Using the Taxonomy of Intervention Intensity to Intensify Intervention for Students with Comorbid Behavioral and Writing Difficulties

Many students have difficulty with writing tasks, and many students have behavioral challenges. And then there are students who have both. This comorbidity, or co-occurring, of writing and behavioral difficulties can be especially problematic. For these students, even the mention of a writing task can be a trigger, particularly because writing requires task initiation and self-directed output. Further, writing demands the self-regulation skills that many students with problem behavior lack. Even a seemingly simple writing task such as a short response to a question requires planning, transcription and revising skills.

Imagine a student for whom writing is a trigger for problem behaviors. They often enact escape behaviors to avoid having to do any writing, and they may shut down entirely. As a result, they write less, and therefore, their writing skills are not given ample opportunity to develop.

The good news is that with proper support and interventions, students with writing and behavior difficulty can find success. One tool we can use is the Taxonomy of Intervention Intensity. This framework provides a means for analyzing multiple dimensions of interventions to ensure maximum effectiveness and alignment to an individual student’s needs. It is best used within the process of Data-Based Individualization (DBI), an evidence-based progress monitoring framework. Under DBI, an intervention is carefully selected according to student need, and their progress is continually monitored through intentional data collection. Throughout this repeating process, adaptations are made as needed based on student performance.

In the chart below, we provide greater details about the taxonomy and how it can be applied for students with writing and behavior difficulty.

### Taxonomy of Intervention Intensity

A framework built on existing research to provide educators with a way to examine different dimensions of an evidence-based intervention to intensify for students with comorbid and intensive needs. The taxonomy includes the areas of strength, dosage, alignment, attention to transfer, comprehensiveness, behavior support, and individualization (Fuchs, Fuchs & Malone, 2017).
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<th>Component</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Strategies Students with Comorbid Behavior and Writing Difficulties</th>
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<td><strong>Strength</strong></td>
<td>How well the intervention works for students with intensive intervention needs (below the 20th percentile), typically expressed in terms of effect sizes.</td>
<td>Ensure the intervention is effective in the setting you are working in with the type of students you are working with (Freeman &amp; Sugai, 2013). SRSD has been found to have an effect size of 1.678 for students with EBD, which is considered a strong effect size. Other writing interventions for students with behavioral difficulties with similar effect sizes may be considered to have a strong effect size (Losinski et al., 2014).</td>
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<td><strong>Dosage</strong></td>
<td>The number of opportunities a student has to respond and receive corrective feedback. It refers to the size of the instructional group, the number of minutes each session lasts, and the number of sessions provided per week.</td>
<td>More opportunities to respond and receive feedback has been correlated with better outcomes for both writing and behavioral interventions. One study showed that students with emotional disabilities took 10-15 intervention sessions to master writing strategies they were working on (McDuffie et al., 2009).</td>
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<td><strong>Alignment</strong></td>
<td>How well the program (a) addresses the target student’s full set of academic skill deficits, (b) does not address skills the target student has already mastered (extraneous skills for that student), and (c) incorporates a meaningful focus on grade-appropriate curricular standards.</td>
<td>Effective writing interventions for students with behavior problems capitalizes on their interests and emerging skills. Further, supports such as graphic organizers and targeted instruction for text structures can help students access grade-level writing standards (Hebert et al., 2018; Heintzelman, 2016).</td>
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<td><strong>Attention to Transfer</strong></td>
<td>The extent to which an intervention is designed to help students (a) transfer the skills they learn to other formats and contexts and (b) realize connections between mastered and related skills.</td>
<td>Self-regulation strategies applied to writing tasks help with the planning, organization and transcription skills that are difficult for many students with behavior challenges (Graham &amp; Harris, 2000).</td>
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<td><strong>Comprehensiveness</strong></td>
<td>The extent to which an intervention is designed to help students (a) transfer the skills they learn to other formats and contexts and (b) realize connections between mastered and related skills.</td>
<td><strong>Self-regulated Strategy Development (SRSD)</strong> utilizes explicit instruction principles including modeling, scaffolding, and practice (Graham et al., 2005).</td>
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<td><strong>Behavior Support</strong></td>
<td>The extent to which the program incorporates self-regulation, executive function components, and behavioral principles to minimize nonproductive behavior.</td>
<td>If writing provokes problem behavior, the intervention should address the specific aspects that the student is trying to avoid. Assistive technology such as voice recognition software (speech-to-text) may help to reduce the triggers of problem behavior (Parette et al., 2007).</td>
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A validated, data-based process for individualizing intervention in which the educator systematically adjusts the intervention over time, in response to ongoing progress monitoring data, to address the student's complex learning needs.

Using student-created goals or self-monitoring is an effective strategy for both writing quality and behavior (Cothran-Cook et al., 2017). Individualized goal setting allows for student ownership and personalized progress monitoring.


References


