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Providing Performance Feedback for Teachers to Increase Treatment Fidelity

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Abstract

This article reviewed a method for increasing teachers' use of behavior-specific praise, which is especially important for students with emotional and behavioral disabilities. The use of performance feedback has been researched fairly extensively and has yielded positive outcomes when compared with other forms of consultation. This article provides research to support the use of performance feedback as well as a framework for building systems to support implementation.

Keywords

performance feedback, fidelity, implementation, coaching, consultation

It is clear that for evidence-based interventions to be effective they must be implemented with integrity. As more schools strive to implement evidence-based practices, the need for systemic support to increase implementation integrity has become clear (Domitrovich, Gest, Jones, Gill, & Sanford DeRousie, 2010). Specifically related to teacher implementation, research has clearly documented that teachers face challenges learning, utilizing, and sustaining their use of new practices, especially in the area of social behavior interventions (Hemmeter, Snyder, Kinder, & Artman, 2011; Mesa, Lewis-Palmer, & Reinke, 2005; Riley-Tillman & Eckert, 2001). Teachers also self-report they desire more training in this area (Reinke, Stormont, Herman, Puri, & Goel, 2011). The need for support is even greater for general educators, as they receive minimal training and struggle to identify evidence-based practices for children with social behavior problems (Stormont, Reinke, & Herman, 2011).

Students with social behavior problems need teachers to be prepared to use simple, effective strategies to support their use of more appropriate behavior. As schools build capacity to support teachers' implementation of evidence-based

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practices, increased efforts toward professional development are targeted. Research in the areas of professional development and implementation science across multiple fields clearly underscores the importance of attending to multiple influences on fidelity of implementation (Domitrovich et al., 2010; Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005; Noell et al., 2005; Reinke, Herman, Stormont, Newcomer, & David, in press). One contributing factor for fidelity is teacher knowledge of the intervention and how to use it with integrity. A second factor is the need for more support for implementation in classroom settings. Research has found that one-shot professional development does not work (e.g., Joyce & Showers, 2002). It is clear that when new skills are learned they are vulnerable and need support for sustained use (Fixsen et al., 2005; Noell et al., 2005). Past research has found that teachers reported they were using an intervention as intended, but direct observational data clearly indicated they were not (Noell et al., 2005). Thus, especially when using new strategies, teachers need more ongoing support to maintain and/or generalize their use (Kretlow & Batholomew, 2010). One very promising practice to support teachers' use of new interventions is to provide data-based performance feedback, which will be referred to hereafter as *performance feedback* (Solomon, Klein, & Politylo, 2012). Performance feedback includes direct observations of specific teacher behaviors in an applied setting followed by feedback on the behavior. The remainder of this article outlines a framework for providing performance feedback to students using the example of *behavior-specific praise*.

Choosing and Training to the Intervention

It is important that schools select an evidence-based program or intervention for improving students' social behavior outcomes. Schools could target increasing teachers' use of effective, more universal practices, such as behavior-specific praise or active supervision. Other options for interventions include selecting an evidence-based program such as the Good Behavior Game (Barrish, Saunders, & Wolf, 1969) or a system-wide approach such as school-wide positive behavior interventions and supports (Sugai & Horner, 2002). Additionally, teachers could be trained in more targeted interventions for students in their classrooms with challenging behaviors (Stormont, Reinke, Herman, & Lembke, 2012). In this article the use of behavior-specific praise is outlined. Behavior-specific praise is one of the most effective tools teachers can use to increase students' appropriate behavior and reduce disruptive behavior in classrooms; however, it is clear that teachers need to specifically plan to use praise because they don't use it at high rates (Stormont, Smith, & Lewis, 2007). Once the specifics of the intervention are decided, it is critical to provide adequate training. Training should include the explicit instruction in the use of the intervention, which includes modeling, practice, and feedback. Next teachers need to demonstrate mastery of specific steps in training settings and then in their classroom setting. The use of performance feedback has been well documented as an effective support for teacher implementation of new skills in classroom settings (Jones, Wickstrom, & Friman, 1997; Mortenson & Witt, 1998; Noell et al., 2000; Noell, Witt, Gilbertson, Ranier, & Freeland, 1997; Reinke, Lewis-Palmer, & Martin, 2007; Reinke, Lewis-Palmer, & Merrell, 2008; Solomon et al., 2012; Sutherland, Wehby, & Copeland, 2000; Witt, Noell, LaFleur, & Mortenson, 1997). Teachers need this level of support for social behavior interventions, including behavior-specific praise, because they report they do not receive enough training in this area, and they are likely to not generalize information learned in a professional development training to their classroom setting (Reinke, Herman, Stormont, Newcomer, & David, in press). Specific examples of how performance feedback can be provided follow. While the focus of this article is on behavior-specific praise, the framework could certainly apply to other social and academic interventions as well.

