

*“If teaching were magic they
would give us a magic wand
and the magic words”*

Program Evaluation

Of

Hocus Focustm

Curriculum

By

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Overview of the Program

Hocus Focus[™] is an eleven lesson curriculum created by Kevin Spencer, former International magician of the year and Performing Arts entertainer of the year. *Hocus Focus*[™] is “student-centered, experiential-based educational approach that utilizes the art of magic... in the context of empowering an empathetic, professional educator/student relationship with the fundamental goal of student growth and development.” (Spencer, 2009) *Hocus Focus*[™] uses a systematic approach to help students “learn to focus and accomplish specific goals and objectives by learning magic tricks” (4) *Hocus Focus*[™] is used in conjunction with the traditional academic curriculum and encompasses a variety of instructional strategies and techniques.

Hocus Focus[™] was developed in collaboration with teachers, therapists/clinicians and national experts with the purpose of providing teachers with a “visual, exciting, and motivating way to allow students to safely explore skill levels, improve existing skills, and develop new ones. (5) *Hocus Focus*[™] can be taught as a stand-alone unit or integrated into core curriculum in math, science, art or language arts.

Hocus Focus[™] is designed to be a fun curriculum that helps students improve their abilities in “planning, sequencing, organizing tasks and movements, fine motor skills, gross motor function/coordination, concentration, memory skills” (5) among others.

EVALUATION SETTING

This evaluation of the program took place over 10 weeks, from September 16, 2010 to November 24, 2010. The program was implemented by four classroom teachers at Northview School, in St. Louis County, Missouri. Northview School is a self-contained public day school in the school district of Special School District of St. Louis County, Missouri. Northview School has a student population of just under 200 students, all of which have a special educational diagnosis, and are placed at Northview via an IEP team decision. Each of the classrooms has between 8-11 students in them. One classroom was made up entirely of female students who had educational diagnoses of emotional disturbance and/or learning disabilities. The second classroom was made up of students with educational diagnosis of Autism and/or intellectual disabilities. The third classroom was made up of all male students with educational diagnosis of emotional disturbance and/or learning disabilities. The final classroom is made up of students with a primary educational diagnosis of learning disability.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

Hocus Focus[™] is in the final stages of development and the proposed purpose of this evaluation is to evaluate the curriculum utilizing the following questions as guides.

- 1) How *effective* is the curriculum integrated & implemented by classroom teacher?
- 2.) Does the use of program help the student improve in their abilities in planning, sequencing, organizing tasks and movements, fine motor skills, gross motor function/coordination, concentration, memory skills, communication, social behaviors?
- 3.) Is the program able to be implemented in cross-platforms?
- 4.) Is the program designed to align with local, state and/or national standards or Grade Level Expectations?

The above questions were formulated from discussions revolving around the following quality indicators; Program fidelity (ease of implementation, ‘best practice’ teaching strategies, differentiation), meeting desired outcomes (are students better prepared for class, are skills learned transferrable to other curricular or life skills), program alignment (Is program aligned with local, state or national standards?) and is the program appropriate and able to be implemented in a variety of settings.

DESIGN AND METHODS

Data will be systematically collected and evaluated utilizing both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. These methods include, observation checklists, pre/mid/post student surveys, pre/mid/post teacher surveys, teacher observation data sheets, anecdotal recording by teachers and students and review of documents. A copy of each of these is included in the appendix of this evaluation.

This evaluation took place over 11 weeks starting September 16, 2010 and ending December 1, 2010. The evaluation was designed to follow the implementation of 11 weekly lessons as outlined by the *Hocus Focus*[™] curriculum. Prior to the first lesson participating students and teachers were given pre-surveys. This survey was again administered in week six and after the final week. Teachers were administered a survey that assessed their attitudes toward the pragmatic utilization of a curriculum such as *Hocus Focus*[™], and the value of such a curriculum in helping students grow both academically and socially. This assessment was administered online utilizing the web-based survey tool SurveyMonkey. Teachers were also asked to assess each student abilities in the following areas: planning, sequencing, following directions, problem solving, focus and concentration.

