

School-Wide Reading and Behavior Improvement

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America's public schools are places where major confrontations and minor skirmishes occur daily. They are places where teachers often cannot do the jobs for which they are best suited because of continuing concerns about reading problems and disruptive behavior. For more than one hundred years, the most consistent complaints from the parents who send children to schools and professionals who work in them have focused the source of satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) with education regarding learning to read (or the absence of it) and controlling disruptive behavior.

In almost all schools, teachers are faced with very serious challenges related to reading difficulties in young children (cf. National Reading Panel, 2000; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998):

- Debate about reading development and reading instruction has been persistent, exhaustive, and heated, yet high stakes reading assessments reflect less than outstanding performance for many children in most states.
- Large numbers of children have significant difficulties learning to read.
- Failure to learn to read is much more likely among some groups of children.
- Increasing proportions of young children in America's schools are being identified with learning disabilities because of difficulties learning to read.
- Significant investment in providing bilingual education programs for nonnative speakers of English has not been matched with attention to best methods for teaching reading to these individuals.

Another reality in America's elementary schools is that large numbers of children are exhibiting very disruptive behavior creating a growing need for continuing discipline and an ever-growing concern for safety at school (Gresham, MacMillan, & Bocian, 1996; Kamps, Kravits, Stolze, & Swaggart, 1999; McQuillan, DuPaul, Shapiro, & Cole, 1996; Neel, Alexander, & Meadows, 1997; Nelson, 1996; Rose, & Gallup, 1999). Disruptive, challenging behavior also has profound impact on the lives of the individuals exhibiting it. For example, it has long been known and continually shown that children with such

disturbing behavior are more likely to be referred, declared eligible, and placed in special education (Algozzine, 1977; Kauffman, 1999; Wehby, Symons, & Hollo, 1997; Ysseldyke, Algozzine, Richey, & Graden, 1982; Ysseldyke, Algozzine, & Thurlow, 2000). In recent years, the need for maintaining discipline has intensified with teachers' concerns about the growing inclusion of students with behavior problems in their classrooms and the increasing degrees of diversity common in America's schools (Cheney & Barringer, 1995; Kamps, Kravits, Stolze, & Swaggart, 1999; Lewis, Chard, & Scott, 1994; Neel, Alexander, & Meadows, 1997; Tobin, Sugai, & Colvin, 1996; Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 1994; Ysseldyke, Algozzine, & Thurlow, 2000).

Using primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of intervention intensity, the Behavior and Reading Improvement Center at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte is systematically implementing and evaluating school-based models of evidence-based programs and practices to serve children in grades K-3 who are having difficulty learning to read or who are exhibiting serious behaviors that lead to discipline problems as they get older. As a basis for clarifying the project effort for dissemination, the context and need for the project, the levels of intervention being implemented, the levels of support being provided in participating schools, the evidence-based practices being evaluated, and the fundamental research questions are described in the following sections of this paper; each area will be discussed in detail during the proposed presentation.

Context and Need

The Behavior and Reading Information Center (BRIC) is one of six national sites selected to address the needs of students in grades K-3 who are at risk for failure due to difficulties in the areas of reading or behavior or both. Two sites at the University of Texas and the University of Oregon focus exclusively on reading. Two different sites focus exclusively on behavior at the University of Nebraska and the University of Oregon. The Behavior and Reading Improvement Center at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and the center at the University of Kansas have focused on both reading and behavior. A coordinating center in Madison, Wisconsin oversees the efforts of all of the centers.

During the 2002-2003 school year, the BRIC personnel will be working with four treatment schools and two control schools in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District (CMS). The Associate Superintendent of Education Services for CMS selected the schools based on specific criteria, including (a) performance above expectations on state accountability standards, (b) above 40% student participation in free and reduced lunch programs, (c) effective implementation of an early reading program and allocation (120 minutes) of literacy block instructional time, (d) within district median or below student mobility, (e) willingness to use project identified measures as evidence of reading and behavior improvement, and (f) willingness to serve as a site and to collaborate efforts to mentor other schools. The two control schools will become treatment schools in the year 2003-2004 when an additional treatment school and an additional control school from a neighboring school district will be added. In 2004-06, all schools will serve as treatment schools. Although BRIC personnel will be working with grades K-3 to provide interventions in behavior, reading interventions will focus on grades K-1 in the year 2002-03, grades K-2 year 2003-04, and K-3 years 2004-06.