Delivery of Performance Feedback

Select a Skilled Professional

Ideally the person providing performance feedback should have a background in both social behavior interventions and consultation. Professionals with this expertise who are in schools may include special educators, school psychologists, school counselors, and behavior consultants. Often this person is referred to as a coach because he or she is providing ongoing support to increase teachers' use of new skills.

Build Rapport

It is critical that the professional serving as a coach has consultation experience because one of the first things coaches need to do with teachers is develop mutual respect. A coach who builds rapport with a teacher will be able to utilize the teacher-coach relationship to overcome barriers to implementation. One of the first barriers that may occur is a lack of buy-in. If teachers do not feel the intervention is valuable, appropriate, important, and/or will be effective, then they may resist implementation efforts. Coaches who have good rapport with teachers can engage the teachers by making the intervention content relevant to the teacher's experiences and values. Thus, coaches also have to be effective communicators. Further, within the context of an effective relationship, teacher concerns are more likely to be expressed and then can be explored by the coach (see Reinke, Herman, & Sprick, 2011). Building positive relationships is important for supporting teachers as they learn and execute new skills

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as teachers may face challenges in translating new skills to practice. Ongoing problem solving with teachers is a key component of coaching and requires that teachers feel comfortable discussing challenges with the coach. Coaches who build a collaborative relationship with the teacher are more likely to identify strategies for overcoming these challenges that the teacher is willing to try in their classroom. While the coach has a level of expertise, so does the classroom teacher, thus collaboration around how the teacher will implement behavior-specific praise within the classroom is vital. When providing feedback to the teacher on how he or she is implementing specific strategies, the teacher can reflect on the information with the coach and participate in setting goals for future performance. Building on progress, having teachers self-reflect on their progress, and praising teachers for their efforts are critical components for both rapport building and teachers' behavior change (see Reinke, Stormont, Webster-Stratton, Newcomer, & Herman, 2012).

Determine Setting for Observation

The setting for the performance feedback needs to be determined according to where the intervention delivery is most appropriate. Often teachers select the time and setting where they are struggling with behavior problems the most. The classroom then should be visited by the coach so the coach can gather observation data that can be utilized to give feedback to the teacher. Part of the coaching relationship is also making sure that the teacher understands the purpose of the observation. In particular, establishing that the purpose of the observation is not to evaluate, but to determine areas of strengths and for targeting improvement.

Determining What Type of Data to Gather

One of the most important aspects of using performance feedback to increase teacher use of new skills or intervention is to gather data on the critical components of the intervention during a time when the new skill is being utilized. To determine what type of observational data to gather, begin by articulating the critical intervention components that are observable teacher behaviors. Identifying what data should be gathered can be done in collaboration between the coach and teacher to ensure that data gathered are accurate and useful. For instance, if the teacher is attempting to use more behavior-specific praise with a student displaying challenging behaviors, it would be important to gather the rate of behavior-specific praise directed to the student. The coach would observe with a specific definition of behavior-specific praise in mind—a definition that aligns directly with what the teacher was trained to do. Thus, a simple frequency count of how many times the teacher provides behavior-specific praise to the student during a given observation can be used to provide performance feedback. Table 1 provides examples of how performance feedback data systems can be set up and utilized.

While it is imperative that the observation collect information on the specific skills the teacher is attempting to employ, it is also wise to gather data on the associated outcomes. For instance, if a teacher is providing behavior-specific praise to a student displaying challenging behavior, gathering data on the specific behaviors that the intervention is intended to decrease is warranted. If the student behavior is noncompliant, which takes the form of verbally refusing to comply, walking away from the teacher, or ignoring requests, then the observation should also track the student behaviors. Again, in this case a frequency count of the behaviors could be compiled. Gathering data on the associated outcomes of interventions can be used in tandem with teacher performance of intervention components to evaluate whether it is working.

Determine When and How to Deliver Feedback

Feedback is most effective when it is immediate, preferably right after the observation or at least within 24 hours. In many studies that have used performance feedback, the delivery was immediately following the observation of the teacher (Noell et al., 2005; Reinke et al., 2007, 2008). The majority of research on performance feedback for teachers' use of social behavior interventions has utilized verbal and/or visual feedback. Table 2 provides some examples of performance feedback plans.

Research on performance feedback has highlighted that feedback can be effectively delivered through multiple formats. This allows the provider of performance feedback some flexibility. Verbal feedback has been the most common (Reinke, Stormont, Herman, & Newcomer, in press). Most of the research on the use of verbal feedback was delivered in person; however, one study discussed providing feedback over the phone. Graphic depictions of teachers' use of different strategies has been an effective way to change teacher behavior (e.g., Reinke et al., 2007, 2008). See Figure 1 for an example of graphically depicting teacher use of specific praise and student disruptive behavior. One consideration when using graphs providing feedback of teacher use of strategies, some time needs to be devoted to ensuring that the teacher understands and correctly interprets the graph. In other research, emails were sent to teachers to provide feedback on their use of the intervention (Fullerton, Conroy, & Correa, 2009; Hemmeter et al., 2011). Barton, Kinder, Casey, and Artman (2011) provided guidelines for determining which type of feedback would work best, including the use of email as a mechanism for delivering feedback.

