Using the instructional coaching model to implement positive behavior supports in early childhood special education programs

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Abstract
Challenging behaviors in early childhood programs are of increasing concern to teachers in preschool programs. The use of Positive Behavior Supports, or PBS, has been on the rise in a variety of preschool programs as a way to increase acceptable behaviors while using tiered interventions to identify children in need of specific skills training in hopes of decreasing the chances of negative behaviors. While most teachers are in favor of the PBS initiative, many teachers report not having enough time or expertise to implement the program to the best of their ability. Another new initiative in preschool programs is that of a support teacher, or instructional coach. This project aims to merge the two initiatives to show how the instructional coaching model can be used in early childhood programs to establish and carry out a robust PBS program, even with students who have the most challenging needs. Tiered interventions appropriate for a variety of preschool programs will be discussed, as well as how to best use a support teacher to implement these interventions in early childhood programs. Lastly, a professional development plan will be shared outlining how one metropolitan school district utilized an instructional coach to train and mentor teachers to implement positive behavior supports in self-contained and inclusive early childhood special education programs.

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Using the Instructional Coaching Model to Implement Positive Behavior Supports in Early Childhood Special Education Programs

A Graduate Project
Submitted to the
Division of Early Childhood Education
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Education
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By
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has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in Education

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ABSTRACT

Challenging behaviors in early childhood programs are of increasing concern to teachers in preschool programs. The use of Positive Behavior Supports, or PBS, has been on the rise in a variety of preschool programs as a way to increase acceptable behaviors while using tiered interventions to identify children in need of specific skills training in hopes of decreasing the chances of negative behaviors. While most teachers are in favor of the PBS initiative, many teachers report not having enough time or expertise to implement the program to the best of their ability. Another new initiative in preschool programs is that of a support teacher, or instructional coach. This project aims to merge the two initiatives to show how the instructional coaching model can be used in early childhood programs to establish and carry out a robust PBS program, even with students who have the most challenging needs. Tiered interventions appropriate for a variety of preschool programs will be discussed, as well as how to best use a support teacher to implement these interventions in early childhood programs. Lastly, a professional development plan will be shared outlining how one metropolitan school district utilized an instructional coach to train and mentor teachers to implement positive behavior supports in self-contained and inclusive early childhood special education programs.
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Chapter I

Introduction

Challenging behaviors are one of the most difficult issues that teachers deal with in the classroom. Teachers often find that these behaviors are more pronounced in the classroom than parents may have seen at home, and not effectively handling these classroom behaviors can have very serious consequences (Dunlap & Fox, 1999). As preschool programs are becoming more widespread and beginning to get more funding from school districts, early childhood teachers are being expected to not only teach basic learning concepts, but also to provide socialization, manage challenging behaviors and other developmental delays, and produce data that shows reliable growth across all learning domains. This project aims to identify behavior supports that can be used across various classrooms. Specifically, the purpose of this project is to use the instructional coaching and support teacher model to provide early childhood teachers working in self-contained and inclusive classrooms with a variety of behavioral supports that will align with the district initiatives of using Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS).

Description of Topic

Over the last several decades, more students have been served in early childhood programs funded by public schools. The rise of the popularity of such programs has led to an increase in the importance of early school success. According to Bulotsky-Shearer, Dominguez, Bell, Rouse, and Fantuzzo (2010), two reports, Eager to Learn (Moriarty, 2001) and Neurons to Neighborhoods (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000), highlighted the importance of emotional and behavioral adjustments in the early preschool years. These reports suggested that behavior
problems in the early years place children at risk for social and academic difficulties spanning into the formal school years.

In addition to typically developing children being served in preschool programs, programs serving children with special needs have also been expanding. Increasingly, children are being diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders before the age of three, and research suggests that intense behavioral interventions can have significant improvements on negative behaviors commonly associated with spectrum disorders (Akshoomoff, Stahmer, Corsello, & Mahrer, 2010). Children who are diagnosed with special needs may be served in specialized early childhood programs. High quality preschool programs that provide behavioral interventions can have a positive impact on behavioral and social learning of all children, but especially those with special needs (Bulotsky-Shearer et al., 2010).

Effective professional development can also have an impact on student learning. In 2001, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (cited in National Middle School Association, 2004) conducted a study that identified professional development factors that impact a teacher’s effectiveness in the classroom. Professional development that was linked to other school based program activities and initiatives, along with providing follow up activities, were found to be the two most important factors. The study also stated that highly skilled teachers help students learn and achieve more.

The increase in the number of children with special needs and challenging behaviors in preschool programs, coupled with research that shows effective professional development can lead to more effective teaching practices, led to the desire to begin a project that would combine both topics. By identifying areas of need for teachers along with current early childhood program initiatives used in my district, I could develop professional development sessions that
would be beneficial to all early childhood teachers in my district and have a positive impact on student learning.

The need for this project became clear to me when I started working for the Des Moines School District. My role within the Des Moines Public Schools is an Early Childhood Special Education Support Teacher. Beside myself, one other person in the district has this title, and we each serve three buildings within the district that house early childhood special education classrooms. Some of the rooms we serve have integrated Universal Preschool or Head Start children, while others are self-contained autism, behavior disorder, or developmental delay classrooms. Three of the buildings we serve are considered centers, meaning the whole building is only early childhood classrooms. The other buildings are elementary schools that also house a few integrated or self-contained early childhood special education (ECSE) classrooms. One of the elementary buildings we serve is considered the deaf and hard of hearing school for the district, and one is considered the severe and profound/severe behavior school for the district. Based on this make up, we serve many different types of children from various cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.

My role as a support teacher within these classrooms is multi-fold. Being a support teacher is much like being an instructional coach who provides a variety of professional supports throughout the early childhood department. Every teacher who is either new to his or her position, such as staff who transferred from other departments, or new to teaching is assigned a support teacher who assists him or her with basic curriculum, instruction, and behavior management issues as they pertain to their entire class. Support teachers help classroom teachers to analyze special education data, make instructional changes, and try new teaching strategies.
The next layer of our role is to provide targeted goals and supports to students who are deemed to be the most challenging or most at risk, either socially or academically. These decisions are made by zone supervisors and special education consultants based on classroom observations and reports from support teachers. During this time in the classrooms, we are identifying specific needs of particular students, coaching teachers how to implement these strategies, and then fading out our support as the teachers become successful.

The final level of our role is to provide intense assistance to teachers who need immediate interventions. These teachers may need assistance to either meet the Iowa Teaching Standards themselves, or they may require help with more than one student who is showing severe deficits across multiple areas of learning and behavior.

As I began working with various teachers within all the different levels of support I give in my position, I began to notice common themes surfacing. Whether I was working in a self-contained classroom or a fully integrated classroom, every teacher was having difficulty with the behaviors of at least one student. Because the classrooms that I serve are spread out geographically and vary greatly in the make-up of the number and ability of students, the specific needs of these students were all different. However, I was finding that teachers were having many similar complaints, such as not being able to get a student to transition to group or to work independently at center time. Often, challenging and inappropriate behaviors were at the forefront of our conversations. The second theme that became evident was the lack of time to really get to the core of what each student needed due to all the district requirements and the intensity of the challenging behaviors they were seeing in some students. Teachers who were dealing with the most challenging students often felt that it was impossible to focus on anything else in the classroom, including teaching lessons and working with other students. These
teachers needed support to make sense of all the new initiatives being presented to them and streamline a way to pinpoint a child's needs and address them efficiently.

Before my position was created, these teachers believed they essentially had to fend for themselves in terms of instructional support. Teachers who were not in the larger early childhood learning centers felt that they were isolated. Some teachers were on a year round schedule and missed out on some team meetings and trainings which were then never re-offered. Due to these factors, teachers felt they were having the same difficulties year after year and never finding solutions. From classroom to classroom, different teachers were trying strategies that worked well, but didn't have the time or the means to share these outcomes with the larger group of early childhood teachers.

Within my first few months of working for Des Moines Schools, I began to compile a list of various visuals, tasks, and interventions specifically for my case load, with the hope of sharing it with all teachers in the district. Luckily, my position also offered the opportunity to help create and lead various professional development meetings that would be presented to the entire early childhood special education staff. The idea of a project that would provide early childhood teachers with a comprehensive collection of behavior supports started to become more realistic, and definitely necessary for the teachers I was supporting.

**Importance of Project**

The importance of this project is multi-dimensional. Early childhood programs are serving more students than ever before, and many of these are students with special needs and challenging behaviors. These programs must be high quality and provide learning support in all domains of a child's development. According to Results Iowa: Education (2007), research shows a clear connection between the quality of a child's early learning experiences and later success in
school and life. Providing children with a high quality preschool classroom is Iowa's best and most cost-effective investment in reducing future costs for academic remediation and building a quality work force.

Due to the increased number of children with special needs in preschool programs, teachers are using behavioral objectives to write and evaluate individualized education plans, or IEPs. These IEPs are also used as ways to evaluate and make instructional decisions, including the type of program in which a child may be placed. Additionally, early childhood teachers are bombarded year after year with more requirements, and less time to do them all. For example, in Des Moines Schools, preschool teachers are required to assess all students using a lengthy comprehensive assessment, and have at least one comprehensive classroom and one teacher assessment for which they must create a portfolio showing they meet each standard. Additionally, teachers must sit in on monthly team meetings, analyze their educational data monthly and form interventions, write and evaluate IEPs, and plan for at least 6 hours of instructional time each day. Teachers need to have one location for resources to meet various needs of students in their classrooms, document growth and goals being met, and align these practices with other school wide initiatives.

Since this project deals with providing teachers with professional development in these areas, the training must be relevant and presented in a professional manner so that teachers would "buy in" to the concepts and be willing to implement them in their own rooms. In developing this project, I chose to present these topics in brief, teacher friendly trainings that showed concrete ways to use the suggestions in the classroom setting. I then structured my role as a support teacher to help teachers continue to implement these strategies in the day to day classroom setting.
Terminology

Through the development of this paper, several key terms were identified. In this section, I specifically define these terms so that all educational staff will use the common terminology. The important terms follow below.

*Autism*- a disorder that is characterized by ritualistic behavior and impairments in socialization and communion. (Quill, 2000).

*Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP)*- a collaborative effort to identify a child’s inappropriate behaviors and then plan to teach and encourage a more appropriate, desired behavior (Stea & Ristic, 2006).

*Challenging Behavior*- includes behavior that may cause injury to self or others, cause damage to the physical environment, interfere with learning new skills, and may socially isolate the child (Conroy, 2004).

*Early Childhood Education (ECE)*- any part or full time program serving children from birth to age eight, including those with special needs (NAEYC, 1993).

*Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE)*- Programs serving students with a variety of communication, intellectual, physical, or behavioral special needs (NAEYC, 1993).

*Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA)*- The FBA is a process of gathering information to help determine the reason why a behavior is occurring (Stea & Ristic, 2006).

*Positive Behavior Supports (PBS)*- a range of strategies that aim to support appropriate behavior of all students across all settings (McKevitt & Braaksma, 2008).