Children participating in the project (a) come from backgrounds of poverty as indicated by high rates of free or reduced lunch, (b) live in neighborhoods with high violent crime rates, (c) experience marked difficulties learning to read and/or exhibit behaviors that lead to discipline problems, and, (d) likely develop high rates of school problems that are viewed as the foundation for identification with learning disabilities and emotional disturbance if not corrected. Schools participating in the project serve a large percentage of children with this profile and share a commitment to school-wide adoption, implementation, and evaluation of systematic, evidence-based, and unified primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention strategies for addressing behavior and reading challenges.

Levels of Intervention

All students participate in the *primary* level of intervention--universal instruction to reduce the onset of reading difficulties and behavior problems, including evidence-based school-wide reading and behavior programs. At the *secondary* level, students receive supplemental support because assessment of reading and behavior indicates that what has been offered at the primary level is not enough for them to

experience success, including instructional strategies and behavior improvement practices that address small groups of students. At the *tertiary* level, particularly challenged students receive very intense, individualized, specialized, consistent, closely monitored support, including one-on-one assistance for those who, despite previous instruction and intervention efforts, experience marked difficulties in learning to read or chronic behavior problems. These three levels of intervention provide the framework for the delivery of services to help all children attain on grade level reading benchmarks and behave appropriately in school. Several levels of professional development support the intervention efforts.

Levels of Support

A specific objective of the Behavior and Reading Improvement Center is to provide professional development designed to sustain the three levels of intervention past the life of the grant. Each school involved with the project has an on-site Center Support Coordinator (CSC). This is a full-time grant supported faculty member at each school. The CSC's help project personnel respond to the needs of all children at their school. They receive ongoing professional development in the areas of assessment and delivery of interventions and they meet with teachers regularly to plan instructional and behavioral approaches based on assessment data. They assist with professional development activities for teachers, model lessons and procedures, observe and provide constructive feedback, and work with teacher assistants to make best use of their time in the classrooms. They will also help teachers incorporate successful interventions at the primary, secondary, and tertiary level based on the individual needs of students. Additional professional development related to home and community involvement is provided by consultants from the local Exceptional Children's Assistance Center through workshops designed to build parent awareness of evidence-based reading and behavior interventions taught to their children.

Evidence-Based Practices

The Behavior and Reading Improvement Center is supporting schools in two critical areas. The conceptual model for improving reading is grounded in a systematic approach that provides a school-wide program based on evidence-based practices and widely-accepted principles of instructional design. This approach emphasizes teaching phonological and phonemic awareness to all students, including those at

risk for reading disabilities and reading failure. The conceptual model for improving behavior is grounded in a systematic approach that provides a school-wide behavior management program derived from evidence-based practices with an emphasis on positive behavioral support that can be implemented inexpensively. The Project is implementing and evaluating a full continuum of evidence-based practices including primary prevention/universal instruction to avert the onset of behavioral problems, secondary prevention strategies that address small groups of students who need additional support or assistance to successfully acquire new skills in reading and behavior, and tertiary prevention that involves more intense, specialized interventions for individual students who despite previous instruction and intervention efforts experience marked difficulties in learning to read and chronic behavioral problems.

Preventing Reading Problems. Recent summaries of research have emphasized the importance of phonics as a primary decoding strategy for beginning readers (e.g., Adams, 1990; National Reading Panel, 2000). Early reading instruction is most effective when it uses explicit, systematic, phonics as a primary decoding strategy, reinforced with highly decodable text (Chard & Osborn, 1999). The primary reading intervention in participating schools (i.e., *Open Court*) emphasizes key aspects of effective early reading instruction and the project effort supports teachers in the effective use of this evidence-based program. Coupled with this is the need for a close monitoring system to insure consistent progress by students. When students fail to reach benchmarks or if students are already reading below grade level, secondary interventions are provided incorporating instructional design principles of an evidence-based beginning reading framework developed at the National Center to Improve the Tools of Educators at the University of Oregon (cf. Coyne, Kame'enui, & Simmons, 2001; Kame'enui & Carnine, 1998). Secondary interventions in reading use teacher expertise in identifying error patterns and provide small group instruction on specific reading difficulties, using materials which provide sufficiently intense and focused practice directed toward helping students make rapid gains (e.g., *Practice Court*, a project developed intensive reading instructional program). When weekly progress monitoring fails to show these gains, tertiary strategies are employed. The most challenged readers are provided with daily, one-on-one supplementary instruction (e.g., *Reading Mastery*) on phonological awareness skills essential for success

