



Making Connections IV

PEIMS Code: N1290335

Abbreviation: MAKECON4

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 IV assists students with developing skills to employ collaborative problem solving. This course specifically focuses on the aspect of social communication, by focusing on their collaborative problem-solving skills. The student will develop skills to understand their autism specifically related to their ability to communicate socially, engage in collaborative problem-solving, and navigate social situations effectively. This course also encourages mentoring relationships within the school environment and helps students identify and take steps toward their postsecondary goals, including job applications, FAFSA completion, and understanding available accommodations at postsecondary institutions or workplaces.

Essential Knowledge and Skills:

(a) General requirements. Students shall be awarded one-half credit for successful completion of the course. Recommended prerequisite: Making Connections III.

(b) Introduction.

- (1) Making Connections IV assists students with developing skills to employ collaborative problem solving. This course specifically focuses on the aspect of social communication, by focusing on their collaborative problem-solving skills. The student will develop skills to understand their autism specifically related to their ability to communicate socially, engage in collaborative problem-solving, and navigate social situations effectively. This course also encourages mentoring relationships within the school environment and helps students identify and take steps toward their postsecondary goals, including job applications, FAFSA completion, and understanding available accommodations at postsecondary institutions or workplaces.
- (2) The Making Connections course sequence serves students who have deficits in social skill acquisition typically due to identified disorders such as 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 that student's post-

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

- (3) Statements containing the word "including" reference content that must be mastered, while those containing the phrase "such as" are intended as possible illustrative examples.

(c) Knowledge and Skills

- (1) Disability Awareness. The student develops an understanding of how autism may impact a person's ability to engage in collaborative problem solving. The student is expected to:
- (A) research and describe repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities and how these factors may impact an individual with autism's ability to use collaborative problem-solving skills; and
 - (B) explain how collaborative problem-solving skills may impact an individual with autism's education and employment success.
- (C) Personal Growth and Awareness. The student identifies personal abilities and weaknesses related to collaborative problem solving. The student is expected to:
- (D) evaluate statements regarding an individual with autism's ability to engage in collaborative problem solving and compare to the student's experience;
 - (E) identify aspects of the student's behavior and belief system which may need to be modified to successfully engage in collaborative problem solving; and
 - (F) develop a plan to effectively employ collaborative problem-solving strategies in various circumstances.
- (2) Social Success. The student engages in collaborative problem-solving techniques. The student is expected to:
- (A) identify multiple facets of an identified problem;
 - (B) generate multiple possible strategies to solve an identified problem;
 - (C) identify and discuss the pros and cons of each generated strategy;
 - (D) delineate the roles of each member in a collaborative group;
 - (E) employ the agreed upon strategy and record observations or resulting data;
 - (F) discuss the results and effectiveness of the selected strategy in solving an identified problem;
 - (G) evaluate the outcomes and effectiveness of different collaborative problem-solving strategies;
 - (H) determine what strategy may be most effective in the future; and
 - (I) describe ways to assist other students with identifying and developing skills to employ collaborative problem solving.
- (3) Social Awareness. The student engages in social, or group, problem solving. The student is expected to:
- (A) identify the who, what, when, where, and why of a given social situation;
 - (B) document the student's behavior in response to a social situation;

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- (C) compare the outcome of a social situation with the student's intended outcome;
 - (D) analyze and describe the perspective of other individuals involved in the social situation;
 - (E) analyze the cause-and-effect relationship between one's behaviors and one's relationships with others;
 - (F) identify potential solutions to a problem in a social situation;
 - (G) describe the pros and cons of various solutions, including analyzing the perspective of others and predicting the likelihood that the student can effectively employ the solution;
 - (H) analyze past social interaction by employing strategies such as social autopsies for real-world situations and roleplays of interactions that are not successful;
 - (I) roleplay a solution which may help improve a social interaction which was not successful; and
 - (J) determine the student's course of action for potential problems that may occur in upcoming social settings.
- (4) Social Awareness in the Community. The student assists a peer in a mentor-mentee relationship in the school environment. The student is expected to:
- (A) demonstrate empathy and use knowledge of the school and understanding of the student's disability to build a mentor relationship with a student mentee;
 - (B) assist the student mentee with navigating the school, including highlighting routines, expectations, and social skills of each setting;
 - (C) use conversation strategies to learn about and build rapport with the student's mentee;
 - (D) assist the student mentee in identifying the mentee's area of needs and what available support systems, such as teachers and counselors, are available in the school to address those needs; and
 - (E) identify and discuss the student's personal experience with having a disability and how that recognition and understanding has positively impacted the student's success in school and community such as enabling the student and teachers to ensure the adequate and effective implementation of accommodations and modifications and promoting the student's ability to self-advocate.
- (5) Future Planning. The student identifies a post-secondary plan and takes steps to succeed in that plan. The student is expected to:
- (A) identify and discuss the student's post-secondary plan;
 - (B) identify the steps necessary to successfully initiate the post-secondary plan;
 - (C) identify steps that can be taken prior to graduation and complete those steps such as, completing a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) application, meeting with a transition specialist, comparing colleges with the student's desired degree, scheduling and completing college entrance exams, completing job applications, and comparing available living arrangements in the college or work area;
 - (D) analyze critiques from mock interviews to increase understanding of employment opportunities;
 - (E) research and describe available accommodations at the post-secondary institution or work place; and

- (F) compare the student's current accommodations and/or modifications with the available accommodations at the post-secondary institution or work place the student is interested in.

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. <https://autismspectrumnews.org/social-skills-intervention-key-piece-of-the-employment-puzzle/>
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. 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/>
13. "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.

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14. 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:

- Lessons, discussions, and review of strategies for working collaboratively
- Discussion of pros and cons of multiple problem-solving techniques
- Conduct a social autopsy of student's strengths and weaknesses in each team activity coupled with a plan to practice specific skills in the next team activity
- Discussion of the benefits of flexible thinking versus rigid thinking
- Multiple team problem solving scenarios
- Role-play

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.

Assessment

Beginning of Semester - Identification of multiple problem-solving collaborative strategies that can be utilized in projects / activities

- Multiple team problem-solving activities/scenarios
- Behavioral rehearsals / social autopsies of the individuals and groups collaborative problem solving in each activity / scenario.

End of Semester - Reflections as to what strategies best fit what activities, the individual's style, and how that individual plans to utilize and grow in the strategies in the future.

Teacher qualifications:

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

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- 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)
- Severely 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.