Students were given two self assessment tools to complete at three distinct times throughout the curriculum. The tools were the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, as well as the Hocus Focus Self Efficacy scale. These were administered on the same timeline as the teachers surveys; prior to start of curriculum, week six of curriculum and after the final week. Students

were also asked to keep a “Wizard’s Book of Secrets” which contained their thoughts, ideas and stories for each trick learned through the curriculum. Likewise teachers were asked to keep short anecdotal notes about the ease of use of the curriculum, noting what worked, what did not work and other thoughts about the curriculum. Both the “Wizard’s Book of Secrets” and the teacher notes were collected and analyzed for common themes and obstacles.

The population chosen for this evaluation was 4 classrooms at a local public day school facility in north St. Louis County, Missouri. This school provided the evaluator with 4 distinct populations of students, all of which had been placed within the school via decision of an IEP team. The students’ diagnosis included Autism, Emotional Disturbance, Learning Disability, ADHD, Intellectual Disability and speech and language disorders. There were 19 females and 15 males at the beginning of the study. The students were predominately African-American. The teachers involved were two female and two male teachers. Two teachers had over 10 years experience teaching in the classroom, with the other two teachers having between 5-6 years experience. Three of the teachers were Caucasian and one was African American. The teachers in the evaluation were chosen because of their willingness to participate in the program. An e-mail was sent out to the teachers within the school about the *Hocus Focus*[™] program and requested teachers to volunteer to participate. The four teachers involved were the first to respond.

Classroom observations were scheduled on weeks 1, 3, 6, 9 as well as during the final performance. Each class was observed for either the entire lesson or a minimum of 20 minutes. Informal interviews were conducted with students and teacher participants following observations.

Results

This evaluation took place between September 16, 2010 and November, 20, 2010. As stated in previous sections there were a total of four teachers, involved in this evaluation process. The program *Hocus Focus*[™] was implemented within the classroom by two of the four teachers in the study. The program was only partially implemented by the two teachers involved. This was due to time constraints, classroom schedule, and other obligations placed on the teacher by the district and state. The two teachers that did not implement the curriculum were able to provide feedback regarding the structure and contents of the program. *All four teachers voiced the opinion that the curriculum was of value to them and a desire to continue to attempt to integrate the Hocus Focus[™] program into their classroom schedule.*

The results outlined in this evaluation are derived from formal and informal interviews with participating teachers, students, and results on surveys completed by participants and teachers. Observation of implementation of the program in two classrooms was also conducted on three separate occasions. The results for each of the evaluation questions are answered and presented in order.

1) How *effective* is the curriculum integrated & implemented by classroom teacher?

To determine the effectiveness of the integration and implementation of the *Hocus Focus*[™] program observation of the implementation was conducted on three separate occasions of the two teachers who utilized the curriculum within their class. Effectiveness of integration was defined by this evaluator by utilizing the following rubric

| TIME | CONNECTION | GENERALIZATION | |
|--|---|--|--|
| ---The program was integrated into the classroom on a consistent and predictable schedule. | ---The concepts taught within the <i>Hocus Focus</i> [™] curriculum were interwoven into other core curriculum throughout the day. | --- Students were able to generalize the concepts from the <i>Hocus Focus</i> [™] curriculum into other core curriculum throughout the day. | |
| | | | |

Table 1a

TIME

The *Hocus Focus*[™] curriculum was inserted into the weekly schedule at a regular and consistent interval. Classroom teacher A implemented *Hocus Focus*[™] on a twice a week schedule. A total of 90 minutes of instructional time per week was dedicated during the evaluation period. Classroom teacher B implemented *Hocus Focus*[™] five times a week for 20 minutes each day, for a total of 100 minutes per week.

When each teacher was asked why they chose the time and structure for integration of *Hocus Focus*[™] into the classroom they both cited the learning styles of their students as the primary reason for their choice.

“It takes my students longer to grasp a concept so I thought it was important to dedicate larger chunks of time a couple of times a week to allow them to explore the process and work on the skills and techniques taught.”

Classroom Teacher A

“My students’ attention spans are short, and are easily frustrated when confronted with new or difficult tasks. That’s why I felt it better to work on the project a short time each day.”