in beginning reading (cf. Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 1998; National Reading Panel, 2000; Wanzek, Dickson, Bursuck, & White, 2000). At each of these levels teachers receive project led training, consistent monitoring and consultation services, and help in collecting, analyzing, and making instructional decisions based on formative evaluation data.

Preventing Behavior Problems. Toward the goal of primary intervention of behavior problems, the Behavior and Reading Improvement Center is implementing the Unified Discipline model that incorporates all aspects of effective school-wide discipline models (Algozzine, Audette, Ellis, Marr, & White, 2000). The project participants use a variety of secondary prevention procedures that address small groups of students who need additional support or assistance to successfully acquire new behavior skills. Effective *group and individual contingency procedures* with strong *reinforcement* components for encouraging appropriate student behavior are among the evidence-based strategies that are used to address behavior problems that remain unmanaged by application of the school-wide primary prevention program (i.e., Unified Discipline). Tertiary (more intense, specialized) prevention methods, such as one-on-one interventions, will be used for individual students who despite previous instruction and intervention efforts experience chronic behavioral problems. In selecting these strategies, project personnel rely on extant resources (cf. Algozzine & Kay, 2001; Algozzine, Ysseldyke, & Elliott, 2000; Beck, 2000; Rhode, Jenson, & Reavis, 1992; Sprick & Howard, 2000; Sprick, Howard, Wise, Marcum, & Haykin, 1998), expert panels, and collaboration with other professionals. Prior research and experience with Unified Discipline suggests that small percentages of students require secondary (e.g., *Think Time or First Step to Success*) or tertiary strategies (e.g., individualized behavior support plan).

Work-In-Progress

The opportunity to assess student outcomes in reading and behavior provides the unique opportunity to add to the knowledge base in evidence-based prevention and intervention practices as well as to research the link between success in reading and behavior. Toward this goal, the following research questions are being answered:

- What do we know about effective primary, secondary, and tertiary level interventions being implemented in area schools?
- What do we need to know about primary, secondary, and tertiary interventions being implemented in area schools?
- What effects do effective implementations of primary, secondary, and tertiary level interventions have on school outcomes?
- What are critical components of a 3-tiered prevention system?
- What proportion of students require secondary and tertiary level interventions?
- What is the nature of professional development needed to implement a 3-tiered prevention system?
- What are the effects of a 3-tiered prevention system?
- What is the treatment acceptability and integrity of a 3-tiered prevention system and how does acceptability and integrity relate to outcomes?
- What is the cost-effectiveness of a 3-tiered prevention system?

The need for comprehensive and continuing intervention within the context of teaching reading and improving behavior is clear. The Behavior and Reading Improvement Center is (a) implementing systemic and cost-effective, school-wide, small group, and one-on-one (i.e., primary, secondary, and tertiary) improvements in the provision of reading interventions in grades K-3, including systems for professional development and technical assistance, (b) implementing systemic and cost-effective, school-wide, small group, and one-on-one (i.e., primary, secondary, and tertiary) improvements in the provision of behavior interventions in grades K-3, including systems for professional development and technical assistance, and (c) improving reading and behavior results for children in grades K-3. Using collegial networks at each participating school, building understanding in informal discussions with change agents, and linking changes in teaching to student performance data support the efforts to implement practices that are sustainable beyond the duration of the project. The work will add significantly to the knowledge, understanding, development, and advancement of effective, evidence-based practices to serve children in

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grades K-3 who are identified as having marked difficulty learning to read or who exhibit serious behaviors that lead to discipline problems as they get older. A discussion of the effort as well as all progress to date will be the focus of the proposed presentation.

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