



Making Connections III

PEIMS Code: N1290334

Abbreviation: MAKECON3

Grade Level(s): 9-12

Award of Credit: 0.5

Approved Innovative Course

- Districts must have local board approval to implement innovative courses.
- In accordance with Texas Administrative Code (TAC) §74.27, school districts must provide instruction in all essential knowledge and skills identified in this innovative course.
- Innovative courses may only satisfy elective credit toward graduation requirements.
- Please refer to TAC §74.13 for guidance on endorsements.

Course Description:

Making Connections III is designed to help students focus on enhancing their understanding of personal learning styles and developing effective self-advocacy skills. Students will explore the strengths and weaknesses commonly associated with autism, analyze their learning preferences, and identify effective strategies for academic success. *Making Connections III* emphasizes self-advocacy, where students will learn how to articulate their needs within their individualized education programs (IEPs) and effectively communicate their rights and accommodations. Additionally, students will examine how the skills they develop in the educational setting can be applied to community contexts. Through role-playing, discussions, and real-world practice, students will engage in future planning activities, including developing graduation plans, resumes, and interview skills to facilitate a successful transition to postsecondary opportunities.

Essential Knowledge and Skills:

- (a) General requirements. Students shall be awarded one-half credit for successful completion of the course. Recommended prerequisite: Making Connections II.
- (b) Introduction.
 - (1) The Making Connections III courses serve students who have an autism spectrum disorder or a related disorder, such as social (pragmatic) communication disorder, which causes them to have difficulty with social skills. These courses assist the students in developing an understanding of autism spectrum disorders and other related disorders. The courses also assist students with developing and generalizing appropriate and beneficial social skills, which may lead to increased postsecondary outcomes.
 - (2) The Making Connections course sequence serves students who have deficits in social skill acquisition, typically due to an identified disorder such as an autism spectrum disorder or social pragmatic communication disorder. The courses also assist students with developing and generalizing appropriate and beneficial social skills and in turn increases students' post-

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secondary outcomes. The course sequence entails a common thread throughout its essential knowledge of skills by emphasizing disability awareness, personal growth, and social skill development.

- (3) Making Connections III is designed to help students focus on enhancing their understanding of personal learning styles and developing effective self-advocacy skills. Students explore the strengths and weaknesses commonly associated with autism, analyze their learning preferences, and identify effective strategies for academic success. Making Connections III emphasizes self-advocacy, where students will learn how to articulate their needs within their individualized education programs (IEPs) and effectively communicate their rights and accommodations. Additionally, students examine how the skills they develop in the educational setting can be applied to community contexts. Through role-playing, discussions, and real-world practice, students will engage in future planning activities, including developing graduation plans, resumes, and interview skills to facilitate a successful transition to post-secondary opportunities.

(c) Knowledge and Skills

- (1) Disability Awareness. The student develops an understanding of autism and specific implications concerning an individual's learning style. The student is expected to:
 - (A) identify and describe the common relative strengths and weaknesses consistently associated with those on the autism spectrum;
 - (B) use various resources to research and describe the typical learning styles of individuals on the spectrum; and
 - (C) compare various effective interventions for individuals on the spectrum.
- (2) Personal Growth and Awareness. The student identifies and analyzes the learning style, study skills, and accommodations that would most benefit the student. The student is expected to:
 - (A) identify the student's preferred learning style;
 - (B) compare learning strategies, such as typing notes or listening to audio lectures, and discuss how the strategies align with the student's preferred learning style; andidentify the strategies including accommodations that will be most effective in each of the student's classes.
- (3) Social Awareness. The student demonstrates self-advocacy skills in roleplay scenarios and in authentic situations. The student is expected to:
 - (A) compare advocacy and self-advocacy;
 - (B) discuss the benefits of becoming an effective self-advocate;
 - (C) discuss, observe, and roleplay the steps of effective self-advocacy;
 - (D) demonstrate appropriate and effective self-advocacy in real situations;
 - (E) evaluate the student's effectiveness in self-advocacy; and
 - (F) develop a plan for improvement in future situations requiring self-advocacy such as developing a list of the available support systems to access in various scenarios or environments or developing a task analysis to effectively communicate frustration.