Classroom Teacher B

Connection

Each of the teachers was asked to how they did or would integrate the concepts into other core curriculum throughout the day. All of the teachers stated that they saw value in the sequencing, writing, and problem solving utilized in the *Hocus Focus*[™] curriculum and saw a connection between the *Hocus Focus*[™] curriculum and skills in the other core curriculums. One of the teachers stated that she had many ‘should’ve’ moments after a class when she could identify when she could have made a connection between the *Hocus Focus*[™] curriculum and the skills taught in the core curriculum. She described these as a light bulb going on after a particularly difficult lesson as she reflected back on what could have been done differently. While these connections were few and limited during the evaluation study both teachers implementing the *Hocus Focus*[™] curriculum felt that their ability to make these connections and

interweave it into other subjects would increase as they gained a higher comfort level and familiarity with the curriculum.

Generalization

Generalization of the concepts was the most difficult to evaluate of the three defining factors of effective integration into the classroom. Informal student interviews were conducted and the question posed was, “Can you see a time when you could utilize the skills taught in the *Hocus Focus*[™] curriculum in your daily life?” The students interviewed had difficulty defining the skills taught. Answers such as, “I don’t know”, “I’m not sure”, were the most common answer. When probed students were able to identify that the learning of the sequence of steps was important and useful in other classes, especially math.

“When I did the trick with the rubber bands, it was important to do each step in order, or the trick would not work, it was like math where if you don’t do all the steps you might get the wrong answer.”

Student Voices

“I don’t know, I guess, when I figured out that I could identify what a simile was by looking for the key words like or as, is the same as knowing the secret to one of the tricks. The ‘floating pencil’ is like that. At first I didn’t understand it, but once I learned how to hold my hand it was really easy. Now that I know what to look for to find a simile it is really easy to find them.”

Effectiveness of implementation of the curriculum was defined for the purpose of this evaluation utilizing the following rubric.

Table 1b

| Use of Material | Teacher Understanding of Curriculum | Teacher use of “Best Practices” | Teacher engagement with Curriculum |
|---|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the video utilized? • Is the student illustrations used • Is wizarding notebook utilized? • Is there enough materials for all students? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can teacher complete trick? • Can teacher explain trick? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of differentiation • What teaching methods are used? • Are lessons presented according to student abilities and developmental levels? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What level of engagement does teacher have? |

The following table illustrates the findings of this evaluation report as it relates to the effective implementation of the *Hocus Focustm* curriculum.

| | Classroom A | Classroom B | Classroom C | Classroom D |
|------------------------------|--|---|---|--|
| Use of Material | Video, Student Illustrations, Materials, Wizard notebook | Student Illustrations, Materials, Wizard notebook | Material reviewed, not implemented in class | Video used, curriculum not implemented in class |
| Teacher Understanding | Teacher able to complete tricks taught, ‘harder’ tricks delayed because teacher did not learn them | Teacher able to complete tricks, Teacher modeled story creation to accompany trick. | Teacher can complete some tricks. Stated that he may utilize curriculum to model trick himself in front of class. | Teacher showed video of three different tricks. No follow up |
| “Best Practices” | Scaffolding, model, GP and IP, reflection | Scaffolding, model GP and IP, reflection, what/Know what/So what | Not implemented | Not implemented |
| Engagement | High energy, excited, | High energy, show, excited | Not observed | Not observed |

Table 1c

2.) Does the use of program help the student improve in their abilities in planning, sequencing, organizing tasks and movements, fine motor skills, gross motor function/coordination, concentration, memory skills, communication, social behaviors?

The results from the pre, mid-course and post assessment are listed in table 2a.

Participating teachers were asked to complete a short survey on each participant identifying their level of independence on each of the criteria. The four levels identified were none, emergent, guided and independent. These results were then compiled and each level was given a numerical score. Independent level was rated at a 6, guided a 4, emergent a 2, and none at zero. Ratings for each student were averaged together with the mean average listed for each assessment.

