CAS Student Research Proposals:

EXAMPLE PROPOSAL

Title of Project: Developing social communication skills in children experiencing difficulty

Authors(s) Jane Doe, SLHS, xxxx Lane St., Denver, CO 80214; email – doe@mscd.edu
Phone: xxx-xxx-xxxx

Abstract (50 words or less)
Project investigators will design and deliver whole-class and small-group instruction to 12 children with identified social communication problems. Video modeling and parent/peer carryover activities will be used to promote generalization of targeted skills. Intervention efficacy will be assessed using formal and informal survey tools and contextualized observation.

Summary of Proposal (500 words or less)

Background. Social communication skills are the verbal and nonverbal behaviors people use to influence social situations (Timler, Vogal-Ellis & McGill, 2007). These skills are acquired incidentally for most children; they are needed to support academic and social development. Research suggests that children with language and/or learning disabilities have problems in this important area, including difficulty entering conversations with peers (Brinton, Fujiki, Spencer & Robinson, 1997) staying on topic, and monitoring their listeners’ interest (Tomblin, Zhang, Weiss, Catts & Weismer, 2004). Problems with social communication can result in increased social isolation and withdrawal during the elementary school years (Fujiki, Brinton, Issacson & Summers, 2001); they can interfere with establishing successful interpersonal relationships throughout adolescence into adulthood (Wadman, Durkin & Conti-Ramsden, 2008).

Methodology. The project investigators will provide in-service training about social communication development and interventions to six primary grade teachers and their assistants at
a local elementary school. Following the training, teachers will be asked to identify and refer two children each (12 subjects total) who they believe have social communication difficulties and would benefit from participating in the intervention. Teachers will be informed that the intervention will consist of whole-class, small-group pull-out and carryover components and be designed to help children develop the following social communication skills: 1) reading social situations correctly and responding appropriately, 2) joining an ongoing communicative interaction appropriately and 3) making relevant contributions to a topic during conversation and discussion.

The researchers will provide instruction for all students in the six primary classrooms during three, 30 minute sessions over the course of six weeks. In addition to these sessions, the 12 focus subjects will also receive six, 30-minute small group pull-out sessions (one per week) designed to reinforce the skills that were taught in the classroom sessions. Both large and small-group lessons will include direct instruction, modeling, role-play, practice of targeted skills and self-evaluation activities. Video modeling, in which students repeatedly view video-taped vignettes illustrating targeted behaviors (Bellini, Akullian & Hopf, 2007; Delano, 2007), and peer mediated practice (e.g., Thiemann & Goldstein, 2004) will be implemented to enhance instruction and promote generalization of newly learned skills to authentic contexts.

**Data Collection.** Prior to and following the intervention, the parents and classroom teachers of the 12 subjects will complete the Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals-4th Edition (CELF-4) Pragmatics Profile. This checklist is a survey which requires the rater to judge the child’s competency on a range of verbal and non verbal social communication skills. Subjects will also be asked to rate themselves according to their perceived efficacy on a number of communication/friendship skills. Additionally, prior to, following and three months after the
intervention, the classroom teaching assistants will observe subjects during recess and note whether or not each joined his/her peers or played independently. Parents and teachers will respond to open-ended survey questions regarding each child’s social communication skill development immediately following the intervention and again three months later. Sample intervention methods and data collection protocols will be shared in this presentation.

References