Support Individual Differences

Just as children require different levels of supports, so do teachers. In terms of coaching, some teachers may require

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Table 1. Performance Feedback With Examples.

Feedback description	Example across feedback type
Verbal: Feedback delivered following an observation either immediately at the end of the observation or at a scheduled meeting time. Can be used for simple or complex skills. Can be used to provide global or specific feedback.	Mrs. White is a fifth-grade teacher who has been teaching for 20 years. She requested assistance with managing disruptive classroom behaviors and has been meeting with Sandy, the district behavior specialist, to develop a plan for areas she could improve her classroom management. Sandy observed during the afternoon math class, the time of day the students were exhibiting the most disruptive behaviors. Sandy counted the number of praise statement, disruptive classroom behaviors, and observed globally the teacher's relationship with students and the students' awareness of classroom expectations. Sandy met with Mrs. White at a meeting time at the end of the day to discuss the observation. Sandy noted that Mrs. White seemed to have a very good relationship with the students. The students clearly felt comfortable with her. She also noted that she observed Mrs. White's positive to negative ratio with the student to be 1:4. Sandy asked if that surprised Mrs. White. Mrs. White indicated that she was surprised and that she would like to change that in her classroom. Sandy told her that the classroom expectations may not be clear to the students because many of them would be calling out or walking around the room during instruction for which Mrs. White redirected them. Mrs. White agreed that the expectations could be clearer. Together Mrs. White worked on a plan for teaching students the expectations in the classroom and then reinforcing students meeting these expectations by using behavior-specific praise.
Email: Feedback delivered by email following an observation. Can be used with simple or complex skills. Can be used to provide global or specific feedback.	(Variation of previous example): Sandy emailed Mrs. White following her observation. The email provided an overview of the purpose of the observation. Next, Sandy began by describing the positive attributes of the classroom and Mrs. White's management style. Next, she described areas for improvement, including clarifying expectations and increasing the amount of praise delivered to students meeting expectations. Mrs. White was able to read the note at home and reflect on the information prior to meeting with Sandy the next day to develop a plan for next steps.
Brief handwritten note: Feedback delivered immediately after an observation that summarizes the observation. Can be used with simple or complex skills. Can be used to provide global or specific feedback.	(Variation of previous example): Sandy made notes during an observation of Mrs. White's classroom. In the note, she noted positive aspects of the teacher's relationship with her students. Next, she noted areas for possible improvement. Lastly, she thanked Mrs. White for allowing her to visit the classroom to observe. Mrs. White was able to review the note during her planning time. She reflected on the information. She decided she would work to clarify expectations in her classroom and increase her use of praise. She emailed Sandy to thank her for the visit and to schedule another observation the following week.
Visual feedback: Feedback delivered graphically. Can be used with discrete skills that can be counted.	(Follow-up from previous example): Mrs. White developed a plan to teach students in her classroom to raise their hands to answer and to give their full attention during instruction. She modeled for them what the behaviors would look like and then had them practice. She did this three days in a row until the students were very clear about the expectations. She provided behavior-specific praise to students who met the expectation. Sandy came to observe during the afternoon math class at the end of the week. Sandy counted the number of behavior-specific praise statements she observed Mrs. White use and the number of disruptive behaviors from students. Following the observation Sandy graphed the number of praise statements and the number of disruptive behaviors. She emailed the graph to Mrs. White to view at the end of the day.
Checklist: Feedback delivered using a checklist or rubric. Can be used with skills that can be broken down into a series of steps or components.	(Follow-up from previous example): Mrs. White met with the coach to develop a plan to teach students expectations and to increase her use of behavior-specific praise. They developed a checklist of the important components to teaching expectations, which included (a) stating the rule and describing why it was an important rule, (b) modeling successfully meeting the expectations, (c) demonstrating what being unsuccessful might look like, (d) asking the students what was wrong in the demonstration of unsuccessful behaviors, (e) having students practice the expectation, and (f) reinforcing the students for meeting the expectations using behavior-specific praise. Sandy came to the classroom when Mrs. White was implementing the plan. She used a checklist to mark off whether each component was completed by Mrs. White. She noted that Mrs. White provided only two behavior-specific praise statements during the observation.

more frequent coaching and more time with the coach. In recent research it was documented that a coach spent more time with teachers who used more reprimands and had more disruptions in their classrooms (Reinke et al., in press). Further, investigation of how the coach spent time with teachers indicated that those who received more performance

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Table 2. Coach Plans for Delivery of Performance Feedback.