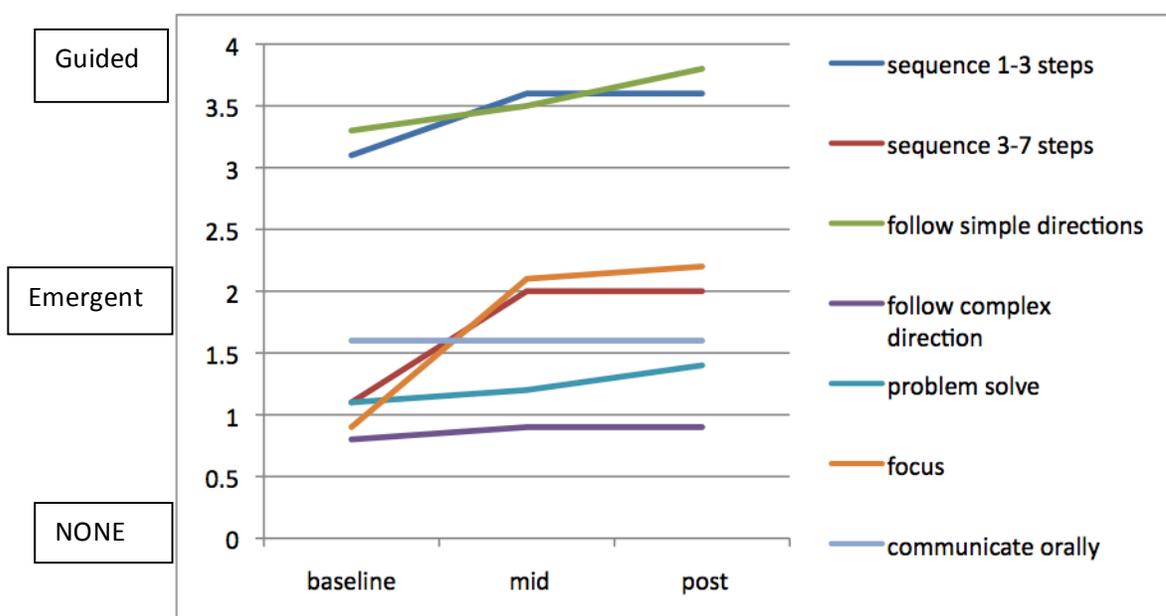


Table 2a

Preliminary results showed positive growth on all measured criteria except in oral communication. The greatest area of improvement was in the area of maintenance of focus. Informal interviews with the participating teachers suggest that the lack of growth in oral communication was because greater emphasis was on the areas of following directions and problem-solving. While this evaluation did not show growth in oral communication growth would be expected in this area as students continue to learn and master the lessons in this curriculum and move into performance of the lessons. Due to time constraints, students were not able to concentrate on the performance of the tricks.

3.) Is the program able to be implemented in cross-platforms?

The four teachers who participated in this evaluation on *Hocus Focus*[™] were asked to comment on the ability of implementation of the curriculum in cross-platforms. The program was able to be implemented in the classroom with students with ED and LD with minimal adaptation or modification. Implementation of curriculum with students with ID, communication disorders, or physical impairment was more challenging and time consuming. In these classrooms student anxiety was elevated when learning new tricks.

Teachers noted in informal interviews that some of the lessons were unable to be completed by some students due to physical impairments and low fine motor skills.

Students were limited in ability to perform tricks in front of audience. Again, this was more prevalent in classrooms containing students with ID, Autism, and physical impairments. Students with ED and/or LD were more likely to be able to perform the tricks in front of a small live audience. The main obstacle to these students was self-confidence and stage fright as identified by the students themselves. Again, due to time constraints on this evaluation these results may be a result of time-constraints not necessarily limit of curriculum.

It is also important to note that students living with Autism were mildly successful in learning and performing of tricks. These students were more persistent in learning the steps and were observed maintaining focus longer on learning a trick than in other classroom situations.

4.) Is the program designed to align with local, state and/or national standards or Grade Level Expectations?

The *Hocus Focus*[™] curriculum and lesson objectives demonstrated alignment with State and national Standards. The evaluation looked at the Grade Level Expectations, Course level expectations and the Common Core State standards in mathematics, English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects. The following table illustrates a small sampling of the alignment between *Hocus Focus*[™] and Missouri State Standards.

