Application of Conjoint Behavioral Consultation: Developing Social Skills Among Head Start Preschoolers

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Introduction

• Social interventions are critical for helping young withdrawn children learn important skills for effectively interacting with others in their environment.

• Preschool children with developmental delays consistently demonstrate social deficits such as spending more time alone and less time engaged in interactive play, engaging in more disruptive and aggressive play, and expressing less positive affect (e.g., smiling) than other children (Kopp, Baker, & Brown, 1992; Lutber, 1993).

• Social skills interventions targeting developmentally delayed preschoolers have received significant empirical support (Caglianico & Tryon, 2001; Leblanc and Matson, 1993; Matson, Fee, Cox, & Smith, 1991; McConnell, Susan, Cott, & Strain, 1991; Storey, Danilo, Ashworth, & Strain, 1994).

• Social interventions that involve parents as meaningful participants in the treatment process can promote positive change in the social functioning of young children, as parents help encourage the generalization of newly learned skills across both home and school environments.

Conjoint Behavioral Consultation

• Conjoint Behavioral Consultation (CBC; Sheridan, Kratzschwill, & Bergan, 1996) is an indirect, structured model of service-delivery whereby parents, teachers, and support staff are joined to work together to address the academic, social, or behavioral needs of an individual child for whom all parties share some responsibility. CBC is comprised of four stages: problem identification, problem analysis, plan implementation, plan evaluation.

• CBC offers an ideal format for addressing the social functioning of developmentally delayed children, as parents and teachers work together to provide interventions across home and school environments.

• Although research has supported the effectiveness and acceptability of CBC at addressing various academic, behavioral, and social concerns (Colton and Sheridan, 1998; Frer and Watson, 1999; Galloway & Sheridan, 1994; Sheridan, Eagle, Cowan, & Dickson, 2001), few CBC studies have been conducted with early childhood populations or children with developmental delay.

Purpose of Study

• The purpose of this research study was to examine the effects of a social skills intervention implemented in the context of Conjoint Behavioral Consultation (CBC) for withdrawn Head Start preschoolers with developmental delays.

• Additional purposes of this research study included the examination of the social validity of the social skills intervention package and the satisfaction of the consultation process.

Methods

Participants

• 7 children between the ages of 4 and 5 years old attending Head Start and their respective parents and teachers.

• Children verified with a “developmental delay” based upon Nebraska State criteria.

• Parents and teachers reported low levels of the target behaviors of sharing, initiating play, and greeting others.

• English was first language for all participants and all were Caucasian.

Procedures

Social Skills Intervention: At School

• Daily 10-minute structured, small group (i.e., the child participant and 3-4 peers) social skills lessons, followed by 15-minute free play practice periods.

• 3 skill lessons (i.e., greeting others, initiating play, and sharing) were delivered over the course of 3 to 5 weeks.

• Each structured lesson included direct instruction of the new skill, role play, performance feedback, and reinforcement for appropriate use of the skill.

• New skills were presented at the beginning of the week, and review sessions were conducted on subsequent days of that week.

• 15-minute free play periods followed each skill lesson/review session.

• Coaching (i.e., prompting and reminding) and reinforcement procedures (i.e., verbal praise and stickers) were implemented during this time.

Social Skills Intervention: At Home

• Daily review of skills at home with parents.

• Weekly practice opportunities in the home context (i.e., play time with family members or play dates with peers), with use of coaching and reinforcement procedures during this time.

• Daily home-school note to increase communication regarding social-behavioral progress across settings.

Conjoint Behavioral Consultation (4 Stages)

• Problem Identification Interviews: Target social behaviors were defined and time for independent observations was discussed.

• Problem Analysis Interviews: Social skills intervention procedures at home and school discussed; Behavioral goals set for children.

• Treatment Implementation: 3-5 weeks; consultant made parent phone calls & school visits to ensure understanding of the intervention.

• Treatment Evaluation Interviews: Progress assessed through behavioral data and subjective parent and teacher report.

Outcome Measures

Direct Behavioral Observations

• Direct Observations conducted 2-3 times per week at school during 15-minute free play periods.

• Modified version of Peer Social Behavior Observation System (PSB; Walker & Seven, 1992).

Positive Social Behavior (consisting of positive social engagement and positive participation) and Alone Behavior were coded.


Measures of Social Validity

Goal Attainment Scaling (GAS; Kiresuk, Smith, & Candilis, 1994).

Evaluation of goal attainment.

Behavior Intervention Rating Scale (BIRS; Von Brock & Elliott, 1987).

Evaluation of treatment acceptability and treatment efficacy.

Consultant Evaluation Form (CEF; Erick, 1987): Evaluation of satisfaction with consultation services.

Discussion

• Several indicators of treatment effectiveness: Favorable mean changes, improved scores on PKBS, and high effect sizes.

• Results should be interpreted cautiously: High variability across all conditions and inflated effect sizes due to the single subject nature of research.

• Parents and teachers found the social skills intervention and the CBC process to be effective and acceptable.

• Limitations: (a) Inconsistency in outcomes of evaluation criteria used to assess treatment effectiveness, (b) Behavioral data were not collected in the home environment, and (c) No formal treatment integrity data were collected.

• Future research: (a) Assess levels of home-school communication and problem solving among parents and teachers as a result of involvement in the CBC process, (b) Examine the effect of CBC and the social skills intervention on behaviors in the home environment.

Design and Data Analysis

• Multiple baseline design across 7 participants

• Participants grouped into 3 series (i.e., 3 children, 2 children, and 2 children)

• Behavioral data were evaluated through stability, phase mean comparisons, percentage of nonoverlapping data (PNOM), and effect sizes.

• All other data were reported through descriptive statistics.

Results

Behavioral Outcomes

• Large effect sizes and favorable mean changes across all participants for positive social and alone behaviors

• Meaningful PND’s for 4/7 participants for positive social behavior and 1/7 participants for alone behavior

• High variability across all conditions for all participants

• Favorable changes in PKBS scores for all participants following treatment

• High GAS, BIRS, and CEF scores were found for all participants

• Integrity of CBC process was high (i.e., 85% of CBC objectives met)

• Integrity of social skills intervention at school ranged from 84%-92%

Additional Outcomes

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