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Toward True Integration of Response to Intervention Systems in Academic and Behavior Support: Part Three: Tier 3 Support

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Toward True Integration of Academic and Behavior Response to Intervention Systems
Part Three: Tier 3 Support

BY KENT MCINTOSH, HANK BOHANON, & STEVE GOODMAN

In articles one and two in this series, we described strategies for integrating academic and behavior response to intervention (RTI) systems at Tiers 1 and 2 (McIntosh, Goodman, & Bohanan, 2010; McIntosh, Bohanan, & Goodman, 2010). This article will illustrate how integrated academic and behavior RTI systems can work at Tier 3. When students are not successful with academic or behavior support at Tiers 1 and 2, more resources need to be dedicated to support them. These resources include the time required in increasing support and the technical skills required for intervening and monitoring progress. Because ameliorating intensive student challenges requires school personnel with the most highly specialized skill sets, school and district resources can easily be wasted without a systems approach to providing academic and behavior support. Support that is arranged in "silos" of separate academic and behavior intervention creates barriers, especially when problems spill over into other areas when the level of student need intensifies. Students at Tier 3 require intensive instruction, and integrated support may help provide students with more opportunities for practice and success across both domains. Consequently, integrating these systems can make support both more comprehensive and more streamlined.

INTEGRATING TIER 3 SUPPORT

When progress monitoring data show an inadequate response to the efficient support provided in Tier 2, more intensive and individualized support is indicated. However, the same teaming and decision-making structures used in Tier 2 still apply at Tier 3 (McIntosh, Bohanan, & Goodman, 2010). Because teaming at Tier 3 involves the same activities of screening, assessment, intervention, and progress monitoring, it makes more sense to rely on the same integrated support teams for both tiers than create specific Tier 3 teams. At times, the school team may need to invite additional members (e.g., family members, mental health experts, community agency representatives) to create student-specific wraparound teams (Eber et al., 2009), but the integrated support team can still coordinate and monitor the effectiveness of support. The characteristic distinction between Tiers 2 and 3 is the intensification and individualization of support that occurs at Tier 3. This difference can be seen most clearly in the processes of assessment and intervention.

Assessment. Though Tier 2 assessment may focus on efficiency of assessment to conserve resources for intervention (Vaughn & Fletcher, 2010), Tier 3 support can be hindered by too little attention to assessment. One of the clear benefits of an RTI system is the rich amount of data collected before Tier 3 support begins. Integrated support teams can review previously collected Tier 2 progress monitoring data and identify what additional information is needed to plan effective support.

It is useful to assess functioning in three domains: academic performance, behavior needs, and quality of life. Though it may seem unnecessary to assess needs in each domain if the presenting problem is in one area only, there is a strong likelihood that intensive problems in one area will lead to problems in the others (McIntosh, Horner, Chard, Boland, & Good, 2006; Reinke, Herman, Petras, & Ialongo, 2008). In these situations, it can be helpful to identify whether academic skills deficits evoke problem behavior to escape tasks or attention-maintained problem behavior is disrupting academic instruction, as each circumstance has different implications for intervention. Moreover, students with challenges in academics or behavior are at risk for diminished quality of life because behavior challenges restrict access to positive social outcomes, and academic challenges often necessarily lead to the replacement of nonacademic subjects where a student may experience success (e.g., art, music, physical education) with additional instruction in an subject in which they struggle (e.g., remedial instruction). As a result, diminished quality of life can then further degrade both academic and behavior performance.

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At Tier 3, bringing in family members can enhance the selection of targets for intervention, encourage effective problem solving, and build an alliance that can extend support across settings (Esler, Godber, & Christenson, 2008). If a child has limited support outside of the school environment, there may be barriers in access to academic support at home and consistency in monitoring and acknowledging prosocial behavior throughout the day. As a result, school personnel and families alike can experience frustration with the assessment process. Therefore, assessment in all of the systems of an individual's life (e.g., school, home, peers, community) can be beneficial in improving outcomes (Henggeler, Schoenwald, Borduin, Rowland, & Cunningham, 2009).

The functional behavior assessment–behavior support planning (FBA–BSP) process is a helpful framework for organizing integrated Tier 3 assessment and intervention. Though it is more commonly associated with behavior support for students with significant needs (O'Neill et al., 1997), Tier 3 academic and integrated interventions can also benefit from this logic of comprehensive skill-based and environmental support (Witt, Daly, & Noell, 2000). Moreover, there is ample evidence of its effectiveness in general education settings (McIntosh, Brown, & Borgmeier, 2008). Through the FBA–BSP process, teams identify a hypothesis statement, including (a) a clear definition of the behavior of concern, (b) the immediate antecedents, (c) the setting events, and (d) the maintaining consequences. Quality of life assessment, in the areas of emotional, environmental, and social well-being (Poston et al., 2003) can then be used to identify potential alternative behaviors and long term objectives. Additional Tier 3 assessment can involve diagnostic assessment, including brief experimental analysis (Daly, Andersen, Gortmaker, & Turner, 2006) and can't do/won't do assessment (VanDerHeyden & Witt, 2008).