*Professional Development (PD)*- ongoing educational training to strengthen a teacher’s knowledge (NAEYC, 1993).
Visual Supports - visually represented rules, cues, and tools that help a child function independently in his or her environment (Blagojevic, Logue, Bennett-Armistead, Taylor, & Neal, 2011).
Chapter II
Methodology

This chapter will describe the procedures I used to develop this project, such as surveying teachers for input on professional development areas they deemed the most necessary. An overview of PBS in early childhood, including each tier and common supports, will be shared. A review of the current literature on challenging behavior and its impact on student learning in the early years will also be covered. The role of instructional coaches in educational settings will also be discussed. Finally, current research on quality professional development will be analyzed.

Procedures to develop project

The first step in my project was to survey the early childhood teachers to identify in what areas they needed the most training and support. The early childhood special education team was used to meeting once a month and filling out informal questionnaires to help drive future meetings. However, many of our classrooms were integrated with regular education teachers who were not present at these meetings and therefore were never trained on many of the special topics. In inclusive settings, all of the adults in the classroom play an integral role in providing support and education for all students, so it was necessary to provide training in a format that could be used by all teachers and associates. Since my role in classrooms was to work directly with only the special education staff, teachers on the ESCE team were asked to provide input on topics they would find beneficial to all staff and students in their buildings. As trainings were developed, the administration and leadership team would determine which ones would be offered to all early childhood staff and which ones would be for ECSE only.
Input was gleaned from teachers in several ways. I began by making note of teachers' concerns that they voiced via in person conversations, email conversations regarding individual classroom support goals, and informal surveys handed out to new or new to their position teachers at the beginning of the year. The informal surveys were used to ask new staff which past professional development topics they had missed, in which they wanted more training, and in which they felt confident already. Teachers were also asked to rank their concerns from most important to least important in several topics, such as communication skills, behavior assessments, teaching appropriate behavior skills, play skills, visual supports, and working on academic IEP goals. Teachers were also asked to list their own concerns and comments about how to best use a support teacher help them meet their needs.

Teacher responses ranged from "why are our students so out of control?" to "what supports are we supposed to put in place? Do these supports conflict with other initiatives, such as PBIS, we are supposed to be using?" and "How do we have time to effectively work with these students (or others in the class) when we are spending so much time dealing with off task or inappropriate behavior?" Every teacher on my case load ranked behavior assessments and skills to promote positive behavior as one of their top concerns in the classroom. I continually asked myself whether I was adequately utilizing my own role as a new support teacher. I wanted to find a way to incorporate instructional coaching into the process of supporting these teachers through the implementation of PBS, as these were the two district initiatives behind my new role.

These guiding questions not only helped me to structure my day-to-day time working with these teachers, but also gave me a solid framework for developing this project. As I began researching all of the questions that they asked, I noticed common themes emerging. I began organizing them into the following themes:
1. What does PBS look like in early childhood education?
2. Why are challenging behaviors so difficult in early childhood classrooms?
3. What is the role of a support teacher, or instructional coach, in early childhood special education programs? How can a support teacher help to implement PBS in a preschool setting?
4. How can these findings be represented in a quality ECE professional development format to support teachers in future academic years?

Based on these questions, I outlined my project to span the course of the school year. I set out to research the teachers’ questions about PBS and challenging behavior. I also reviewed the current literature on instructional coaching to find a process that would allow me to use my current position to help implement supports to target special education students with challenging behaviors. Since I was only assigned to work with a small percentage of the ECSE teachers in the district, I planned to represent my findings in a series of professional development trainings that would be shared with ECSE staff across the district. To evaluate my efforts at the end of the school year, I planned an informal survey to gain insight from classroom teachers as to how well they felt the role of the support teacher helped to implement behavior supports, reduce challenging behavior, and provide on-going professional development.

Literature Review

This section will provide a review of the current literature on several topics that were necessary to the development of this project. An overview of positive behavior supports in early childhood will be given. Common interventions for each tier will be shared. Next, an overview of challenging behaviors in the early years will be presented, including the impact of these behaviors on school performance. Instructional coaching, which is a new initiative being utilized
in many school districts, will also be discussed. Finally, the role of quality professional
development in regards to instructional coaching and behavior supports will be examined.
Guidelines for effective professional development will be outlined as well.

**Overview of Positive Behavior Supports in Early Childhood Education.** Teachers in
Des Moines Public Schools are accustomed to targeting one particular child and implementing
one specific intervention. Unfortunately, targeting just one child is not enough to make a whole
classroom run smoothly. It is important to have comprehensive and effective supports for all
children in a building. The idea of Positive Behavior Supports (PBS) has been gaining
popularity in early childhood programs due to its approach of providing a package of supports
and collaboration of staff to target the social-emotional competency of all children (McCart &
Turnbull, 2002). When an entire school or program participates in this program, it is referred to
as School Wide Positive Behavior Supports (SWPBS).

PBS systems are based on three levels, commonly referred to as tiers, that each provides
different supports and interventions based on the needs of the student. When programs or
schools decide to implement PBS, they begin with the universal level, known as Tier One.
These are school wide expectations and supports to teach students the rules and responsibilities.
The targeted or secondary level, known as Tier Two, creates more individualized supports for
groups of students who are at risk based on school wide data collection systems. The intense
individual level, known as Tier Three, puts specific supports and expectations in place for
individual students who have not been successful with the previous PBS levels. These three
levels aim to create classrooms that allow all students, particularly those with disabilities, to be
successfully included in general education (New Jersey Positive Behavior Support in Schools,
2012b).
The aim of school-wide positive behavior supports is to create an environment that promotes appropriate behavior. According to McKeown and Braaksma (2008), PBS is a "structured way to promote positive relationships in schools and provide students with social and behavioral skills to be successful learners and school citizens" (p. 735). The authors go on to say that PBS was brought forth based on the assumption that typical school discipline policies that focused on punishment were proving to be ineffective. In 2006, Gettinger and Stoiber compared PBS to non PBS classrooms. The authors observed preschool to first grade classrooms where PBS was implemented by school based teams, and then also observed control classrooms which had not implemented PBS. The authors studied the effectiveness of the school based team approach, which was called FACET. Observations of child behaviors and classroom variables were compared between experimental and control classrooms. The results indicated that children in the experimental PBS classrooms had significant gains in the occurrence of positive behaviors, such as social responsiveness and engagement, from baseline to post-intervention and exhibited fewer negative behaviors, such as distractibility and aggression, compared to control children. Behavior gains were positively correlated with the level of fidelity in which teachers were fully implementing the PBS program. These findings supported recommendations that PBS classrooms, which used functional behavior assessments, collaboration among staff and families, and varying levels of interventions, can be beneficial in early childhood settings with children who exhibit challenging behavior (cited in Applications of PBIS in Childcare and PreK, 2012).

Several studies have set out to analyze the degree to which PBS supports were implemented and how they improved child outcomes. Several instruments have been created to evaluate the degree to which Tier 1 supports are being implemented, resulting in change in
schools and producing improved student outcomes. These instruments and assessments include the Team Implementation Checklist (TIC), Effective Behavior Support Self-Assessment Survey (EBS), Systems-wide Evaluation Tool (SET), School-Wide Benchmarks of Quality (BoQ), School Safety Survey, and the School-Wide Information System. In 2005, Irwin and Algozzine, (cited in Childs, Kincaid, & George, 2009) conducted an extensive evaluation of the statewide PBS system in North Carolina. The authors assessed the impact of PBS efforts on student outcomes and the degree to which the PBS activities were implemented with fidelity. During the 2004–2005 school year, 46 schools began implementing Tier 1 supports. 16 of those schools utilized the SET to evaluate implementation fidelity, with 9 of the schools scoring at least 80% on total implementation and 80% on behavioral expectations taught. In 2007, Muscott, Mann, and LeBrun evaluated the effect of large-scale Tier 1 implementation on school discipline and academic outcomes. Twenty-eight schools were evaluated for implementation using the Universal Team Checklist, the EBS Survey, and the SET. After one year, 21 of 24 teams (88%) were scoring at or above 80% implementation rates on the SET. Schools averaged a 28% reduction in office discipline referral (ODR), a 31% reduction in in-school suspensions (ISS), and a 19% reduction in out-of-school suspensions (OSS). Lower suspension rates lead to an increase in instructional time for students. PBS implementation was also associated with math gains for the majority of schools (cited in Childs, Kincaid, & George, 2009).

The PBS initiative is one that many early childhood programs have adopted over the past decade. Frey, Park, Browne-Ferrigno, and Korfhage (2010) conducted a survey to see which aspects of the PBS initiative teachers favor the most. Early Childhood Stars, a Midwestern early childhood program serving 5000 children ages three to five, began implementing PBS in 2006. All teachers in the program were invited to take place in the study. 101 classroom teachers
originally agreed. These teachers attended professional development, were provided specialized materials, and were provided technical support to implement the PBS plan. During the first year of implementation, 62 teachers and staff were asked to take part in a series of focus group interviews. In addition to the interviews, classroom observations and a quasi-experimental design were used to determine if teachers were actually practicing and promoting social-emotional competency. Thematic analysis of the qualitative data gleaned from these interviews was used to identify themes in the teacher responses.

Frey et al. (2010) found that, overall teachers were supportive of the PBS implementation. Teachers praised the program for being proactive, providing systematic social-emotional development, and recognizing the importance of involving families. However, some teachers did comment that some strategies were important but not feasible, and that some interventions required expertise or resources to which teachers typically had little access.

The Florida PBS Project is a large scale initiative funded by the Florida Department of Education to increase the capacity of Florida schools to provide varying degrees of interventions to students (Childs, Kinkaid, & George, 2009). A study of the Florida PBS Project set out to evaluate the degree to which PBS intervention levels were occurring as planned and resulting in improved student outcomes. 500 Florida schools, which equals approximately 20% of the schools in the state, were trained in Tier One supports. For each school participating in the study, a New School Profile was completed which collected basic baseline and demographic data. Each PBS school team also completed a 20-item survey using a Likert scale to rate the team’s effectiveness. A Benchmark of Quality instrument assessed ten critical elements of the PBS process and encompassed 53 benchmarks. These items were scored by the team on a 100 point Scoring Guide; schools that scored a 70 or higher were considered “high implementers.” A
PBS coach completed this self-assessment form with input from the PBS teams and data entry personnel. The combined results were used to cross reference other school records to identify whether PBS had an outcome on variables such as academics.

According to Childs, Kinkaid, and George (2009), many research questions were answered based on this study. This study noted an impact on student behavior. Overall, the number of office discipline referrals was 33% lower after one year of implementation than it was during the baseline year. Additionally, the study showed that Florida schools trained in PBS had a higher percentage of students reaching the proficient level of the reading segment of the state’s comprehensive assessment test – 62.67%, compared to the statewide average of 55.67%.

It is important to note that Pre-K programs could not be included in the data of this study, even though they may have been participating in the PBS initiative. Due to the age and developmental level of preschool students, alternative discipline procedures are commonly used instead of office referrals and suspensions. No formal documentation of the procedures used by Pre-K programs were listed in this study, nor was there any data collected to show whether there was decrease in these procedures with the implantation of PBS at the early childhood level (Childs, Kinkaid, & George, 2009).

