Teaching Social Problem-Solving Skills Through Computer-Assisted Instruction

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Interpersonal conflicts with peers prevent children with autism to establish normal relationships. The present study used a Social Problem Solving computer software to improve alternative thinking skills in problem solving of 3 children with autism. The children showed an increase in the number of alternative solutions generated in the trained problem situations, as well as in the non-trained situations, presented in the programme. This supports the earlier findings of a study by Bernard-Opitz, Sriram, and Nakhoda-Sapuan (in press).

As an important extension to the previous research, this study further investigated the ability to generalize alternative thinking skills to natural settings and the effects of alternative thinking on creativity and consequential thinking.

Four contrived situations were planned to further investigate issues on generalization. Two of the situations were related to the computer programme. Preliminary evidence showed that the children might be able to generalize to skills taught during training in similar natural settings. While generalization occurred in one of the computer related situations (retrieve balloon), it was not obvious for the rest (see Figure 1). Figure 2 shows that the children demonstrated a higher learning rate in the rambutan situation (contrived: retrieve balloon) compared to the money situation (contrived situation: chips). Hence, it was suspected that the children did not effectively learn the negotiation skills, a higher cognitive thinking ability, required in the problem solving during the training in the short training period. In addition, familiarity with particular problem-settings might be a determinant for generalization to occur; such as requesting for toys or food.

Contrived situations unrelated to the computer programme did not show generalization effects. This inability may imply that children had difficulty in generalizing skills to new non-trained settings and behaviours. It may also be due to the short intervention period, as the application of skills needs continuous training.

The influence of alternative thinking on creativity and consequential thinking did not show conclusive results. Social validity of the programme was also assessed.

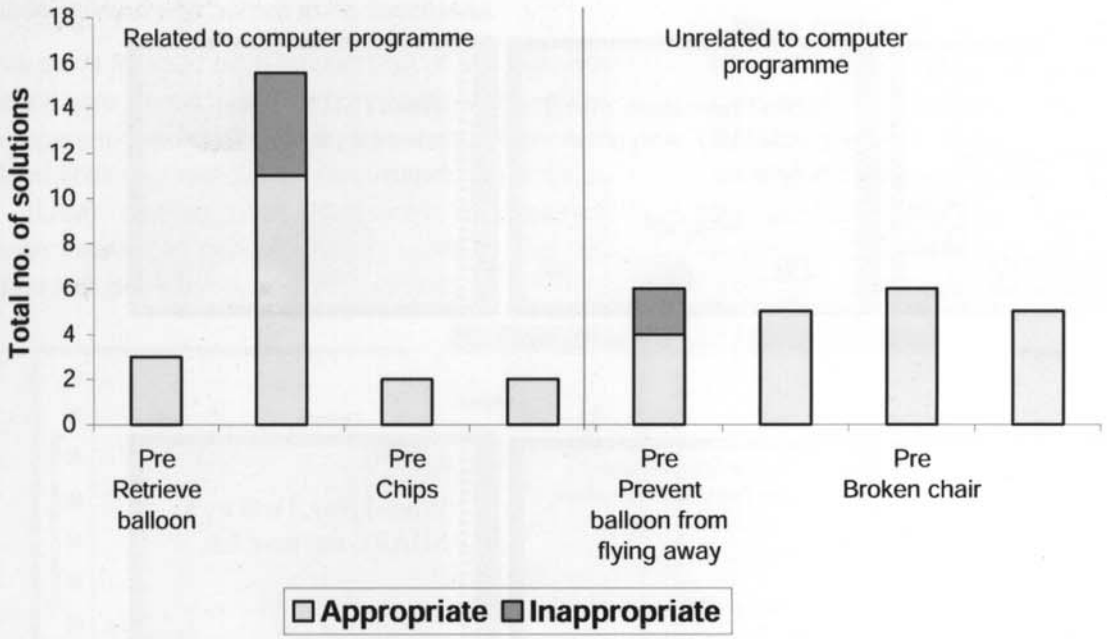

Figure 1. Generalization to contrived situations across all children.

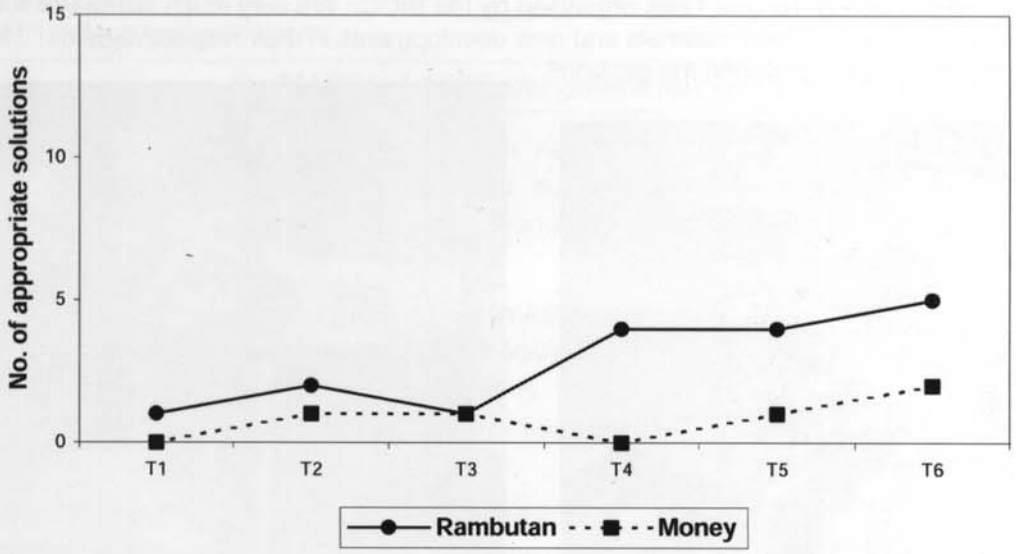

Figure 2.
Performance on two trained situations simulated in the computer programme across all children.

Acknowledgment

I would like to thank the following persons from iT21 (S) Pte Ltd for improving the Social Problem Solving software at no cost: Mr Tan Cheng Hua, Managing Director, Ms Josephine Ho, Project Director/Multimedia Programmer and Ms Lee Pei Chin, Multimedia Producer.

The revised software was used to train children with autism in social problem solving skills, as part of my Honours (Psychology) Academic Exercise.

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