Target teacher behavior	Setting observed	Data collection system	Feedback method
Increase use of behavior-specific praise Reduce reprimands	10:00-10:30 large group reading	Pencil-paper simple frequency count	Immediately following large group, verbal feedback on numbers compared to goals and previous performance

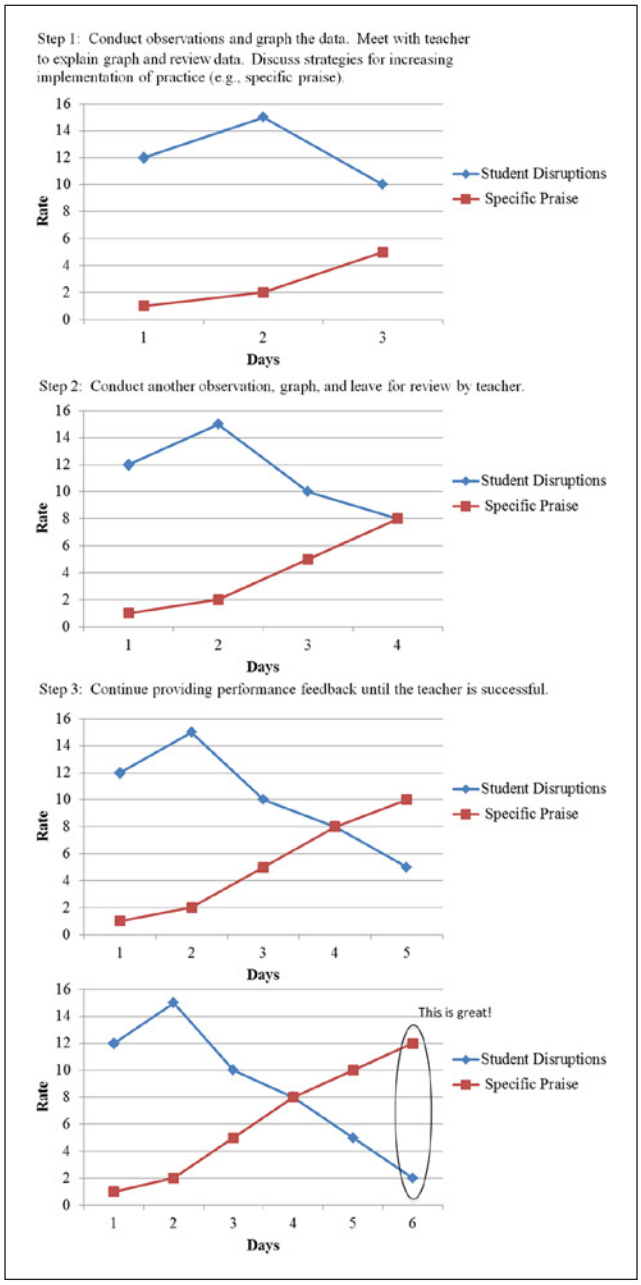


Figure 1. Example of Using Visual Performance Feedback.

feedback demonstrated higher rates of implementation of classroom management skills (Reinke et al., in press). Depending on resources available, some teachers may need more frequent visits than weekly coaching. Teachers may also need support implementing other foundational effective teaching strategies for the target intervention to have the desired impact (Hemmeter et al., 2011).

Build Sustainable Structures

After teachers have begun to utilize new practices, it is vital to build structures to support their sustained use. Such practices could be peers collecting data on target variables or teachers videotaping themselves and monitoring their use of strategies. It is also important for teachers to be supported in using strategies across all settings that are appropriate and with all children where they are appropriate. If teachers have been coached in one setting, they may not generalize to another naturally (Riley-Tillman & Eckert, 2001). Research has found even with specific prompts for generalization only two of three teachers were able to effectively generalize their practices (Riley-Tillman & Eckert, 2001). Constructing systems for providing additional support to teachers over time can be beneficial. For instance, gathering follow-up data and providing additional coaching when implementation falls below a set threshold is an effective model. In one study a feedback note was used with verbal feedback if implementation fell below 75% (Riley-Tillman & Eckert, 2001). In another study that also used visual feedback, the researchers arranged a meeting with teachers if implementation was below 100% (DiGennaro, Martens, & McIntyre, 2005).

Summary

It is important to commit to sustaining evidence-based practices in schools. As part of this process it is critical to ensure teachers use interventions with fidelity or as intended. The purpose of this article was to provide a framework for supporting teacher use of strategies to support children with social behavior problems through the provision of data-based feedback. In order to bridge the gap between science and practice to have socially meaningful impacts, it is important to invest in supporting the implementation and sustainability of new practices in schools.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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