**Overview of Common PBS Supports Used in Des Moines Public Schools Early Childhood Classrooms.** All programs that implement PBS will choose the supports for each tier that best match their program type and needs of their particular students. Due to the unique and intense needs of the young students my program serves, the supports used in our ECSE classrooms may differ from those used in upper elementary programs. Each level of the PBS tiers will be described below, and common early childhood supports will be listed for each.
**Implementing the PBS initiative.** When a school decides to implement PBS, a leadership team will be formed which may include representation from administration, counselors, and teachers. This team will complete the *School Readiness Checklist* to ensure their commitment and secure a place in an initial training. These trainings are usually three consecutive days in length and are offered at any time during the calendar year to best fit the needs of schools that may begin researching the PBS process mid-year. During the training, school teams will participate in lectures, team building activities, and be able to view videotapes of other schools already implementing PBS. The school team will then complete a comprehensive action plan, which includes steps such as recruiting other staff members to be on the PBS team, understanding basic behavior principles, creating common behavior expectations, establishing rules for specific school settings, developing a reward system, and creating a data-based behavior tracking system. School teams will then be ready to begin implementing Tier One supports in their schools (Childs, Kinkaid, & George, 2009).

**Tier one-universal supports.** The universal supports level sets the stage in schools or centers. The main purpose of this level is to prevent problematic behavior by creating interventions for all students and staff across all settings in the school. At this level, common rules and expectations are set, and children are explicitly taught how to follow these rules through direct instruction and continual reinforcement (New Jersey Positive Behavior Supports in Schools, 2012b). In the Des Moines preschool centers, the common rules are: (1) We take care of ourselves; (2) We take care of each other; and (3) We take care of our things. These rules are displayed pictorially in every classroom as well as in common areas, and teachers use this verbiage daily to remind children of the rules. For children who may have special needs or who
are new to structured settings, these rules and reminders may be individualized and represented with picture or objects.

Once the classroom rules and expectations are in place, it is the teacher's role to create a supportive classroom environment for all students. The classroom practices most commonly used are predictable routines and planned transitions, including giving cues for the child to complete these tasks independently (Jack & Lindeman, 2005). Again, this step can be adapted for children who need extra support through the use of visuals that will help them regulate their own behavior and follow the rest of the group with little adult intervention.

Additionally, there are basic environmental strategies that teachers can put into place that will help to reinforce these common rules. Research shows that often, just structuring a room to promote positive social interactions can have a dramatic effect on decreasing the frequency and duration of inappropriate behavior (Bovey & Strain, n.d.) Many classrooms achieve this by integrating children so that they have positive peer models and structuring learning centers in a way that promotes sharing and reciprocal interactions. Many of the ECE classroom teachers I observed do this by having a clear system that defines how many children can be in a center, changing the materials in each center often, and using items that promote sharing rather than isolated play, such as using a wagon rather than a bike at recess time.

In most high quality early childhood classrooms, the universal level of PBS encompasses items that are already in place. When classrooms use a developmentally appropriate curriculum, provide a safe classroom structure, use engaging schedules and activities, and guide children in learning the rules and expectations, most children will be successful (Fox, Carta, Strain, Dunlap, & Hemmeter, 2009). Within individual classrooms, the most common forms of Tier One supports were visual structure and self-management systems.
Visual Structure and Supports, including picture schedules. Visual supports are tools that help children understand where items in the classroom belong, what will happen at each time of the day, what is expected of the child and how he or she should do it, how to interact with others, and how to communicate thoughts, feelings, and choices (Blagojevic et al., 2011). These practices may include picture labels throughout the room, whole group as well as individual picture or object schedules, social scripts or social stories, and choice boards. According to Hume (2008), visual supports target skills such as gaining independence in transitions and on task behavior. Hume continued that visual supports have been proven to be effective in increasing skills in the areas of academics, play skills, social interactions, and reducing unwanted behaviors, such as self-injury. Additionally, visual supports have been shown to increase a child’s independence and reduce the need for teacher correction (Hume & Carnahan, 2008).

Self-management systems. These systems are used to teach young children to pay attention to their own behavior and to engage in appropriate behavior independently (Fox & Garrison, 2006). Self-management systems work by first identifying the child’s current level of self-management and identifying the behaviors or times of the day in which the child is not able to regulate his or her own behavior. The teacher will then visually display the appropriate behaviors to the child in an individualized way, such as a booklet, checklist, or picture strip. The child will then be taught to engage in the expected behavior while using the system for a cue while the teacher provides feedback and praise. Children will learn how to assess their own behaviors by marking off or moving pictures as they complete them or rating their behavior, such as by marking a happy face if they did the step correctly. The teacher will fade out his or her support as the child gets more accurate using the system on his or her own. These management
systems can also be tied to rewards, such as having the child earn a desired object by checking off all the steps he needs to complete before gaining the reward (Fox & Garrison, 2006).

Simply providing these structured models for less socially competent peers can serve as a successful intervention for children who have mild to moderate special needs. Children with more intensive needs will be provided with supports in the second tier of the PBS framework.

**Tier two supports.** Children who have more difficulty managing their emotions and solving conflicts will benefit from the second level of supports. The children who are targeted at this level are those who may be “at risk” of developing serious, ongoing behavior problems. Research does suggest that inappropriate behaviors tend to occur more in children who lack communication and social-emotional competence (Jack & Lindeman, 2012). The main aim at this level is to provide intentional and meaningful social skills support to all children, especially those with special needs which may impact their social skills.

For many PBS schools, there is a school-wide data collection system that would indicate the children in need of more intense supports, based on repeated referrals or behavior write ups for the same offense in a short period of time (New Jersey Positive Behavior Support in Schools, 2012a). Once the children in need of Tier Two supports are recognized, more intense interventions are put into place, and small group sessions are commonly planned. Explicit instruction of social skills, expressing emotions, and handling anger are the areas of focused instruction that many early childhood students will need (Fox et al., 2009).

In the Des Moines preschool settings, PBS was such a new initiative that there were no formal data collection systems and group supports in place for children at the Tier Two level. In the Des Moines preschools, the Tier Two level was thought of more as the intervention level. When a child was exhibiting extreme difficulties in a social-emotional area, the teacher would
begin an intervention for 4-6 weeks. This intervention time consisted of summarizing the problem behavior and identifying what the appropriate strategy to teach the desired behavior would be (Tier Two System of Supports, 2011). During this time, the teacher would be exposing the child to positive behavior skills in a small group or one-on-one setting. Often a child would be provided with an adult mentor to provide ongoing behavior support, which is one of the roles of my position. Data would be collected, and at the end of the intervention, decisions would be made on the next appropriate steps. If the problem was not resolved, the child would move to Tier Three supports, which often meant considerations for special education services, or new goals and services for a child already on an IEP. The most common Tier Two supports used by ECE staff are augmentative communication and functional communication training.

**Augmentative communication.** Since a large percentage of children with autism or other developmental delays enter preschool programs with little or no communication skills, it is necessary to provide these children with a way to express their wants and needs. In the place of verbal speech, other forms of communication, such as pictures, may be used. The Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) is a system in which the child gives a picture of a desired item to the communication partner in exchange for the item (Bondy & Frost, 1994). There are six phases in the PECS protocol, including exchanging a simple picture, traveling to gain a communication partner, discriminating between similar pictures of objects, learning sentence structure, and finally, teaching a child to make comments about the environment. While not all children who use the PECS system will gain verbal speech, vocalization is encouraged and often times will develop through the use of pictures (Overcash, Horton, & Bondy, 2010).
**Functional communication training (FCT).** FCT is a strategy to use with children who continue to have challenging, or even dangerous, behavior after classroom wide supports have already been in place. FCT involves identifying the purpose of the child’s behavior and teaching an appropriate replacement behavior that will still meet his or her needs. The main goal of FCT is to get a child to communicate needs, either through verbal speech, pointing, or using pictures, instead of engaging in the inappropriate behavior (Dunlap & Duda, 2004. For example, if a child bites a peer every time he or she enters a play group, teachers may observe and deduce that the child does not know an appropriate way to ask children to play or share materials. The child would then be taught to express his or her desire of “play with me, please” or “I want a turn, please” by hitting a voice recorded switch placed in each center. Teachers would provide praise every time the child used the switch instead of biting, along with support to peers to help invite the child into the play group.

**Tier three supports.** Students will be identified as being in need of individualized and intensive supports when they have not been successful in regulating their chronic behavior problems after having exposure to Tier One and Tier Two supports. PBS offers a systematic process for assessing behavior needs and aiming to decrease the problematic behavior through higher level interventions (New Jersey Positive Behavior Support in Schools, 2012a). The appropriate team members would first gather to review all of the previous interventions and supports. Appropriate consent from guardians would be obtained, and assessments would need to be completed in order to move on to the next steps (Jack & Lindeman, 2005). In the Des Moines Schools, this level of intensity means that a child would most likely need behavior goals as part of an individualized education plan (IEP), which first requires a functional behavior assessment (FBA) and behavior intervention plan (BIP). For some children, inappropriate
behaviors can escalate to the point of being unsafe to the child, peers, or staff. This level of intensity may require some form of non-violent physical restraint. For this reason, the most common tier three supports are the FBA process and Physical Intervention.

Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBA). The purpose of the FBA process is to determine what causes challenging behaviors, as well as which conditions lead to the desired behavior (Teaching Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders, 2003). The first step in determining the function of a child’s behavior is to collect data about the antecedents, behaviors, and consequences. This process is usually referred to as the ABC data collection. The antecedent is the internal or external cause of a behavior. It is usually something that occurs right before the behavior and can be seen, but sometimes the precipitating factor may be something internal and unknown to the observer, such as not eating breakfast before arriving at school. The behavior is the observable act that follows the antecedent. The consequence is how people in the environment react to the behavior (Stea & Ristic, 2006). It is important to remember that the consequence may not be a punishment, such as being sent to a time out. Sometimes the consequence may be that peers walk away from the child when he or she spits, or that the teacher redirects the child back to his or her table when he or she continually gets up from small groups.

The next step of the FBA process is to summarize the data and form a hypothesis as to why the behavior is occurring. This step will help to determine the function, or reason behind the behavior. Behavior is a form of communication and can serve to either access a desired item, attention, or outcome, or to escape from an undesired situation (New Jersey Positive Behavior Support in Schools, 2012b). For example, a preschool child may begin throwing his or her snack foods, hitting peers, and screaming during the transition from snack time to small work groups as
a way to avoid having to do academic work. Additionally, a child may scream and kick an adult at story time in order to gain a preferred item, such as a stuffed bear, that staff may hand to the child in order to calm him or her down at group time.

After careful data collection and reflection, the third step is to design the behavior intervention plan (BIP) to strengthen the appropriate behavior. Based on the function of the behavior, teachers will design an effective intervention that will gain the same outcome as the problematic behavior while using a more appropriate behavior (New Jersey Positive Behavior Supports in Schools, 2012b). This means that if a child is exhibiting challenging behavior as a means to gain a desired object, the teacher will need to design a way that is easier and just as effective, to gain that item in an appropriate manner. Similarly, if a child is exhibiting inappropriate behavior as a way to escape a portion of the day, it may be appropriate to teach the child how to ask for a break, or to teach the child to first complete a few moments of the task before being allowed to pick a more desired activity. Staff will continually monitor the BIP and make changes as needed to continue meeting the child’s needs.

