

Creating Environments that Work for All Students: Real Manuals for Real Teachers



Increasing Family Involvement
for Special Populations



Reading Strategies for Special
Populations



Providing Academic Feedback
for Special Populations



Positive Behavior Support:
A Classroom-Wide Approach
to Successful Student Achievement
and Interactions

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Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute
Publication #203 Tampa, Florida

Preparation of this manual was supported in part by a grant from the
Office of Special Education Programs (U.S.D.O.E)
(Grant #H324T000019)

About the Department of Child & Family Studies



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Increasing the use of evidence-based strategies by special education teachers: Effective strategies manuals



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Introduction

Increasing the use of instructional strategies that have a strong empirical foundation is proposed as an important factor in improving the educational outcomes of students in both general and special education. For example, the recently enacted No Child Left Behind Act refers to evidence-based practice 110 times in outlining the federal plan to improve general education (Slavin, 2002) and the first recommendation in the report of the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education (PCESE) is to develop a culture of results that should emerge from improved instruction based on research and increased accountability (PCESE, 2002). A special issue of *The Journal of Special Education* (Cook & Schirmer, 2003) highlighted a series of research based instructional practices for children who have disabilities and the literature in special education contains several research syntheses and meta-analyses of evidence-based practices (e.g., Forness, Kavale, Blum, & Lloyd, 1997; Gersten, Schiller, & Vaughn, 2000). However, the consensus in the field is that there is a vast gap between research and practice that is of national concern (Greenwood, 2001) and the failure to implement and sustain the use of effective practices in the classroom has been offered as a major explanation for the poor outcomes for students in special education programs (Greenwood & Abbott, 2001; Landrum, Tankersley, & Kauffman, 2003).

A research demonstration project was developed through a unique partnership of special educators, parents, administrators, and researchers, in order to increase the use of evidence-based practices in special education programs and to improve student outcomes. A major product of this project was the development of four teacher-friendly manuals that are guides to the implementation of evidence-based practices by special education teachers.

The Development and Content of the Effective Strategies Manuals (ESMs)

Planning meetings with members of the partnership were held to discuss what constitutes evidence-based practice, what practices teachers were already using that met these criteria, and what practices they thought would be helpful to students. Subsequently, work groups met to develop teacher friendly manuals that would facilitate the implementation of evidence-based practices in the classrooms. The topics of the four Effective Strategies Manuals (ESMs) were: (1) enhancing reading comprehension,

(2) formative evaluation, (3) positive behavior supports (PBS), and (4) family involvement. A significant body of empirical literature supports the effectiveness of each of these topic areas (Duchnowski, Kutash, Sheffield, & Vaughn, 2004).

To improve reading, the ESM included the use of effective strategies such as mnemonics, selective highlighting and underlining, finding main idea, and using graphic organizers (e.g., see Forness et al., 1997). Formative evaluation was considered to be technical jargon by the teachers and was replaced with “providing academic feed-back.” The EMS contained sample charts and graphs that the teachers could customize and involve the students in monitoring their progress on a frequent basis (e.g., see Forness, Kavale, Blum, & Lloyd, 1997). Strategies using PBS were aimed at reducing challenging behaviors and increasing desirable social skills in students. These strategies included concepts such as an emphasis on strengths, accommodations in the classroom environment, and developing effective classroom rules (Carr et al, 2002). All the partners viewed family involvement as a critical area needing to be addressed in the project. The strategies developed in this manual emphasized helping families collaborate with teachers to ensure academic success of their children. There was a specific focus on increasing family help with homework assignments (Cotton, 1995). In addition, issues of cultural sensitivity were addressed by this topic. Draft versions of the manuals were pilot tested by the teachers and suggested changes were incorporated into a final copy for implementation.

Level of Implementation. When implementing evidence-based practices, it is critically important to measure the degree to which there is adherence to the practice as intended by the developers of the practice. A scale developed to measure implementation of the ESMs was modeled after the Intervention Validity Checklist (IVC) system by Vaughn and her colleagues (1998). This scale contains a description of the evidence that needed to be provided in order to ascertain if a teacher had used a behavior described in the manual. The fidelity instruments for the ESMs can be easily administered in the context of a supportive supervisory session with a teacher. The fidelity instruments are included and it is strongly suggested that they be used by those who implement the ESMs. Information will be produced that will help teachers increase the degree to which they effectively implement the ESMs.

Request for Feedback. We wish you success in implementing the ESMs. Since we will continue to refine their content and implementation procedures, we are very interested in your experiences with the implementation of the ESMs. Please contact us with your comments and suggestions.

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Author Note: Preparation of these materials was supported, in part, by the Office of Special Education Programs Grant Number H324T00019.

Acknowledgements

This manual was developed with the assistance of staff and parents at Thomas E. Weightman Middle School and Wesley Chapel High School in Pasco County, Florida. We would like to thank the following people for their help in developing the manual: Judy Bird, Justina Cracchiolo, Jennifer Crosby, Rosemary Culp, Don Fowler, Kristi Frye, Kari Kadlub, Ileana McCallum, Cari Meigs, Laura Meshbesh, Leslie Poe, Kristina Samples, Ann Shanks, Christa Thompson, Darcy Tyus, Peggy Wheeling, Christine Wolffe. Additionally we thank the following people for reading the first draft and offering suggestions: Sheryl Arnold, Fola Betourney, Lisa Broz, Cari Maldonado, Martha Moon, Wendy Pellegrino, and Alicia Russell. Drs. Kutash and Duchnowski are co-principal investigators for the grant, and Susan Sheffield, Ph.D. serves as project coordinator. Art and design by Dawn Khalil.