and linkage of material, verbalization of coping and problem solving strategies used

Behavior

•Self-management (e.g., when waiting one's turn; when entering and leaving classrooms at the start and end of the day and other transition times; when working on something in a group or alone)

•Social norms about appearance (e.g., washing face or hair, brushing teeth)

•Recognize dangers to health and safety (e.g., crossing street, electrical sockets, pills that look like candy)

•Sound physical health--adequate nutrition, screenings to identify visual, hearing, language problems

Integration

•Integrate feeling and thinking with language, learning to "use your words" and expand feelings vocabulary as a curb to impulsive, out of control action

•Differentiate the emotions, needs, and feelings of different people in different contexts, if not spontaneously, then in response to adult prompting and assistance

•Recognize and resist inappropriate touching, sexual behaviors

<u>Key Concepts/Universal Values Students Should Express and Understand</u>: honesty, fairness, truthfulness, trust, hope, confidence, keeping promises, empathy

Peers/Social

•Be a member of a group: share, listen, take turns, cooperate, negotiate disputes, be considerate and helpful

•Initiate interactions

•Resolve conflict without fighting; compromising

•Understand justifiable self defense

•Empathy toward peers: show emotional distress when others are suffering; develop a sense of helping rather than hurting or neglecting; respect rather than belittle, and support and protect rather than dominate others; aware of thoughts, feelings, and experiences of others (perspective taking)

Family

•Be a family member: be considerate and helpful, express caring and develop capacity for intimacy

•Make contributions at home - chores, responsibilities

•Relate positively to siblings - share, take turns, initiate interactions, negotiate disputes, help, show caring

•Internalize values modeled in family

•Self-confidence and trust--know what they can expect from adults; believe that they are important; that their needs and wishes matter; that they can succeed; that they can trust their caregivers; that adults can be helpful

•Intellectually inquisitive--like to learn and explore their home and the world around them

•Homes (and communities) free from violence

•Home life includes consistent, stimulating contact with caring adults

School-Related

Reasonable Expectations That Teachers Can Have for Students About What Children Can Learn/Developmentally Prefer By Grade 2:

 •Pays attention to teachers

 •Understands similarities and differences (e.g., skin color, physical disabilities)

 •Works to the best of one's ability

 •Uses words effectively, especially for feelings

 •Cooperates

 •Responds positively to approval

 •Thinks out loud, asking questions

 •Expresses self in art, music games, dramatic play

 •Prefers starting more than finishing

• Derives security in repetition, routines

• Articulates likes and dislikes, has clear sense of strengths, areas of mastery, can articulate these, and has opportunities to engage in these

• Explores the environment

• Self-confident and trusting--what they can expect from adults in the school; believe that they are important; that their needs and wishes matter; that they can succeed; that they can trust adults in school; that adults in school can be helpful

Appropriate Environment Needed to Bring About School Expectations:

• Clear classroom, school rules

• Opportunities for responsibility in the classroom

• Authority clear, fair, deserving of respect

• Frequent teacher redirection

• Classrooms and school-related locations free from violence and threat

• School life includes consistent, stimulating contact with caring adults

Community

• Curious about how and why things happen

• Recognize a pluralistic society (e.g., being aware of holidays, customs, cultural groups)

•Accept responsibility for the environment (e.g., not ittering, conserving energy by closing lights, not leaving water running)

•Participate in community events (e.g., religious observances, parades, library events, recycling)

The Standards and SEL Are Consistent

Interestingly, in the introduction to the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards, the Department of Education (DOE) acknowledges the importance of the affective domain, which addresses areas of self-esteem, emotions, feelings and personal values. "Certainly students' intellectual growth is affected by their emotional disposition" (NJCCCS, 1996, p. iii). While their reasoning for not specifically including the affective domain is that they did not believe that these are areas where the State should formally assess, the inclusion of the Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards do address these very areas:

1. All students will develop career planning and workplace readiness skills.

2. All students will use technology, information, and other tools.

3. All students will use critical thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving skills.

4. All students will demonstrate self-management skills.

5. All students will apply safety principles.

The descriptive statements and indicators for each standard further elaborate and support the necessity of teaching SEL. The DOE also says, "Teachers, administrators, parents, and other community residents all have a responsibility to nurture and communicate the values, self-worth, and character development required for young people to succeed" (NJCCCS, 1996, p. iii).

No one can be certain if the current movement with regard to standards and assessments will be enduring or just the next education bandwagon, soon to be abandoned for another. Regardless, we must admit that we definitely want students who are aware of and can manage their emotions, who can be empathetic, remain positive in the face of life's difficulties and are good decision makers and problem solvers. These abilities certainly will optimize our teaching and student performance both toward the Academic Standards and on state and standardized assessments. Therefore, we need to embrace a broader notion of Standards if we wish to see as the outcomes of our educational labors not only high test scores, but also

students who are genuinely knowledgeable and have the

skills, attitudes, and values to put their knowledge to

constructive use.

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