Intervention. Though it may be more efficient to provide separate academic and behavior interventions at Tier 2 (McIntosh, Bohanan, & Goodman, 2010), integrated support is necessary for enhanced outcomes at Tier 3. A key feature of Tier 3 support is the focus on individualized intervention matched to student need. Consideration of both academic and behavior difficulties allows for a more comprehensive individualized intervention. In the FBA–BSP process, the hypothesis statement is used to identify strategies that will make problems (or academic errors) unlikely, inefficient, and ineffective (Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, & Hagan, 1998). Specific strategies are generated and selected based on their potential effectiveness and fit with the skills, resources, and values of the implementers and stakeholders (Albin, Lucyshyn, Horner, & Flannery, 1996). Strategies are organized by (a) behavior strategies, (b) antecedent strategies, (c) setting event strategies, and (d) consequence strategies. The result is a comprehensive plan integrating academic, behavioral, and quality of life interventions.

Behavior strategies. Academic and behavior interventions both focus on teaching as the most important intervention in education. Academic interventions involve teaching important skills that are missing or deficient. Behavior interventions also involve missing or deficient skills, though with a focus on teaching missing or underused prosocial skills.

For remediation of any skill (academic or behavior), interventions must include high quality instruction. High quality instruction (a) focuses on critical, functional skills, (b) uses explicit teaching, (c) is carefully sequenced, (d) emphasizes the use of conspicuous strategies, (e) uses scaffolding to promote student success, (f) utilizes prior knowledge, and (g) provides regular opportunities for practice (Coyne, Kame'enui, & Carnine, 2007). Intervention strategies may involve a range of instructional methods.

When academic skills are the targets for change, it is important to identify the right specific skill to target. The instructional hierarchy (acquisition, fluency, generalization, and adaptation; Haring, Lovitt, Eaton, & Hansen, 1978), in combination with validated models of academic development, can inform the identification of target skills. For example, low accuracy indicates the need to focus on acquisition, with performance feed-

Figure 1: Hypothesis statement and integrated support plan for Keenan.

HYPOTHESIS STATEMENT	SUPPORT PLAN STRATEGIES
Setting Event Experiences of academic failure earlier in the school day (e.g., failing a quiz)	**Setting Event Strategies** Provide high interest reading materials (low rider cars) at his level for pleasure reading Involve in activities with high interest and probability of success (graphic arts)
Antecedent Presented with Grade 6 level reading material during independent reading	**Antecedent Strategies** Provide individualized academic support targeting reading fluency Provide graphic organizer for independent reading tasks Remind to use alternative behavior before reading period
Behavior Negative self-talk (e.g., "I can't do this," "I'm stupid"), leading to work refusal (puts head on desk and doesn't acknowledge requests)	**Behavior Strategies** Teach alternative behaviors: ■ Request to read preferred reading materials (at his level) ■ Positive self-talk (e.g., "I'm getting better with practice")
Consequence Escapes academic task (independent reading)	**Consequence Strategies** Prompt use of alternative behavior when he uses negative self-talk Ensure that he completes independent reading (assigned or preferred materials)

back as a critical component, whereas high accuracy but low rates of responding indicate fluency as a goal, with extensive practice as important (Daly, Lentz, & Boyer, 1996).

When problem behavior is the target for change, the instructional hierarchy can also be used, but the primary focus is on teaching functionally equivalent alternative behaviors, behaviors that serve the same function as problem behavior but are more socially appropriate (O'Neill et al., 1997). For instance, students can learn to request assistance or escape from a frustrating activity. Students can also be taught to solicit peer or adult attention appropriately or self-monitor their progress and initiate problem solving as needed.

Antecedent strategies. Antecedent strategies involve changing the environment to make desired skills less difficult to perform. For example, the difficulty of tasks can be reduced to match the student's instructional level (Lee, Sugai, & Horner, 1999). Common strategies also include providing a distraction-free work environment and scaffolding, through the use of advanced organizers, or assistance from adults or peers. When academic task demands are the antecedents to problem behavior, these academic skills can be pretaught to make the task easier to perform, thereby preventing the need for problem behavior. In addition, before situations where challenges are likely, students can be reminded to use alternative behaviors instead of problem behaviors (Colvin, Sugai, Good, & Lee, 1997).

