



How a video game helps students level up their social skills

Playing video games at school may be every kid's fantasy, but it's a dream come true for students at [Bright Beginnings Learning Center](#), a receiving school serving students with disabilities from across New Jersey.

In 2017, the center began using a social skills curriculum called [SiLAS](#) that includes a video game component where students apply what they learn by creating scripts and acting out scenarios using avatars in a video game. The center, which serves students ages 3-13, uses the program with students with autism who are primarily verbal communicators.

"It's extremely stimulating, and for this generation of students, they're really engaged by the technology," said Cindy Borell, the center's supervisor.

Boosts engagement, motivation

Compared to traditional role-playing and video modeling, video gaming can be even more engaging and motivating for the younger generation, said Borell. "It's much more interactive," she said. "The kids are really responding to the moving images."

Teachers first introduce a social skill such as the concept of personal space and have students practice it before moving to the video game, Borell said. Once the students understand the skill, they apply what they've learned by writing a brief script for the video game. They record their own voices and use video game controllers to move the avatars on the screen.

Each game is recorded and saved so it can be discussed and used for reteaching. "They have a popcorn party to watch the videos and critique them," Borell said. "It's exciting because they hear their own voices and they get to pick the scene and the avatars. They feel more connected to it," she said.

Powers up personal connection to concepts

*Reprinted with permission from: **Special Ed Connection**®. © 2019 LRP Publications, 360 Hiatt Drive, Palm Beach Gardens, FL 33418. All rights reserved. **Special Ed Connection**® is your go-to source for compliance guidance and use-today solutions for all your day-to-day special education responsibilities. For FREE access or more information, please call 1-800-341-7874 or visit www.SpecialEdConnection.com. For more **LRP Publications** resources, visit www.shoplrp.com.*



Last year, [Parsippany-Troy Hills School District](#) in New Jersey, began using the SiLAS video game with students in the district's STRIVE program, a self-contained program serving students with significant behavioral needs.

"An essential component for our social skills program is not only to teach students what they need to be successful in life, but to keep them motivated and engaged in the process of learning," said Debbie Huffman, Parsippany's coordinating supervisor of special education K-5.

"Having the video game at the end of the instruction is a great motivator," she said. "It's ideal for students who are harder to motivate, who it's harder to maintain their attention, and who have deficits in the area of social skills and self-regulation," she said.

The ability to personalize and control the avatars helped students connect more to the concepts, Huffman said. "With social stories, often the teacher was creating the story and reading it to the student. Even when we used their name in it, it was a little too abstract. The students themselves weren't involved in the creation of it and so they were a passive participant," she said.

Even with a more interactive activity, such as role-playing, some students didn't want to act in front of their classmates, Huffman said. "Most kids are comfortable, though, creating a video and recording their voices. They feel less exposed," she said.

Supercharges generalization of skills

Of seven students in Parsippany's STRIVE program who used the video game and curriculum, all but one has been reintegrated into general education settings for parts of the day, Huffman said. "That's been very successful," she said.

Because the videos are saved, teachers have also been able to replay them if they see an issue arising in the classroom, Huffman said. "The students have also been able to call out a situation and reference what happened from the video game," she said.

At Bright Beginnings, the video games help students make progress toward their IEP goals related to social skills, Borell said. "The kids are hooked. They think they're just playing a game," she said. In addition, students are learning basic computer and

*Reprinted with permission from: **Special Ed Connection**®. © 2019 LRP Publications, 360 Hiatt Drive, Palm Beach Gardens, FL 33418. All rights reserved. **Special Ed Connection**® is your go-to source for compliance guidance and use-today solutions for all your day-to-day special education responsibilities. For FREE access or more information, please call 1-800-341-7874 or visit www.SpecialEdConnection.com. For more **LRP Publications** resources, visit www.shoplrp.com.*



gaming skills and using those skills to play video games with siblings, which benefits inclusion, too, she said.

[Jennifer Herseim](#) covers Section 504 and education technology as it relates to special education for LRP Publications.

September 18, 2019

Copyright 2019© LRP Publications

*Reprinted with permission from: **Special Ed Connection**[®]. © 2019 LRP Publications, 360 Hiatt Drive, Palm Beach Gardens, FL 33418. All rights reserved. **Special Ed Connection**[®] is your go-to source for compliance guidance and use-today solutions for all your day-to-day special education responsibilities. For FREE access or more information, please call 1-800-341-7874 or visit www.SpecialEdConnection.com. For more **LRP Publications** resources, visit www.shoplrp.com.*