*Physical intervention.* When a teacher must physically intervene in order to keep a child safe, it is not a form of behavior management, but rather a crisis management technique. Physically intervening should not be thought of as a way to reduce the frequency or intensity of a problematic behavior (Teaching Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders, 2003). The first two tiers of the PBS system should create school climates where this intensity of acting out behavior is rare. If a child has proven in the past to be violent or unsafe, staff should monitor the FBA and BIP closely to provide supports to reduce the likelihood of these acts. In the Des Moines Schools, only staff members who have received specific training are able to intervene physically.
Staff members who are deemed most likely to serve these children are provided with Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI) training, including specialized training in the area of non-violent physical interventions and control dynamics. Each support teacher in the district attended a specialized “train the trainer” event so that we were certified to teach staff within our district how to implement these skills. This specialized training provides staff with the knowledge of how to respond to a violent child, but only when he or she is an imminent danger to him or herself or others. The *Nonviolent Crisis Intervention* program focuses on crisis prevention through being proactive (the first two tiers of PBS). The goal of the training is that staff will have the confidence to deal with a situation when it arises, but that they will continue to focus on being proactive (CPI, 2005). For example, if a child bites a staff member, the staff member is trained to remove him or herself safely from the bite without causing harm to the child. Additionally, if a child is in danger of running into a busy street, staff are trained to safely and briefly restrain the child until the child is able to safely control his or her body. None of the techniques are intended to provide any pain or injury to the child. Teachers must properly document every occurrence. Teachers will contact the child’s family, administration, and the CPI trainer/support teacher assigned to their building by the end of the school day on the date that the episode occurred. Furthermore, after such occurrences, the teachers must review the child’s behavior plan with a support teacher and a special education consultant. The staff involved in these meetings will make any changes to prevent the likelihood or further situations.

One of the conversations that I had many times with teachers was that they often felt that they spent their whole day “putting out fires” rather than teaching academic content. I routinely assured teachers that they were in fact teaching their students many skills when they were working on implementing a behavior support plan. I became increasingly aware that my role
within my district revolved around not only teaching new skills to students, but also coaching teachers to accept new ideas and embrace change.

**Overview of Challenging Behavior in Early Childhood Education.** As stated earlier, the primary complaint I heard from teachers was that their students were exhibiting a wide variety of inappropriate behaviors and seemed to be completely unprepared to be successful in the classroom. These teachers were not alone. The National Academy of Science recently reported that only 40% of children enter school with the social-emotional skills necessary to be successful in kindergarten (Yates, Ostrosky, Cheatham, Fettig, Shaffer & Santos, 2008). This is a major concern for early childhood educators, as reports also show a strong link between a child’s behavior and later learning. Poor skills in the areas of following directions, staying on task, listening, and displaying appropriate behavior were linked to lower academic achievement and continued behavioral problems as children entered the primary grades. Not having the skills necessary to exhibit self-control, cooperation, independence, and staying on task can lead to deficits in school readiness components, such as problem solving, empathy, cognitive development, and language skills (Bulotsky-Shearer, Dominguez, Bell, Rouse, & Fantuzzo, 2010).

According to Bulotsky-Shearer et al. (2010), problem behavior often arises when the child is not capable of meeting the demands of the classroom. The researchers set out to study behavior problems that were present in Head Start programs during structured learning classroom activities in the early preschool years. Participants for this study were chosen using a stratified, random sample of 257 Head Start children in a large urban school district. Gender was evenly split, and the children were all between the ages of four to five and a half, predominantly African American, and all living in households in which the annual income was less than
$15,000. The Adjustment Scales for Preschool Intervention (APSI), which is a teacher measure that assesses adaptive and maladaptive classroom behavior using a 144-item multidimensional instrument based on teacher observation, was used to assess the emotional and behavioral problems of all children across a variety of classroom routines. The authors were seeking to examine the long term influence of preschool emotional and behavioral problems within the classroom on peer social interactions. The APSI was used at the beginning of the preschool year to rate each child’s competence in the areas of structured learning, peer interaction, and teacher interaction. Additionally, the teacher version of the Penn Interactive Peer Play Scale (PIPPS-T) was used to assess the children’s interactive play skills within the classroom. This assessment was given at the end of the Head Start year and again at the end of kindergarten year.

After both sets of assessments had been given, a series of path analyses and t-tests were used to identify whether there was a correlation between lower APSI scores and lower PIPPS-T scores. The results of the study indicated that children who had more difficulties in structured learning environments also exhibited higher play disconnect scores at the end of the preschool and kindergarten years. Additionally, problems in peer interactions at the start of the year were positively associated with play disruption, even at the end of the year. On a positive note, the authors added that responsive teacher-child interactions have been found to predict social and academic gains in preschool programs. Well planned interventions within quality early childhood programs may help to stop behavior problems while promoting more adaptive engagement in formal learning settings (Bulotsky-Shearer et al., 2010).

Self-regulation is a large component of being socially and emotionally ready to be successful in school. In fact, kindergarten teachers rank this skill as the most important prerequisite for entering school (Teaching Strategies, 2010). According to Leong and Bodrova
self-regulation means being able to delay gratification, control your emotions, and apply standards of behavior without having to be reminded. Self-regulation does continue to gradually develop as children mature, but it is a skill that must be taught. Teachers need to identify the level at which children are currently performing and then use a variety of strategies to bridge the gap between their current level and more complex skills. Effective teachers will purposefully use strategies and set up scenarios where they can scaffold these skills. It is important to remember, however, that punishing children for not demonstrating a skill that is higher than their developmental level does nothing to help improve their regulation skills (Florez, 2011). Fox and Garrison (2011) stated that teaching children to manage their own behavior can be done through the use of visuals, such as charts, which the child will use to monitor their own actions. Teachers will provide plenty of positive feedback and help children to learn when they are using the correct behavior throughout the school day.

Holifield, Goodman, Hazelkorn, and Heflin (2010) conducted a study to investigate whether self-monitoring devices can increase a child’s ability to self-regulate on-task behavior and increase attention and academic performance. For their study, two male students with autism, ages 9 and 10, who were currently being served in self-contained elementary classrooms were chosen. Both of these students had exhibited long term difficulties in the areas of attending to task, which had many negative repercussions, such as lowered social functioning and interrupted learning ability. Their teachers reported that the students could not complete tasks unless they were given almost constant verbal prompts and that they both demonstrated high levels of off-task, disruptive behavior.

A multiple baseline design was used to determine the effectiveness of the self-monitoring intervention across various academic sessions. When presented with seat work, the teacher
would give each student a self-monitoring sheet. The teacher would periodically give a verbal cue of “attending to task” and the students would circle either yes or no on their sheets. The students were praised if they were attending and circled yes; students were redirected and no praise was given if the student was not on task. After six days, both students were able to self-monitor independently when given cues. Both boys showed significant gains in their ability to attend to a task, ranging from 169% to 175% from their baseline scores. This study shows the importance of being able to self-regulate and how serious the consequence of not being able to learn these skills can be as children move into the later elementary years. This study also shows the importance of having a behavior support in place to help children be successful in the classroom setting, even those with significant developmental and intellectual delays (Holifield et al., 2010). While this study was done with elementary students, the same techniques can be applied to younger students in hopes of encouraging more self-regulation skills at an earlier age.

Another reason why teachers are seeing an increase of problem behaviors correlates to the increased number of students on the autism spectrum who are now being served in public schools. Recent statistics show approximately one in 88 children will demonstrate characteristics somewhere on the spectrum; a 23% increase over 2006 data (Jace, 2012). More alarmingly, according to a recent article in the New York Daily News, a new survey from the CDC reports that one in 50 children may have some form of autism based on parent phone reports (One in 50, 2013). Autism is a complex neurological syndrome that affects one’s social and communicative functioning. All children with autism spectrum disorders will display varying levels of difficulty with social interaction and behavior. In the classroom, some children may exhibit resistance to change, limited interests, selective attention, and atypical sensory stimulation, such as hand flapping, spinning, and rocking. Students with autism spectrum
disorders may demonstrate challenging behaviors that are not always responsive to traditional methods of classroom praise or discipline (Teaching Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders, 2003). According to the National Research Council, intensive early interventions can result in improvements for many children with autism (cited in Akshoomoff, Stahmer, Corsello, & Mahrer, 2010).

A recent study by Akshoomoff, Stahmer, Corsello, and Mahrer (2010) followed a group of young children who had been diagnosed with autism in the toddler years and had received intense interventions in an inclusive toddler program until age three. 29 toddlers attended the Children’s Toddler School (CTS) program. Children received a total of 21 hours of direct instruction each week during the program, including classroom time, community time, and in-home parent education. In addition to the 21 hours of programming offered by CTS staff each week, parents were also encouraged to use the techniques for an additional ten hours at home each week. The children in the program were exposed to structured learning, communication training, play based therapy, and interactions with typically developing peers. Children were assessed at the start and end of the study using the Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales (VBAS) and Differential Ability Scales (DAS). IQ scores were obtained at entry and exit using the Bayley Scales of Infant Development or Mullen Scales of Early Learning. This study showed significant gains in verbal and nonverbal IQs at the conclusion of the children’s time in the program. Only 4 children had average nonverbal IQ scores at entry into the program, while 11 had average scores at exit. Additionally, no child had average verbal IQ scores at entry, while 13 children (65%) had average verbal IQ scores at the time of follow up in elementary school. As children left the CTS program, the majority of them went on to segregated special education preschool programs, while 28% attended an inclusive classroom, and 17% attended programs
aimed for typically developing children in a private setting. When following up with students in elementary school, 63% of them were enrolled in general education classrooms. The authors of this study found it hopeful that the gains children were able to make in the toddler years through intense interventions could be maintained after the child left the program, regardless of the type of program the child went on to attend. The children’s early progress appeared to remain stable or improve while enrolled in general education settings.

Self-regulation is just forming in the first five years of life, so most preschool children will be in the early stages. Children with developmental delays will require even more help to learn these skills (Florez, 2011). Furthermore, at least one student with some form of autism spectrum disorder or other special need commonly appears in many of the early childhood special education classrooms or integrated preschools in Des Moines. The typical integrated classroom that I support reserves eight spots for students on IEPs. Several of the classrooms I serve are also considered “autism programs” that specifically serve only children with autism. Usually one teacher serves eight to ten children in these types of programs. For these reasons, the need for teachers to have a toolkit of behavior supports to help children be successful in school is apparent.

**Instructional coaching in early childhood education.** According to Russo (2004), many school districts are now trying a new professional development strategy known as school-based coaching, which involves a content area expert working closely with small groups of teachers to improve classroom practices and student achievement. The instructional coaching model has become a compelling choice for school districts due to the fact that traditional forms of professional development, such as lectures or in-service days, are unpopular with teachers due to the lack of follow up and accountability to implement new strategies.
The Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University works with urban school districts across the country to engage in school reform. The Annenberg Institute encourages the use of instructional coaching, which they see as a promising way for leaders to facilitate content-focused collaborative professional development that is tailored to meet the needs of teachers. Recent research by the institute shows that professional development is most effective when it is embedded in the teacher's daily work. The evidence of increased student learning as a result of coaching is still not well documented, since there are many variables involved beside just the presence of a coach. However, researchers hope that as coaching is more widespread and its impact can be measured, the link between student achievement and coaching can be documented (Instructional Coaching, 2004).

