

Characters and Motivation

Animated cartoons are popular with children and have been shown to have pro-social benefits (Mares & Woodard, 2001). Video modeling has been one of the most popular and effective approaches for teaching social skills to children with special needs (Bellini & Akullian, 2007). The combination of animation with video modeling is an innovative and compelling approach for teaching social skills. One of the benefits of a motivating program such as this is that enhanced student motivation is likely to result in improved skill acquisition and reduced behavior problems (Koegel, Tran, Mossman, & Koegel, 2006). Other benefits are that the group teaching approach offers opportunities for students to learn from each other, interact socially, and work on skills in a natural environment. With consistent use of this program, it is expected that students will demonstrate improved social skills and motivation. Collateral effects are also anticipated based on previous research showing that improving social skills can also result in improvement in language, play, imitation, and social skills not directly targeted by the intervention (e.g. Whalen, Schreibman, & Ingersoll, 2006). Efficiency and accuracy of implementation and data collection are also areas where improvement will also be noticeable. Improving teacher interactions with students is likely to result in improvements not only for the students in this study, but for future students as well.

Television also has the potential to teach pro-social behaviors to children. Recent research showed the striking result that television is no more prone to fostering violence than it is to fostering pro-social behavior (Fisch, 2005; Friedrich & Stein, 1975; Mares & Woodard, 2005; Wright et al., 2001). Forge & Phemister (1987) further suggested that watching cartoons can have the same positive effects as watching live-model pro-social programs. Among the benefits of pro-social cartoons and programs are elicitation of pro-social behaviors (Forge & Phemister,

1987), altruism (Mares & Woodard, 2005), nonverbal helping behaviors (Friedrich & Stein, 1975), and academic skills (Fisch, 2005; Tidhar, 1996; Wright, et al., 2001).