Setting event strategies. Setting event strategies involve preventing or neutralizing environmental conditions that inhibit desired performance (Horner, Vaughn, Day, & Ard, 1996). These strategies can be considered as steps to reduce distractions and enhance the environment to optimize student learning and performance, often in the form of addressing quality of life needs identified through the assessment process (Eber et al., 2009; Kincaid, 1996). Though setting events can occur during school hours, school challenges can also be intensified by challenges outside of school that affect academic or behavior performance (e.g., sleeping in class because there is no bed at home; Edmonson & Turnbull, 2002). In these circumstances, the home environment can be targeted as part of a comprehensive plan to help enhance school performance (e.g., helping the student get to school on time, providing a quiet space and performance feedback for homework completion; Esler et al., 2008). In other circumstances, problems in or out of school cannot be prevented, but neutralizing routines can be used to minimize their effects (Horner, Day, & Day, 1997). For example, engaging students in positive or neutral interactions that are not related to academic or behavior problems may reduce feelings of isolation and enhance school engagement.

Consequence strategies. Consequence strategies involve ensuring that the desired behaviors are reinforced and problem behaviors are not inadvertently reinforced. One of the critical aspects of these strategies is to help students make the connection between desired behaviors and natural reinforcement. For instance, completing activities to improve reading fluency should help students read materials in their interest areas more easily. Behavior interventions should be designed to lead to enhanced capacity to build and maintain positive social interactions or cope more effectively with difficult situations. However, before students can access natural reinforcement for using desired skills, structured reinforcement systems can be effective to acknowledge small successes and encourage use and practice until they can use them independently (Akin-Little, Eckert, Lovett, & Little, 2004). In the case of problem behavior, it is important to ensure that the alternative behavior is functional—that it provides access to preferred interactions, activities or objects, or escape from aversive situations (O'Neill et al., 1997).

In addition, it is important to ensure that problem behavior is not inadvertently reinforced. For example, work refusal can be reinforced by removing the request. Instead, school personnel can encourage the student to ask for a break, upon which a brief break from the task can be provided, and the task can be reattempted when the student is ready. Adding punishment procedures should only be considered once all other components of a plan are in place. As long as problem behavior is not reinforced, punishment may not be needed for plans to be effective.

CASE STUDY EXAMPLE

To illustrate how the FBA–BSP process can be used for integrated Tier 3 academic and behavior support, we provide an example of a fictitious Grade 6 student named Keenan. After his needs were identified through universal screening, Keenan was provided Tier 2 reading support focusing on decoding with positive outcomes, and reading accuracy was no longer a concern. However, the small group repeated reading intervention was not leading to adequate progress, and his teachers were starting to be concerned with increasing "shutting down" problem behavior. Based on referral information and a functional behavioral assessment interview, the integrated support team identified the hypothesis statement in the left column of Figure 1. Keenan's teachers and parents were keen to incorporate his strengths and interests (reading about and illustrating low rider cars) into the plan to address long-term goals regarding self-confidence and school engagement.

Given this information, the team identified strategies in the right column for an integrated support plan. The plan included both academic and behavior strategies, which would typically have been provided separately, by separate teams. The team selected the setting event and antecedent strategies that were most likely to prevent the need for problem behavior. Because Keenan's academic difficulties played a critical—even causal—role in his problem behavior, his behavior was unlikely to improve without academic support. Thus, the plan included intensive academic support targeting his

reading fluency and additional scaffolding in the form of graphic organizers.

The team also identified an alternative behavior to replace work refusal. Keenan was taught that when he felt frustrated, he could request to read preferred reading materials and use positive self-talk to counter negative thoughts. Consequence strategies were selected to ensure that he would use the alternative behaviors when frustrated and would work during independent work time, reading either the assigned work or his preferred materials.

Finally, the team created a plan for monitoring implementation and effectiveness. The team created a detailed intervention plan that included a detailed, daily checklist to ensure that strategies were implemented, and Keenan's progress was measured through daily behavior report card points and weekly oral reading fluency probes. Measuring both academic and social progress was noted as critical in enhancing Keenan's success in both areas. To enhance engagement in the support plan and school in general, Keenan was encouraged to lead his IEP meetings, where he would share his data and provide input into the plan.

CONCLUSION

As the case study shows, implementing separate, independent Tier 3 academic and behavioral support systems has clear drawbacks. When the magnitude of academic and behavior problems increase, so do the resources, environmental structures, and data needed to address the problems. As a result, support should be aligned in such a way that each team can identify their responsibilities, keep the other teams informed, and know when to move support up or down the triangle. By integrating both models, it is hoped that teams can operate more efficiently, provide more comprehensive support, and avoid being overwhelmed by multiple initiatives. ∎

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