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- (4) Personal Growth and Awareness. The student explains the purpose and goals of the Admission Review and Dismissal Committee (ARD-C) specifically focusing in on the Individual Education Program (IEP). The student is expected to:
 - (A) identify the essential components of the student's Individual Education Program (IEP), such as academic goals, behavior intervention plan, behavior and social skills goals, autism supplement, and transition plan;
 - (B) demonstrate the ability to discuss the student's disability, including identifying strengths, acknowledging needs, and participating in the development of plans to address those needs; and
 - (C) evaluate each accommodation and modification to determine the student's need for that service based on its effectiveness and appropriateness; and
 - (D) communicate effectively and respectfully the student's needs and rights according to law and the student's IEP.
- (5) Self-Advocacy. The student advocates for appropriate accommodations and modifications in the classroom. The student is expected to:
 - (A) discuss various self-advocacy strategies;
 - (B) implement self-advocacy strategies to ensure all needed and agreed upon accommodations and modifications are available;
 - (C) roleplay and describe respectful approaches in informing teachers of the appropriate accommodations or modifications the student receives; and
 - (D) review and articulate disability rights for Texas students with disabilities.
- (6) Social Awareness in the Community. The student understands that accommodations and modifications needed in the educational setting may also be needed in other community settings. The student is expected to:
 - (A) compare the student's needs in community settings to the student's needs in the educational setting;
 - (B) identify how accommodations provided to the student at school can be used to mitigate demands in other settings;
 - (C) roleplay and describe the use of accommodations and modifications in various community settings;
 - (D) practice and implement the use of accommodations and modifications in community settings; and
 - (E) analyze the effectiveness of accommodations and modifications in the school setting and make necessary changes.
- (7) Future Planning. The student discusses transition goals and adjusts goals based on various feedback. The student is expected to:
 - (A) identify the student's graduation plan;
 - (B) identify all credits and assessments needed for graduation;
 - (C) develop a plan for the completion of required courses;

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- (D) discuss the importance of having a state identification card and develop a plan to obtain one;
- (E) discuss the components of an effective resume such as work experience, volunteer work, involvement in school organizations, and mastery of marketable skills;
- (F) complete a mock job application and develop a resume;
- (G) discuss, observe, and roleplay socially appropriate and marketable behaviors to demonstrate in an interview, such as appropriate dress for various interviews, promptness, eye contact, and answering questions regarding marketable strengths and weaknesses;
- (H) practice skills in real-world situations and analyze how the interactions were successful or unsuccessful; and
- (I) develop a plan for engaging in real-world situations in the future.

Recommended Resources and Materials:

1. Buron, Kari Dunn. *The Incredible 5-Point Scale: The Significantly Improved and Expanded Second Edition*. Shawnee Mission, KS: AAPC Publishing, 2012.
2. American Psychiatric Association. (2022). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed., text rev.). <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.books.9780890425787>
3. "Fostering Autistic Wellbeing through Self-Care and Self-Advocacy." *Reframing Autism*. Accessed May 22, 2024. <https://reframingautism.org.au/fostering-autistic-wellbeing-through-self-care-and-self-advocacy/>.
4. Gerhardt, Peter F., and Daniel Crimmins. *Social Skills and Adaptive Behavior in Learners with Autism Spectrum Disorder*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes, 2013.
5. Gorenstein, Michael, and Melissa Shapiro. "Social Skills Intervention: A Key Piece of the Employment Puzzle." *Seaver Autism Center for Research and Treatment at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai*. AHRC New York City. June 25, 2021.
6. Griffiths, Amanda J., Amy Hurley Hanson, Cristina M. Giannantonio, Sarika K. Mathur, Kristina Hyde, and Erik Linstead. "Developing Employment Environments Where Individuals with ASD Thrive: Using Machine Learning to Explore Employer Policies and Practices." *Brain Sciences* 10, no. 9 (2020): 632. <https://doi.org/10.3390/brainsci10090632>.
7. Laugeson, Elizabeth A. *The PEERS Curriculum for School-Based Professionals: Social Skills Training for Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2014.
8. Laugeson, Elizabeth A., and Fred Frankel. *Social Skills for Teenagers with Developmental and Autism Spectrum Disorders: The PEERS Treatment Manual*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2010.
9. *Learning Style Inventory (Secondary)*. Stetson & Associates, Inc. Accessed May 22, 2024. <https://stetsonassociates.com/Files/NEW%20Learning%20Style%20Inventory%20SECONDARY.pdf>.
10. "Learning Style Questionnaire." University of California, Merced. Accessed May 22, 2024. <https://learning.ucmerced.edu/sites/learning.ucmerced.edu/files/page/documents/learningstylequestionnaire.pdf>.
11. O'Connor, Rachel A.G., Neeltje van den Bedem, Els M.A. Blijd-Hoogewys, Lex Stockmann, and Carolien Rieffe. "Friendship Quality among Autistic and Non-Autistic (Pre-) Adolescents: Protective or Risk Factor for Mental Health?" *Autism* 26, no. 8 (2022): 2041-2051. Published online January 22, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613211073448>.
12. "Research-Based Recommendations for Building Self-Advocacy Competence." *Autism Spectrum News*. Accessed May 22, 2024. <https://autismspectrumnews.org/research-based-recommendations-for-building-self-advocacy-competence/>.