The role of an instructional coach can be multi-dimensional. In terms of professional development, the coaching model is used to build relationships among teachers, resolve specific problems, learn new skills, and strengthen the confidence and competence amongst staff members to apply already mastered skills to new situations. According to Doyle (cited in Coaching in Early Childhood, 2006), the coaching process includes five main components. The process of being an instructional coach should include 1) initiating the relationship with the teacher and making a plan with specific outcomes, 2) observing the teacher's current practices, 3) planning experiences to strengthen the teacher's knowledge or letting the teacher observe the coach demonstrating a new technique, 4) reflecting on what the teacher now knows and what questions or concerns she now has, and 5) evaluating the coaching process by self-reflecting. Of these steps, Doyle identifies reflection as the most important step because it is what differentiates coaching from typical problem solving or consulting. When a teacher is forced to reflect upon the process and identify what has been learned and what he or she still needs to learn or
implement, it makes the teacher more confident and competent. The goal is to promote continuous improvement, not just an improvement for the time that the coach is present.

Unfortunately, not all coaching relationships use this model, or any defined model, as a framework. Instructional coaching, especially in terms of early childhood education, is a relatively new initiative. Consequently, there are great differences across programs as to what a coach does, or even who qualifies to be a coach. Isner, Trout, Zaslow, Soli, Quinn, Rothenberg, and Burkhauser (2011) set out to study the current literature on early childhood coaches to identify the specific features that make coaching effective. They also conducted a multi-case study of coaches working across a variety of settings to examine details of how coaching is used to improve program quality.

In their study, the authors examined the current literature on a variety of early childhood settings that use a coaching model to improve quality rating scores on various assessments, such as the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS), the Preschool Rating Scale, and the Arnett Caregiver Interaction Scale. These programs included 17 childcare centers, 17 Head Start programs, 9 family childcare programs, 9 preschool programs, and 6 early elementary school programs. Several themes were identified through these studies. Across the studies examined, nearly all early childhood coaches were females with at least five or more years of teaching experience and a minimum of a bachelor's degree. Coaches reported doing a variety of activities in these studies, such as helping with lesson planning, observing and modeling, goal setting, and collaborative problem solving. All but six of the programs studied reported that coaching is one piece of a larger professional development model, and coaches in many programs were responsible for providing other trainings that aligned with their practices. Additionally, most coaches met with the teachers they serve weekly or bi-monthly. Based on
these characteristics, 13 of the teachers in these studies reported evidence of positive outcomes such as increased knowledge and positive attitudes. 87% of the early childhood teachers studied reported positive outcomes based on assessments such as the ECERS. (Isner et al., 2011).

Isner et al. (2011) also performed a multi-case study of coaching in the Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS). Four sites were chosen for this study, and each director at these sites completed a questionnaire and a phone interview lasting 40-100 minutes. This study found that three of the sites reported that their coaching was based on the consultation model by Patricia Wesley and Virginia Buysse (2005), although not all staff had been formally trained in this method and only one site reported assessing whether coaches are following this model with fidelity. Three of the sites reported that they had no formal manual or set of materials to guide their daily practices. All four of the sites reported that the goal of their coaching was focused on general quality improvement as opposed to improvements in specific content areas; however, coaches often begin their work with a particular teacher by focusing on “quick fixes” that can create an immediate improvement. The coaches themselves reported meeting informally on a regular basis and formally every few months with other coaches to collaborate and reflect on their own work. Both supervisors and teachers provided informal feedback to the coaches. Coaches in this study repeatedly stated that they viewed the feedback from teachers as more important than feedback from supervisors.

This study echoed many of the same issues my colleagues and I experienced. Many large school districts across the country have adopted the instructional coaching model. While many school districts in Iowa may have literacy or math coaches, my specific role as an early childhood special education support teacher was new to the Des Moines district and a pioneer position for most of the surrounding districts in our area. For this reason, it was paramount to
provide professional development not only on topics of PBS, but also on how my role would be defined.

**Quality Professional Development in Early Childhood Education.** In their official position statement on Conceptual Frameworks for Early Childhood Professional Development, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (1993) stated that using high-quality professional development can be a successful catalyst to address challenges that affect children, staff, and their families. The NAEYC recognizes that the programs that serve early childhood children vary greatly in terms of the educational level of staff, which can in turn affect how children are educated while in those programs. Since the adults who work with young children are key to providing high quality care, ongoing training should be structured to support all of the staff members working within a classroom. In the classrooms that I serve, it is very common to see a newly licensed teacher working with associates who may not have any formal training, but who have been working in the school system for several years. While both could be considered knowledgeable, it is important to provide in-service trainings that focus on the areas both parties may need.

When I began focusing this project on being part of a professional development series for our staff, I became aware that in order for this training to be meaningful it would need to follow certain guidelines. As a public school staff, our teachers were used to having frequent trainings, usually half a day every other week, which were not always on topics deemed important to them. I knew from surveying my staff that they wanted concrete ideas they could begin implementing in their classrooms immediately. To help structure my trainings, I followed these guidelines set forth by the NAEYC’s position statement on professional development (1993):
• Professional development should be an ongoing process. The recommended amount of training is 24 clock hours each year.

• Effective trainings should provide linkages between theory and practice.

• Effective trainings should be active, hands-on, and encourage professionals to learn from each other.

• Effective professional development should provide opportunities for application and reflection, along with chances to be observed and be given feedback.

• Professional development programs should be designed with input from the individuals who will be attending.

Teachers and administrators can agree that effective professional development can be vital to school success, although many factors, such as cost, can often decrease the effectiveness of such efforts. To help support such efforts, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 provides some funding for professional development that extends beyond the typical one-day workshops or conferences (Professional Development, 2004). While the literature on long term, intensive, and continuous trainings that are embedded in the teachers’ job have shown promising and significant gains in quality, few studies have been done specifically using relationship-based models, such as mentoring and instructional coaching (Zollitsch & Dean, 2010).

Many studies have examined the impact of training on the early childhood workforce. In 2007, Fukkink and Lont (cited in Byington & Tannock, 2011) conducted a meta-analysis of caregiver training by analyzing peer-reviewed publications. They concluded that specialized training with a focus on teacher-child interactions demonstrated a significant positive effect on the competence of providers. Additionally, provider education and training appeared to be better predictors of child care quality than did age, experience, or mental health. A 2004 study by
Helterbran and Fennimore (cited in Byington & Tannock, 2011), found that teachers sometimes view professional development as irrelevant, ineffective, and unrelated to the needs of their students. The authors found that training was deemed most effective when teachers gained a sense of ownership and created a continual cycle of learning.

Professional development in early childhood has the potential to create a more positive classroom environment. Byington and Tannock (2011) set out to study the professional development needs and interests of early childhood trainers. In their study, an online survey was created and shared with all early childhood trainers across the state of Nevada. 277 surveys were distributed, and 166 were returned. The survey contained 31 questions that gathered demographic data as well as trainer specific questions, such as length of time providing professional development in early childhood, types of trainings presented, resources used during trainings, and topics covered at trainings. The survey asked for information about coverage of Nevada’s Eight Core Knowledge Areas, which include topics such as curriculum, assessment, positive guidance, and leadership. Respondents indicated the types of techniques they used during trainings, such as lectures or small group activities. Additionally, ECE trainers were asked to rate their interest level on 15 topics related to teaching adult learners and to indicate the ways that they supported their own professional development.

The results of this survey showed that the majority of respondents were female (97%), Caucasian (83%), and held a bachelor’s degree or higher (74%). The highest number of trainers, 28%, worked at childcare centers and listed administrator or director as their primary position. 60% of the trainers surveyed reported that they presented fewer than 12 trainings a year, and that most of their trainings were focused on topics of environment, curriculum, and positive interactions and guidance. Most trainers reported using handouts (86%), lecture (73%), and
small group activities (72%) for the bulk of their training. Only 14% reported using field trips or webinars as a form of professional development. 82% of respondents reported using trainer developed materials rather than resources such as journal articles or commercially pre-packaged materials. This study also found that the majority of ECE trainers receive their own professional development through brief two or three hour online training modules. When asked to indicate topics of interest for their own learning, ECE trainers indicated the highest interest in the areas of teaching techniques, understanding adult learner principles, and utilizing the latest research in early childhood (Byington & Tannock, 2011).

Based on these survey results, the authors suggested the following recommendations. First of all, ECE trainer criteria should be established to ensure that trainers are knowledgeable and qualified to teach and train other early childhood professionals. Secondly, professional development opportunities for ECE trainers should be expanded to include training in areas such as adult learning principles. The authors of this study emphasized that to increase the effectiveness of their professional development, trainers need to receive instruction on how to implement learner-centered teaching, especially when teaching adults with diverse backgrounds. Lastly, the authors suggested that a statewide evaluation and quality assurance system for professional development should be created and implemented to effectively evaluate the impact of the trainings offered to the early childhood professionals (Byington & Tannock, 2011).

As the popularity of early childhood programs in Iowa continues to rise, so does the awareness for the need of effective professional development. The Iowa School Boards Foundation (2007) released a briefing on quality professional development in early childhood education in light of the recent legislation creating Iowa's Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program. The Foundation recognized that, due to the nature and diversity of programs serving
children ages 0-5, many early childhood teachers do not have access to effective and unified professional learning opportunities. Some of Iowa’s preschool programs are housed in school district buildings, while others are in community childcare centers. The state of Iowa recognizes the need to provide a coherent professional development delivery system for preschool teachers across the state. As part of the Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program, school districts are required to collaborate with community partners to plan and implement preschool programs. District leaders hope to use these relationships as a way to identify needs of childcare providers in various programs and provide training opportunities to equip all teachers with the skills to deliver developmentally appropriate, high quality instruction.

I was very aware that in order for my trainings to be successful, I would need to go beyond traditional professional development techniques. In his book *Instructional Coaching*, Jim Knight (2007) states that ineffective forms of PD lead to only a 10% implementation rate. When teachers are continually exposed to poorly presented PD, it can make them lose their enthusiasm and willingness to try new interventions. However, when teachers are included in well-designed PD and ongoing support, more than 90% of the teachers will implement programs that improve student learning. I was very fortunate that my position as a support teacher closely resembled that of an instructional coach. According to Knight (2007), instructional coaches provide ongoing, fulltime professional development on-site, directly to the teachers in their classroom settings. I would be able to merge both formats and provide an overall training to all staff and then follow up in person with the teachers who needed continual coaching and implementation of the behavior supports.

With these recommendations in mind, I designed the project. This project would include professional development sessions, along with the development of a resource toolkit utilizing
various supports from each tier of the PBS model. Additionally, I would use these resources to structure my role as a support teacher and infuse these topics into my daily time in early childhood classrooms.
Chapter III

The Project

The purpose of this project was to identify which behavior supports were commonly used in the Des Moines early childhood programs, and then use my role as an instructional coach to provide training and mentoring to the ECSE teachers I serve through an instructional coaching model with the intention of improving children’s learning. This chapter will highlight the training modules that were developed to present the early childhood department with knowledge of several behavior supports from each tier of the PBS model. Case studies will also be shared that highlight the practice of implementing behavior supports in several different types of ECSE classrooms.

