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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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Implementing RTI

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, Bohanon, & Bohah, 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 supports. For this reason, students are more likely to receive appropriate support if they are labeled based on their level of need, 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 support 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 wrap-around 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, Boal, & Good, 2006; Reineke, Herman, Petros, & 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 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 support across both domains. Consequently, integrating these systems can make support both more comprehensive and more streamlined.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HYPOTHESIS STATEMENT</th>
<th>SUPPORT PLAN STRATEGIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting Event</td>
<td>Setting Event Strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences of academic failure earlier in the school day (e.g., failing a quiz)</td>
<td>Provide high interest reading materials (low rider cars) at his level for pleasure reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antecedent</td>
<td>Antecedent Strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presented with Grade 6 level reading material during independent reading</td>
<td>Provide individualized academic support targeting reading fluency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior</td>
<td>Behavior Strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escapes academic task (independent reading)</td>
<td>Teach alternative behaviors:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ Request to read preferred reading materials (at his level)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ Positive self-talk (e.g., “I’m getting better with practice”)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Consequence

Figure 1: Hypothesis statement and integrated support plan for Keenan.
back as a critical component, whereas high accuracy but low rates of responding indicate fluency as a goal, with extensive practice as important (Daly, Lents, & Boyer, 1996).

When problem behavior is the target for change, the instructional hierarchy can be used 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; Kinsaid, 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; Edmondson & 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; Eser 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 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 order to enhance the system, 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 that Keenan’s teachers and parents were keen to increase 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 he would use the alternative behavior 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 behavior 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 repeated reading can operate more effectively to provide more comprehensive support, and avoid being overwhelmed by multiple initiatives.