Beyond Social Skills

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Social Thinking vs. Social Skills

What's the difference between teaching Social Thinking and Social Skills?

Historically, people from many different professions and non-professionals alike have taught social skills by identifying with students specific social behaviors, such as "greeting another person" or "initiating a topic in a conversation" and then teaching the students through the memorization and practice to improve upon their production of each of these skills. When the skills can be isolated and practiced data can also be more easily taken.

The reality is that our social skills are not made up of individually memorized behaviors that are then utilized exactly the same way in each situation; in fact it can be easily argued that people who say "hi" to every person the exact same way, regardless of what they know about the person or the situation would likely be interpreted as "odd". Consider a 13 year old boy who, based on the culture of his age and his campus is actually expected to say "what's up?" when greeting his peers, say "hi" when greeting his teacher and then say "hello" when brought into a formal meeting.

The gap between teaching students behaviorally based, memorized social skills and the need to teach our students how to adapt their social skills based on the expectations of the situation and the people in the situation is the gap between the more tradition social skills teachings and Social Thinking. When teaching Social Thinking we are teaching students to become active social problem solvers who are not focused on memorizing what to do socially but instead are engaged in figuring out what people around them are doing, what they are expecting, what our students are seeking in their interactions with others and all this helps them to figure out how to interact in any given time or place and with different people. This same knowledge of the social mind can then be applied in our academic interpretations as well as our need to explain our own thinking through written expression, classroom projects, etc.

Defining Social Thinking & Skills

How do you literally define teaching Social Thinking and Related Social Skills?

We use a three-part definition to explain how the social mind helps us produce social skills and that we use social skills to affect how people feel about us in a specific situation:

Social Thinking

We use our Social Thinking to consider situation (context) and our own and others thoughts, emotions, beliefs, intentions, knowledge, etc. This information helps us to interpret and respond to the information in our min
social behavioral interactions.

If we are simply reading or watching information on a screen, we will use our social thinking for our own internal interpretation to make meaning of what we are experiencing.

If we are using our Social Thinking to understand those who we are sharing space with and may need to interact with, we then will need to extend this information to help us adapt our social skills.

The above information relates strongly to information in the literature related to concepts such as Theory of Mind/Perspective Taking, Executive Functioning and Central Coherence (understanding the gist).

Social Skills

As we consider our own Social Thinking and are in the presence of other people, even those we do not plan to interact with, we are then are expected to adapt our behavior effectively. To do this we have to consider the situation and what we know about the people in the situation for them to react and respond to us in the manner we had hoped. Our behavioral adaptations are what people call our "social skills". If we use our social skills well, then others perceive us the way we intended. Producing good social skills relates directly to having solid socially based executive functioning and perspective taking skills.

Why bother with social thinking and related social skills?

It's a lot of work to be socially mindful of how we are being perceived, how we feel, what is expected of us, all while tuning into how people are thinking and feeling in that situation. Some students have told me they didn't want to bother doing all this, so we explored it further to study why we engage in all of this social thinking and related behavioral adaptations. We found out that we all tend to do this because our social skills influence how people feel about us and how we then, feel about them as well as ourselves. At the heart of our social skills is our social-emotional reasoning which impacts our mental health!

Social Academic Connection

Understanding the Social Academic Connection and Treatment

With Social Thinking we deconstruct the experience of the social mind to better understand how we think socially in order to interpret social information as well as produce more sophisticated social skills. Our Social Thinking is utilized when we are simply sharing space with others (e.g. when sitting next to a person in a classroom, on a bus or in a movie theater), when engaged in a social interaction, as well as when we each need to think socially about another point of view such as when we are reading about a character in a novel, understanding the story line and related interactions on TV or in a movie, writing an essay, when sharing the road with others and even when watching sports!

By defining our Social Thinking as relating to social interpretations and related social responses across the day, whether it is in school, at home or in the community, we are connecting the dots between one's social emotional and social academic learning as these two areas contribute strongly to our success in what ever community we belong at the moment (school, family, vocational, community group etc.)