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13. Spark, Sia. "Fostering Autistic Wellbeing through Self-Care and Self-Advocacy." Reframing Autism. Accessed May 22, 2024. <https://reframingautism.org.au/fostering-autistic-wellbeing-through-self-care-and-self-advocacy/>
14. "Study Strategies by Learning Styles." Florida State University Academic Center for Excellence. Accessed May 22, 2024. https://ace.fsu.edu/sites/g/files/upcbnu296/files/Study_Strategies_by_Learning_Styles.pdf.
15. Werner, Carly, MEd, MS, and Dianne Zager, PhD. "Research-Based Recommendations for Building Self-Advocacy Competence." Autism Spectrum News. Accessed May 22, 2024. <https://autismspectrumnews.org/research-based-recommendations-for-building-self-advocacy-competence/>

Recommended Course Activities:

- Learning Inventory
- Review of indicated learning strategies; develop a plan to effectively utilize learning strategies as well as advocate for their use in each course
- Review and confirm understanding of expectations in each course
- Review and confirm understanding of current Individualized Education Program; advocate for any changes that are needed.
- Participate in ARD-C
- Review of current transcript and graduation plan; meet with general education counselor and make plans for successful completion / graduation.
- Write resume
- Observe appropriate interview behavior
- Role-play with critique and further practice of interview behavior
- Behavior rehearsal exercises
- Discuss available work/volunteer opportunities
- Review how to obtain state identification (e.g., driver's license, identification cards, Selective Service registration)

Suggested methods for evaluating student outcomes:

The students participate in a class period that includes direct teaching of social skills instruction, and then they are also monitored throughout the day by the Making Connections teacher and paraprofessionals. Monitoring consists of the staff consistently observing the students' other classes and providing prompting, redirection, and coaching of the learned social skills. This allows for the student to employ the learned strategies in an authentic circumstance and receive feedback from their trusted Making Connections staff. The combination of the Making Connections course and the monitoring serves to increase the students' social skills by moving them through all levels of learning (acquisition, fluency, maintenance, and generalization).

The students will be evaluated using various minor and major grades as well as their progress towards their individualized goals. The progress towards their goals will be evaluated using consistently obtained data. Rubrics should be utilized to grade goals set, role-plays, and behavioral rehearsal exercises. Summative assessments may involve administering the social skills assessment from the beginning of the semester again at the end of the semester to compare results and evaluate growth in social skills development. Students can be required to reflect on their growth through the semester and set future goals.

Beginning of Semester - Completion of learning style survey results and reflections as to how to effectively utilize this information in each class / a job.

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- Review and reflection of current Individualized Education Program including reflection of what accommodations / modifications are currently helpful / not helpful, and which are not currently being provided in classes with an action plan as to how to address the teachers of the courses.

End of Semester - Reflections as to what steps have been made to grow in the ability to self-advocate, how/when to utilize these skills in future classes, jobs, and friendships/relationships.

- Discussions of laws/rights regarding accommodations/modifications
- Role-Play self advocacy for IEP documented accommodations / modifications
- Behavioral rehearsals / social autopsies of real situations when student has attempted discussions with teachers / others to self-advocate

Teacher qualifications:

An assignment for a *Making Connections III* course is allowed with one of the following certificates:

- Emotionally Disturbed
- Generic Special Education
- High School—Generic Special Education
- Language and/or Learning Disabilities
- Secondary Generic Special Education (Grades 6 – 12) (Grades 6 – 12 only)
- Severe Emotionally Disturbed and Autistic
- Special Education: Early Childhood – Grade 12

Additional information:

This course is designed for students with identified social skills deficits. These deficits should be addressed within the student's individualized educational plan. That plan is helpful at encouraging the appropriate interventions be used by staff as well as by each student. Although the students can only work towards acquisition, fluency, and maintenance within the Making Connections classroom, the individualized educational plan should also detail the manner with which the student will achieve generalization of those skills across all educational settings.

Teachers should collaborate with professionals and build skills in behavioral intervention especially in using operant conditioning/cognitive behavioral strategies.