Table 4a

| <p>HOCUS FOCUS™</p> | <p>Missouri Course Level Expectations</p> |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Write a short story that aligns with the sequence of movements used in the magic trick | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reading 3f. Develop and apply skills and strategies to comprehend, analyze and evaluate nonfiction F. Understanding directions Read and apply multi-step directions to perform complex procedures and/or tasks |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Write with correct grammar, punctuation, spelling, and capitalization | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Writing 2E. Compose well developed text. In written text apply conventions of capitalization, conventions of punctuation, and standard usage |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use a ruler to measure and mark paper in inches | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Measurement 2A Apply appropriate techniques, tools and formulas to determine measurements Use standard or non-standard measurement |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reverse numbers, Identify smaller and larger numbers, add and subtract 3-digit numbers with and without regrouping | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Numbers and Operations 2D Apply operations on real and complex numbers |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lead another person to complete the moves of the task (with or without the magic move), providing clear directions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Listening and Speaking skills 2B Develop and apply effective speaking skills and strategies for various audiences and purposes Give clear and concise multi-step oral directions to perform complex procedures and/or tasks |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Start and maintain a conversation throughout the performance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Listening and speaking skills 2A 2 Develop and apply effective speaking skills and strategies for various audiences and purposes Discussion and Presentation |

RECOMMENDATIONS

The *Hocus Focus*[™] curriculum is a curriculum that has numerous strengths that make it a valuable asset to today's classroom teacher. The curriculum is laid out in a logical way and its ease of use makes it an accessible curriculum that is easily implemented into the classroom. The lessons are broken down into logical teaching steps, provide both overall and lesson specific objectives. The lesson plans include detailed student illustration sheets that enhance the learning for the student. The inclusion of a CD containing all the supporting documents made it easy for teachers to print out copies of the student illustrations and assessment forms.

The *Hocus Focus*[™] curriculum captures the students' attention immediately and allows them 'in' on the 'secret' of magic. Students spend their time learning instead of watching and actively engage them in both physical and mental capacities. Students are introduced and taught the importance of sequential steps and following directions by the learning of simple magic tricks. These tricks offer enough 'wow' factors to keep the students engaged in the learning process. Students are also encouraged to help each other and to provide constructive feedback to their peers as they learn together.

Suggestions for improvement are minor and few. It was mentioned by all four participating teachers that they wished they had more time to plan and implement the curriculum.

They expressed that the curriculum was accessible and user friendly but still felt that it involved time to learn the tricks well enough to teach them. This time was not available during the evaluation period, which was done during the first semester of the school year and during a time when new district wide initiatives were mandated. It was expressed that time may not be as much of an issue during the second semester of the school year. No data was collected during this evaluation to validate this.

While the *Hocus Focus*[™] curriculum did align with State and National Standards it is the opinion of this evaluator that it would be beneficial to list the exact State or National Standard or provide a chart cross-referencing these standards. This would benefit teachers who are charged with identifying these standards in their lesson plans.

It was also suggested by three of the four participating teachers that the order of the tricks was somewhat problematic. The rubber band tricks required more fine motor skills than some of the other tricks and their position in the curriculum created obstacles to learning for the students that may have been avoided had they taught tricks such as the “floating pencil”, “paper clips” and the first two rope tricks.

As a final note it is of importance to note that overall the reception to the *Hocus Focus*[™] Curriculum was positive by both the teachers and the students involved in this presentation. Those that were involved in the implementation of the curriculum expressed joy and enthusiasm. To sum up one teacher stated, “This is one of the first pre-made curriculums that I have encountered that is accessible, engaging, and achievable in the classroom, even with all of the demands placed on us.”

APPENDIX

- A. **Planning Matrix**
- B. **Observation Checklist**
- C. **Student Skill Observation Data Sheet**
- D. **Hocus Focus Self-Efficacy Scale**
(condensed)
- E. **Hocus Focus Self-Efficacy Scale**
(original)
- F. **Teacher Survey**