Identifying Common PBS Supports in Early Childhood Programs

The first step of establishing the content of this project was to identify several behavioral supports that are commonly used in early childhood programs and align them with the three tiers of the PBIS system that our centers were implementing. I began to make a list of commonly used interventions by taking note of techniques teachers were already using in the classroom. I supplemented this list by adding items that I had suggested to teachers or that I had used in my own classrooms in the past. The supports were organized based on the intensity that each one would require, based on the research above. Supports that could be used at the school wide or classroom level were determined to be Tier One supports. Items that required some individualization or that targeted small groups of children were placed at the Tier Two level. The final items that required intensive one-on-one teaching and support were placed at the Tier
Three level. Using the research discussed above regarding types of interventions that were provided at each level, I matched up the early childhood supports for each. (See figure 1).
Figure 1—Common Early Child Positive Behavior Supports in the Des Moines Public Schools

**Tier 1 Supports**
- Visual structure
- Center choice boards
- Common rules, classroom limit setting
- Picture/object schedules
- Self-Management

**Tier 2 Supports**
- Social stories
- Calm down spot, calm down board
- Turn taking board
- Work tasks/structured play tasks
- PECS

**Tier 3 supports**
- FBA, IEP Goals
- CPI
This representation was considered a draft and was not formally adopted by the district as a definitive model for providing services. However, the chart was shared with the ECSE leadership team at a 3 hour bi-monthly consultant meeting. Feedback was provided, and this chart was chosen to be used as a working model for myself and the other support teacher to structure our time and resources in the classrooms we serve.

In addition to having this chart as a reference point, a resource binder or toolkit was developed. Using the supports described in each tier, I compiled pictures, handouts, and samples of products that teachers could use at each level. Copies of the toolkit, which were laminated and bound, were provided to each ECSE support teacher, as well as distributed to each center’s professional lending library by the end of the 2012-2013 school year.

**A Professional Development Series for ECSE Teachers**

After aligning the common behavior supports with the PBS model, it was time to start presenting the information to staff through professional development. Due to limited time over the course of the first school semester PD calendar, not every topic covered in this project could be presented. Similarly, not every support used in the school setting could be covered in this project. Some of these topics had been touched on at beginning of the year trainings or were planned to be presented at later dates by other departments, so administration did not feel it was necessary to re-present all of these items in greater detail.

Since my position is unique enough to meet with small groups of teachers to present topics as they become necessary, administration felt that some of these topics could be present as needed to smaller groups. I organized the professional development topics much like that of the PBS model. Some trainings could be presented as an overview to all staff members, some would need to be presented to small groups based on their individual needs, and some teachers would
need the direct one-on-one, daily coaching that I could provide as a support teacher. It was necessary to provide training to the whole early childhood team in only one topic for each tier. The topic of visual structure and independent work systems, a Tier 1 intervention, was presented to all staff. Functional Communication Training in terms of social interaction, a Tier 2 support, and Functional Behavior Assessments, a Tier 3 support, were presented to a smaller number of teachers and associates based on need and request. Access to my skills as an instructional coach in an individual teacher’s classroom was based on administrative request. These individual training periods occurred for 3-12 hour per week.

**Large group professional development opportunities.** The first PD presentation for staff covered the topics of visual structure and independent work tasks. This one hour topic was presented to the leadership team and 45 ECSE teachers at a regularly scheduled monthly staff meeting. This topic was presented through a PowerPoint presentation covering the research listed above in the literature review, along with applications of how to make this relevant to the children we serve in our buildings. Staff members had a chance to ask questions about their specific students, along with a time to share the strategies they already used in the classroom. Several examples of tasks and play materials, made by my fellow support teacher and me, demonstrated how common items in the classroom can be visually structured to gain independence. The agenda for this presentation can be found in figure 2.
Figure 2 - Agenda for Visually Structured Tasks Professional Development

Title of Course: Using Visually Structured Tasks in Early Childhood Special Education

Audience: ECSE Teachers in Des Moines Public Schools

Objectives: By the end of this course, participants will be able to define visual structure, create structured work stations in their classrooms, and use visual structure to adapt materials and activities throughout the school day.

- Overview of structured work systems in ECSE (10 minutes)
- Purpose of work tasks (5 minutes)
- How to set up work systems in your classroom (10 minutes)
  - Room arrangement
  - Schedule arrangement
- Examples of work spaces (10-15 minutes)
  - Photo sharing
- Examples of work tasks (Share around the room) (10-15 minutes)
  - Fine motor
  - Academic tasks
  - Play skills
- Make your plan (work on own for 5 minutes, then share out with your table)
  - Which children need tasks?
  - When will they use them?
- What skills do they already have?
- What kind of tasks do you need to make?
- Make your materials list

- Aligning work tasks with assessment data (5 minutes)
  - GOLD standards and objectives
  - IEP goals
After presenting to staff on the topics of visual structure and independent work tasks, staff provided feedback that they would like to have a make it/take it session where, under my supervision, they would be guided to make visuals and tasks for use with their own students. These sessions were held during two evening sessions in November. Prior to the make it-take it sessions, an email was sent out to staff asking for donations of objects such as shoe boxes, cardboard flats, plastic containers, and any spare manipulatives or materials not being used in their classrooms. These materials, along with the Tasks Galore (Eckenrode, Fennell, & Harey, 2005) book series, were placed in the teacher work rooms that were stocked with paper, lamination, and basic office supplies. In addition, support teachers provided hot glue guns, straight edge razors, and Velcro.

Two weeks before the sessions, email reminders of the make it-take it night were sent, and staff members were asked to sign up for a time slot and location. The four hour sessions were held at each of the three preschool centers after school during parent teacher conference nights so that associates could make materials as well. Staff were asked to come prepared with a list of materials they would like to make or a list of difficulties they were having in the classroom. Support teachers were available in the work rooms to give ideas, share materials, and help model the use of visuals. Eight associates attended the first evening, and two teachers and three associates attended on the second evening. Several teachers who did not sign up for a time slot or attend the sessions did use the resources to make items on their own.

In addition to the large group training on visual structure, the entire early childhood department, including regular education teachers, associates, and leadership were trained in the CPI Nonviolent Crisis Intervention Program in January 2013. 160 staff members attended this training. The large group was split into two equal smaller groups, both of which met for six
hours over the course of two Wednesdays. This training was presented using the CPI copyrighted PowerPoint DVD, lecture, participant work books, hands on demonstration, and a final posttest. Follow up and tips on how to implement these strategies in particular classrooms took place one on one with teachers as I visited their classrooms. After all ECE and ECSE staff members were trained, a monthly review was led by myself and my fellow support teacher for 15-30 minutes each month at our staff meetings to revisit topics covered in the training and allow teachers to share ideas and concerns. The agenda for this training can be found in Figure 3.
Figure 3- Agenda for CPI Professional Development

Nonviolent Crisis Intervention Training Outline (Crisis Prevention Institute)

Botanical Center
Group A: 8:00am to 11:15am
Group B: 12:30pm to 3:45pm

Agenda

Day 1 8:00am-11:15am/12:30pm-3:45pm

1. Introductions/Pre-Test (15-30 minutes)

2. Unit I: The CPI Crisis Development Model (30-45min)
   a. The CPI Crisis Development Model Lecture

3. Unit II: Nonverbal Behavior (30-45 min)
   a. Proxemics and Kinesics
   b. Proxemics Lecture
   c. Kinesics Lecture
   d. The CPI Supportive Stance Lecture

4. Unit III: Paraverbal Communication (15 min)
   a. Paraverbal Communication Exercise
   b. Paraverbal Communication Lecture

BRAEK

5. Unit IV: Verbal Intervention (60-90 min)
   a. The CPI Verbal Escalation Continuum Exercises
   b. The CPI Verbal Escalation Continuum Lecture
   c. Verbal Intervention Tips and Techniques Lecture
   d. Empathic Listening

Day 2 8:00am-11:15am/12:30pm-3:45pm

1. Review of Day 1 (10 minutes)

2. Unit V: Precipitating Factors, Rational Detachment, Integrated Experience (30-45 minutes)
   a. Precipitating Factors Lecture
   b. Rational Detachment Lecture
3. Unit VI: Staff Fear and Anxiety (15 minutes)
   a. Staff Fear and Anxiety Exercises
   b. Staff Fear and Anxiety Lecture

**BREAK**

4. Unit VII: CPI's *Personal Safety Techniques* (45-75 minutes)
   a. CPI's *Personal Safety Techniques* Lecture
   b. Review of Safety Rules
   c. Personal Safety Demonstration and Practice:
      i. Block
      ii. Kick Block
      iii. One-Hand Wrist Grab
      iv. Two-Hand Wrist Grab
      v. One-Hand Hair Pull Release
      vi. Two-Hand Hair Pull Release
      vii. Front Choke Release
      viii. Back Choke Release
      ix. Bite Release

Team Intervention (15-30 minutes)

5. Postvention (30-45 minutes)

6. Post-Test (15-30 minutes)

---

By the end of the course participants will be able to...

With *Nonviolent Crisis Intervention*® training, the emphasis is on early intervention and nonphysical methods for preventing or managing disruptive behavior. CPI's *Personal Safety Techniques* for staff are also demonstrated and practiced in this seminar to prepare staff to safely remove themselves and others from a dangerous situation. You’ll learn:

- How to identify behaviors that could lead to a crisis.
- How to most effectively respond to each behavior to prevent the situation from escalating.
- How to use verbal and nonverbal techniques to defuse hostile behavior and resolve a crisis before it becomes violent.
- How to cope with your own fear and anxiety.
- How to use CPI's Principles of Personal Safety to avoid injury if behavior becomes physical.
Small group professional development opportunities. Staff first had the opportunity to be trained in visual structure and increasing independence. Then more targeted trainings were developed in the areas of FCT and behavior analysis.

The next topic presented to staff was on FCT to increase socially appropriate behavior and interactions. When I began working on this portion of the professional development, I found that many of the interventions, such as sharing, I Feel boards, and asking to take a break, began to fall into common themes. I began to realize that the common themes could easily be matched to the Second Step social skills curriculum that teachers were already using for their whole group instruction. The *Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum* was developed by The Committee for Children. It is a program that uses puppets, songs, stories, and activities to learn about feelings, solving problems cooperatively, and to help children manage their anger and frustration (SecondStep.org, 2012). The social skills curriculum is divided into lessons that teach the concepts of empathy, emotion management, and friendship skills. Teachers within the district had some flexibility as to how often to incorporate these materials and lessons into their daily schedule, but I believed that connecting the FCT presentation with familiar themes would be more beneficial.

This session was offered to self-contained and inclusive ECSE teachers via an email invitation. Five ECSE teachers came to the after school session offered at one of the large preschool centers. This topic was again presented through PowerPoint and short video clips of acting out behavior. This presentation covered the basics of what FCT was and how it might look in ECSE classrooms based on the social skill concepts of empathy, emotion management, and friendship.
Staff had an opportunity to share ideas and role play ways that they could provide a functional way for students to get their needs met using an appropriate form of communication rather than through inappropriate student behaviors. Visually structured turn taking games and materials were presented, and staff had the chance to role play how they would help their students use appropriate skills. Each staff that attended the training were given prepared visuals indicating “I need a break,” “Will you play with me?” “I need a hug,” “share” and “my turn.” Figure 4 shows the agenda from this training.
Figure 4- Agenda for FCT Professional Development

Title of Course: Using Functional Communication Training to Support Early Childhood Social Skills

Audience: ECSE Teachers and Associates in Des Moines Public Schools

Objectives: By the end of this course, participants will be able to define what FCT is, and use the 7 step process to implement FCT across a variety of settings to target multiple social skills.