Professionals and family members are more familiar with how to teach basic math and reading concepts to children than with how to move through a scope and sequence of teaching Social Thinking and related social skills. This is likely because we all remember being taught math and reading skills ourselves, but few of us remember being taught our social skills, for this reason we may not have a clear framework for where to begin with teaching social learning concepts. Social Thinking provides a large range of concepts; frameworks and strategies to help parents and professionals make sense of this complex information and then teach it more effectively. Our

concepts, which are largely based on the evidence and then developed for use in practical situations such as the classroom and home, simply make sense.

Concepts & Frameworks

Central to Social Thinking's teachings are concepts and frameworks to guide how parents, professionals and students of all ages conceptualize our socially based experiences. Each of the below frameworks helps to organize one aspect of the social mind's synergistic and dynamic processes, each of these then spins off into a series of smaller and diverse lessons. By clicking on each of the below, you will be taken to a free article which explores the concept in more detail as well as link you to related published products.

Core Concepts and Frameworks developed by Social Thinking
- ILAUGH Model
- Four Steps of Perspective Taking
- Social Thinking Formula as taught through Social Behavior Mapping
- Social Thinking Vocabulary and Concepts
- The Cascade of Social Thinking
- Levels of the social mind as taught through:
- Social Thinking- Social Communication Profile (ST-SCP)
- Social Thinking – Group Learning, Play and Problem Solving Scale (GPS)
- Dynamic Informal Social Thinking Assessment tasks

Levels of the Social Mind

Teaching different lessons to students with different levels of the social mind

Just like any type of learning, such as learning math or learning to decode text, some people do it really well, others have more subtle issues while other have really obvious and deep learning challenges. Social learning is no different, but what is different is that little thought has been given to this topic as it relates to social skills. All too often students are placed into social skills treatment groups based on their diagnostic label, even if different students in the treatment group have obvious disparities in their social skill abilities.

Noticing that students were not necessarily receiving treatment that was relevant to their social learning needs, we began to develop our "perspective taking scale", which has now evolved into what we call "Different Levels of The Social Mind" as explained through our Social Thinking-Social Communication Profile.

Our profile groups people over 9 years of age into one of five social learning categories (phenotypes):

- Significantly Challenged Social Communicator
- Challenged Social Communicator
- Emerging Social Communicator
- Nuance Challenged Social Communicator
- Neurotypical Social Communicator

Based on one's level of their social mind, we then explain likely challenges in a person's social academic performance, social emotional processing and related social competencies. We then recommend core issues to attend to as the treatment program is developed as well as guide understanding of what parents and professionals can anticipate prognostically for this person as they get older.

We feel it is extremely important to understand a person's level of their social mind in order to create more effective treatment programs and have realistic discussions about optimal outcomes for this student as his parents and team plan for the future.

STTSC

In 2010 we launched our Social Thinking Training and Speaker's Collaborative (STTSC). This is made up of 13 different speakers, all of whom maintain a clinical caseload while specializing in the development and advancement of Social Thinking.

Michelle Garcia Winner and Dr. Pamela Crooke are part of this speaking collaborative as well as lead the training of all other collaborative members. All speakers get excellent reviews and work closely as a team to provide consistent, clear and engaging information across a span of our conference days. Given collaborative members busy travel and treatment schedules, booking conference presentations months if not a year in advance is highly recommended.

Social Thinking Clinical Services

We have two locations in the United States where we have licensed clinics. In San Jose, California (near San Francisco) we have two clinics; our larger Social Thinking-Stevens Creek and the smaller sister clinic, Social Thinking –Santana Row. We also have a clinic in Sudbury, Massachusetts (near Boston) called Social Thinking Boston.

Both clinics specialize in running Social Thinking groups as well as individual sessions for students of all ages. We also provide assessments at two of our clinics (Social Thinking Santana Row and Social Thinking Boston) to determine a person's level of their social mind and recommendations regarding specific treatment strategies.

However, given our travel and clinic schedules, we can only offer assessments on a limited basis and there is a waiting list for assessments at both clinics. Through our clinics we also can provide layered Social Thinking training to local school districts.

Our Community

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using right away. We're constantly adding material based on the latest research and our evolving client work—so stay informed!

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working or living with children, teens, or adults with social and communication problems —including Asperger's, ASD, and ADHD.

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