1. Overview of FCT (30 minutes)
   a. What is Functional Communication Training?
   b. Why use FCT
   c. Steps to implementing FCT in your classroom

2. Case scenario and Small Group Discussion (10 minutes)
   a. What is Abby trying to communicate?
   b. Share out in 5 minutes

3. Think, Pair, Share (15 minutes)
   a. Using the 7 step process, write a plan of how you would teach Abby a replacement behavior and teach it in your classroom. Work with others at your table and share with presenters as we go around the room

4. Teaching Social Skills in ECE (15 minutes)
   a. Friendship
b. Emotional Management

c. Empathy

5. Adding FCT and structure to social skills (60 minutes)

a. Friendship
   i. Initiating play
   ii. Joining in play
   iii. Sharing and cooperating

b. Emotional Management
   i. Dealing with anger or disappointment
   ii. Calming down

c. Empathy
   i. Exchanging feelings
   ii. Commenting on emotions

d. Examples- field trip around the room to view examples
   i. Structured turn taking
   ii. Adapted play plans
   iii. Play routines and scripts
   iv. Social story cues
   v. Calm down choice board
   vi. Cozy corner, peace table
   vii. Commenting board

6. Questions or Comments from the Group (5 minutes)
7. Fill out the feedback form of items you are interested in using in your room. Leave the form with your support teacher and we will schedule a time to work with you!
The final PD topic was that of Functional Behavior Assessments. This training was only presented to new ECSE teachers, since many other teachers had already had forms of this training in the past. The PowerPoint presentation for this topic was designed to lead staff through the process of identifying a problematic behavior, hypothesizing the function, and setting a replacement behavior. The staff was encouraged to bring their own FBAs and behavior plans, since many of them had been written by past teachers or consultants. Guidance was given on how to update forms that were incomplete or not representative of what was really happening in the classroom. Staff was then instructed to chart out the behaviors of their students on note cards, along with the appropriate staff response or replacement behavior. These cards were intended to be used as a quick reference and to guide general education co-teachers, associates, and substitutes to follow the correct behavior plan. Teachers were encouraged to role play challenging behavior scenarios with their associates so that all staff knew how to respond. The last part of this presentation was dedicated to the topic of creating a safety plan or crisis team so that all staff in the classroom knew how to react if an extremely violent outburst occurred. This agenda is shown in Figure 5.
Title: Functional Behavior Assessments in ECSE
Audience: New ECSE Teachers
Materials needed: Please bring your laptop and at least 1 current FBA from a student on your roster

Learning Objectives: By the end of the course, participants will be able to understand the FBA process, including how to determine the function of behavior, write behavioral goals, and increase positive behavior using a variety of supports. Participants will also be able to review current FBA’s and make corrections as needed.

1) What is an FBA?
2) Opening Activity- FBA Knowledge Quiz. Find a buddy with whom to score your test. Share out- how did you do? (10 minutes)
3) Overview of the FBA Process (90 minutes)
   a. Step 1- Determine which behavior to target
      i. Case scenario- with your buddy, define the problem behavior in one sentence
   b. Step 2- Identify the function of the behavior
      i. Motivation assessment scale, Problem Behavior Questionnaire, FAST
1. Using a current student, fill out one of these assessments and score. What is the function of the behavior? Did it surprise you?

ii. ABC data or observation

1. Take ABC data while you watch the video clip. What happened before the behavior? After? (think of subtle consequences too)

c. Step 3- Identify alternatives to the behavior

i. Replacement behavior form

1. Fill in a replacement for each behavior listed

d. Step 4- Identify strategies to increase the positive behavior

i. Look at your current FBA for your student. List 3 ways you can enhance his or her positive behavior. Are you already doing this in your classroom?

e. Step 5- Identify strategies to decrease negative behavior

i. Look at your current FBA. Is there a plan in place to redirect the inappropriate behavior? Is it working? If not, list 3 ways you would like to work on this in your classroom

f. Step 6- Develop a BIP and use it continuously throughout the day

i. Overview of the sections of a BIP

g. Step 7- Evaluate the BIP, and make changes as necessary.

h. Find your student’s BIP. Is it accurate? Is it working? Are you using it daily?

i. Share at your table the contents of your BIP. What do you like or dislike about it.

4) Reviewing your current caseload (30 minutes)

a. Find and highlight the following items:
i. Behavior of concern

ii. Antecedents and consequences

iii. Function of the behavior

iv. Replacement behavior

v. Goal- how will it be taught? Reviewed?

vi. Safety plan?

5) Making your FBAs and BIP work for you (30 minutes)

a. Tips and techniques
   
i. Make cue cards for each student
   
ii. Staff responsibilities
   
iii. Packets, files, and boxes for each student

b. What if something isn’t accurate?
   
i. Amend
   
ii. Re-write

c. Adding and FBA to a student who needs one

d. Positive Behavior Supports
Using the Instructional Coaching Model to Ensure Implementation of PBS Strategies

After staff had been exposed to the expectations of the PBS system and experienced the training opportunities discussed above, I continued to work with the teachers in my designated schools to continue the implementation throughout the school year. By this time in the school year, I knew my teachers and their students well enough to know which tiers of the PBS model had already implemented, and which students may need extra supports. At bi-monthly leadership meetings, I was asked to give reports of the staff I was working with, what their needs were, and how I was helping to support them. Using the framework of the PBS model became a very streamlined way to visually lay out which teachers needed more intense support in their classrooms, and thus more of my time. Some of the teachers with whom I worked one on one received more in-class training simply because they were new teachers. Other times, the early childhood leadership and administration directed me to work more closely with teachers who continued to struggle with implementing district initiatives, had the most challenging students who were failing to make progress, or recently received students integrated into larger settings from smaller, self-contained classrooms and needed more intensive support during the transition.

For record keeping purposes, our early childhood administrative team asked that we as early childhood support teachers set goals with teachers. We set goals using a documentation form that can be seen in Figure 6.
Figure 6- Early Childhood Goal Sheet

Support staff: ________________________________

Teacher/Classroom: ________________________________

Environment  Parent involvement  Health/Safety

Curriculum instruction assessment  Student need(s)

Identified Area of Concern:

Goal 1:

Action Plan (including timeline):

Follow up:
Throughout the school year, support teachers in the district met at monthly meetings. Since the role of a support teacher in our district includes pre-K-12 support teachers in all content areas and behavioral supports, the administrative team tasked us with working in focus groups to create common forms and verbiage to be used in future school years. A new documentation form draft was introduced in January of 2013. As one of the support teachers on that focus group, I began using that form experimentally for the remainder of the year. This form can be seen in Figure 7.
Figure 7- Revised Draft of District Support Teacher Goal Sheet

Teacher Name: ______ Support Teacher Name: ______ School:_______

Initial date: __________________ Reason for Support Teacher Involvement:

What does the teacher want to see?

What is currently happening?

Specific, Measurable Goal / Outcome:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critical Feature</th>
<th>Date:</th>
<th>Current Status:</th>
<th>Action Steps:</th>
<th>Teacher Plans to Do:</th>
<th>Support Plans to Do:</th>
<th>Next Follow Up Date:</th>
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- What can be done to improve student success?

- What changes need to be made/implemented?

made/implemented?
Qualitative Studies Utilizing Instructional Coaching

What follows below is a narrative recounting of the teachers and students that I worked with through the stages of the PBS model. All names have been changed.

Sophia. Sophia was a first year teacher in an inclusive classroom in one of the larger preschool centers located in Des Moines. In the inclusive models, there is one special education teacher, one regular education teacher, and one classroom associate. Sophia’s co-teacher and associate were both significantly older than her, and her associate has physical limitations that prevented her from being able to get down on the floor or interact with the children in a hands-on way. The co-teacher openly disagreed with many of the district initiatives and refused to do them on her days of lead teaching. Sophia’s roster mainly consisted of children with behavioral concerns and limited language skills. The general education peers were all young and what the teacher described as “immature.” Sophia tried her best to gain control of the whole class when she was teaching or provide much needed support when her co-teacher was leading, but often the children (who could realize there were no set rules and little consistency among staff) would exhibit behaviors that would cause the classroom staff to become angry and frustrated.

When I visited Sophia’s classroom she rarely had questions about her own special education children’s academic progress. For a first year teacher, she was knowledgeable in the areas of differentiating instruction and providing scaffolding. Her main concern was for that of the whole class. Surprisingly, her students were sitting through group time fairly well, sometimes better than some of the general education peers who commonly lost focus.

It was easy to see that this classroom needed to go back to the basics of the PBS model and simply establish those classroom rules and expectations. The teaching staff were at first reluctant to do this, since they believed it would confuse the children even further by changing
routines, expectations, and adult reactions to behavior so far into the school year. After reiterating some of the facts of how important self-regulation is to later learning, the classroom staff were engaged and ready to make some changes.

Since my position is specifically to work with the special education staff, I worked with Sophia to set goals and action steps that would have positive impacts for all students in her classroom. We held our meetings and discussions at times that the co-teacher could be present to encourage her to use the same techniques when she was the one teaching for the week. Sophia’s initial goal was simply for her class to come to group time appropriately and stay for a ten minute task with all of her students completing the activities to the best of their ability. We began by discussing what her expectations for the children at group time would be. She stated she would like all of the children to keep their hands and feet to themselves, keep their eyes on the teacher, and have a quiet voice. This included both sitting quietly when they were listening and talking at an acceptable volume when it was their turn to share.

Once the ground rules were established, Sophia made a visual poster and showed it to the students at her group time the next day. She reminded the children that after group, it would be center time. She drew the children’s attention to the picture schedule located on the easel and reminded the children that center time is a time when they could talk freely and be more active. For the first several days, simply reviewing the poster at the start of group time seemed to help focus the children. Sophia was able to praise the group or individual students when they were making good choices. I modeled to the co-teacher and associate how to discretely use individual visuals to the children who needed it.

After just a few weeks, the group was overall much more compliant when it came to their group time behavior. However, during this process, a new special education student joined
Sophia’s class. Jose had particular difficulty controlling himself at group time. He would often slide around the carpet on his back, get up and leave group several times, and a few times even began throwing toys from a nearby shelf. My focus quickly shifted from providing casual whole class support to a more intensive, child focused support. We continued to stay within the Tier One supports by providing Jose a self-monitoring visual. Jose’s ability to truly self-monitor was very low, but he did regulate better by having the visual available. Jose was able to earn a gold coin to Velcro onto his chart each time a teacher noticed him following one of the group time expectations. After he earned four coins, he was able to leave the group to have one minute of a sensory break with the sit and spin, which was a highly preferred activity for Jose, before returning to group.

For several days I observed Jose using his visual at group time. When data showed that he was staying at group without inappropriate behavior for at least 5 minutes, we decided to change his visual to require that he earn six coins before requesting a break. I also began to model having Jose monitor his own behavior by giving him a coin and saying “Put this on your chart when you know you are keeping your hands to yourself.” In the beginning, Jose would always put it on his chart immediately, without seeming to give much thought to if he was actually following the rule. After some practice, Jose could be presented with the coin at a time when he was having difficulty following a rule and he would correct his behavior before adding it to the chart. Eventually the reward was phased out even more by Jose being able to still earn his sensory break, but he had to wait until center time to redeem it.

After six weeks, not only was the whole group transitioning and staying at a large group activity, but Jose was also able to use visuals and minimal adult prompting to stay at group without disruptions. I began to fade out my child specific support in Sophia’s room. I still
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After six weeks, not only was the whole group transitioning and staying at a large group activity, but Jose was also able to use visuals and minimal adult prompting to stay at group without disruptions. I began to fade out my child specific support in Sophia’s room. I still
visited her classroom weekly, and as she received new students throughout the year, we collaborated on goals and accommodations. However, for the most part, Sophia was able to utilize the newly developed skills in new situations as they occurred.

**Darlene.** Darlene was a very experienced teacher who had been teaching the deaf education preschool program for over 20 years. However, due to lower numbers of deaf students in the district, Darlene’s deaf education program was cut to half time and she was asked to teach self-contained ECSE the other half of the day. Darlene was eager and willing to try something new, but totally unsure of how to make the transition due to many obstacles. She was the only ECSE teacher in her elementary building, which caused her to feel as if she didn’t have a support system. Furthermore, Darlene had a high turnover rate of associates, with three different associates resigning or asking for transfers in a three month period. Darlene also taught at the only continuous calendar preschool program, meaning that she missed out on many of the other preschool wide trainings and meetings held at the start of the typical school year.

Since her program was new, it took more time for her classroom to be full. For several months she only had two students. I consulted with Darlene twice a week to provide basic mentoring and individualized support for her students as issues arose. For the most part, Darlene’s classroom was quiet and manageable until late fall when she received three new students in the same week. One of her students had Down syndrome, was completely deaf, and had just emigrated from Burma. The second student had just turned three years old and had no verbal communication. The third student, Timmy, came from a Spanish-speaking home, but had no verbal skills in any language, was currently diagnosed with ADHD, and exhibited many characteristics of a child on the autism spectrum. Timmy’s parents opted not to give him the ADHD medication prescribed by his doctor or provide any of the private therapy services, such
as speech or sensory integration, which had been suggested by his case manager. Timmy struggled with many aspects of the school routine, such as coming to group time and staying in his spot, interacting with peers, communicating his needs, and interacting with toys appropriately.

After observing Timmy several times in the classroom, it was clear that he needed more structure, supported by visuals, in order to be more independent and compliant. Using a goal setting sheet, I worked with Darlene to identify the areas she wanted to prioritize. After several conversations, Darlene realized it was realistic to expect Timmy to transition to group time and stay for 3-5 minutes, as well as to play appropriately with materials in a center for up to ten minutes before switching centers.

We began immediately to start structuring Timmy's day. Darlene started by first changing her classroom schedule to better meet the needs of her young students who had a hard time staying on task for very long. She decided that rotations of 10-15 minutes worked best for her class, so she had the entire group change locations often, going from large group to centers, play to small groups, outside to snack, and rotating between one on one work with a teacher and a larger turn taking activity. We started teaching Timmy the routine by using a portable picture schedule that was set up in a first/then manner. In the beginning, we found it was necessary to "reward" Timmy after every successful transition. For example, after each time Timmy came to group, Darlene would blow bubbles. After a few weeks we were able to fade out the immediate reward and simply show him two un-preferred or "work" activities on his schedule and use the reinforcing item only in times when he was struggling to comply. In those instances we would simply arrange his schedule to show him the demand, such as finishing a small group task, and then he would get the bubbles. After six weeks, Timmy was coming to group when given his
transition picture card, staying at group for five minutes, and then transitioning to a small group or one on one work session with a teacher.

Another area where Timmy needed a lot of support was during center time. If an adult was not in a learning center with Timmy, he would usually run around the room or spend long periods of time in repetitive motions, such as shoving food in the play microwave until it was too full or opening and shutting a book cover without looking at the pages. Staff in the room found it hard to always be with Timmy when they were busy trying to work with other students. I suggested to Darlene that Timmy could learn some simple play tasks paired with a visually structured task to give him some independent time in centers until an adult could join him. Darlene was excited about this idea. She began by making one task in each center that she knew Timmy could do independently, such as matching play food onto a Velcro board in the kitchen center or putting small rubber vehicles into a container in the block center. For a few days, staff members needed to show Timmy his schedule which was set up to show him the task, called “work” to Timmy, and then a basket of toys was called “play.” In the beginning, Timmy would need some adult monitoring to complete the whole work task, but Timmy enjoyed the structure and quickly mastered the tasks in each center. After he completed his work, Timmy was able to play with the toys in the basket in any way he wished. After a few moments, another staff member and a peer usually joined the center and tried to engage Timmy in a play scheme to work on communication and interaction skills. After a few weeks of this routine, Darlene started working with Timmy during one on one time to interact with play materials in a more meaningful way. Using a visual picture task of play skills, Darlene taught Timmy to perform a play scheme in almost a rote manner. For example, Timmy learned to use visuals during doll play and could pick out a doll, put clothes on the doll, give the doll a bottle, and then put the doll
in the baby bed. Once a play skill was mastered, the visuals were put into the basket of “play” materials in each center, so that when Timmy finished his work and moved on to independent play, he had something functional to do.

The third area with which Timmy struggled was initiating conversation. Darlene reported that sometimes Timmy would seem to be listening if she talked to him, but other times it appeared as if he “tuned out” what others were saying and would keep playing or walk away from adults. Timmy would sometimes smile at an adult, but never tried to initiate a conversation in either English or Spanish or even try to gain adult attention by nudging an adult. I began to model the PECS program with Timmy, starting by presenting pictures of objects that were highly motivating, such as a toy car, and others that were not, such as a sock. When Timmy began to reach for an object, he was guided to give the picture to an adult who then modeled the words “I want the car.” Within a few weeks, Timmy could discriminate between pictures to ask for toys or preferred foods at snack time if an adult was at the same table with the real objects. At the time of this project, Timmy was working on discriminating between two preferred items and then selecting the correct one, such as choosing between Cheerios and Frosted Flakes at snack and then picking the bowl with the correct cereal in it. However, Timmy is still working on approaching an adult to initiate a request and has not yet done so on his own. To aid in this process, Timmy was given a binder filled with preferred pictures he had previously learned and is encouraged to pick from his book throughout the day.

Celine. Celine worked in an ECSE program that was combined with a Head Start classroom in one of the preschool centers. This class could serve a total of 20 children, eight of which could be students on IEPs. In her morning class she had a student named Jacob who had been with her for a year and a half. Jacob had started in the Head Start room as a three year old,
but was quickly staffed to ECSE with a behavior plan. Jacob had suffered extreme abuse and neglect from his birth parents and was currently being adopted. He had been diagnosed with reactive attachment disorder and had physical disabilities that made it hard for him to maneuver around the classroom as easily as his peers. Jacob was also very smart and had verbal and academic skills well beyond most three and four year olds.

When Jacob first joined Celine's room, he had difficulty transitioning between tasks and controlling his emotions. He would lash out verbally at staff and peers and would often spend most of the day refusing to do the same tasks as peers. As his home life started to become more stable, Jacob began having less difficulty at school and the team was actually thinking he would soon master his behavior goal and be dismissed from special education. A couple months after the 2012 school year began; Celine contacted me and said she thought Jacob was regressing. We found out later that he had begun having visits with his birth parents again and was emotionally distressed from the changes. Celine was seeing many of the old behaviors, and some were even more severe than before. Jacob had started to bite himself and peers, hit peers, throw toys at staff and peers, curse, spit, and make verbal threats toward staff and peers.

I started working with Jacob by observing him for a 3 hour session. During that session, Jacob demonstrated 122 instances of physical aggression toward himself or others, and 188 instances of verbal aggression. Of the three hours he was at school, Jacob was engaged with his teachers and peers for a total of 28 minutes. The rest of the day he spent hiding under a table crying, or in the cubby area throwing toys and kicking lockers. Staff continually tried to redirect Jacob and engage him in activities, yet he refused and continued to make threats or try to harm others. After further observations and talking with staff members, it became clear that Jacob was at times trying to avoid group activities. He also was trying to gain Celine's attention by
continuing to act out when an associate was with him, because eventually Celine would come
over and he would calm down for several moments when she was with him.

Celine and I set the goal of Jacob either joining an activity or appropriately declining the
activity and instead working on his own on a similar task. Celine also wanted Jacob to work on
asking appropriately for a break or adult attention. Jacob already had a picture schedule and his
own work space set up. Although Jacob was very verbal, it was observed that when he was very
angry he had a hard time expressing his true feelings. For this reason, visuals for items such as
"I need a break," "I need a teacher," or "I need a hug" were added to his picture schedule. At
the start of each activity, Jacob was presented with a picture of the task along with the break
cards. Jacob usually chose to skip the group activity and work alone, and then later finish the
task with an adult. During this intervention, we did see his verbal and physical aggressions
decrease dramatically. However, the team felt his negative behavior was mainly attention
seeking and that he was purposefully skipping group so that he could work one on one with a
teacher later.

After having a team meeting, we decided to try adding to the intervention and making the
connection between the communication cards and the outcome more concrete. Each day for
three weeks, Jacob started his day in the family room with just an associate for 15 minutes.
During this time, Jacob could engage in any activity of his choice with the associate. After the
15 minutes, the associate would tell Jacob she needed to do some teacher work but that he could
come get her if he needed her. She would then sit at a table a few feet away from Jacob and do
paperwork or check her email. For the first few days, Jacob would begin yelling or throwing
toys as soon as the playtime ended. The associate continued to do her own work, but would
remind Jacob he could ask for a teacher if he needed her. After a week, Jacob became proficient
at handing the card to the associate or verbally asking to play. A timer would be set for 3 minutes of play time, and then Jacob would be taken back to his classroom for small group time. If Jacob chose to have a break instead of doing the work, he was presented with simple work tasks that were not overly preferred. After completing the tasks, he was asked to complete a small portion of the small group work on his own before a teacher would engage with him. Again, Jacob reverted back to inappropriate behavior, such as running up and biting a teacher when he was supposed to be working, instead of asking for help. At times, Jacob would refuse to even transition back into the classroom from the family room and would instead run down the halls, scream, or attempt to kick or bite the teacher.

After a few weeks, Jacob was able to transition back into his classroom and complete a small task before gaining positive adult attention. Jacob was consistently asking for breaks or adult time with little prompting. He was having only 12 physical aggressions a day, although they were still very serious in intensity. Staff did at times need to restrain Jacob when he became especially violent, and several times a week, Celine resorted to doing a room clear to take the other students out of the room when Jacob began running around the room throwing large objects and knocking over shelves. Staff felt that for the safety of Jacob’s peers, someone needed to be with him at all times. These changes and precautions were added to his FBA and behavior plans, and staff were continually trained and reminded of how to deal with Jacob safely as he escalated. Jacob would often comment that he “hated his loud classroom and all the noisy kids.” Several times he was offered noise reduction headphones during center time, but usually he would throw them at a peer. I continued to visit Celine’s classroom several times a week to collect data and model how Jacob could ask for breaks appropriately. One day Jacob told me he
wished he could go to the classroom next door, which happened to be a much smaller self-contained classroom.

At a team meeting, we discussed the option of Jacob going to a smaller classroom. We obviously wanted him to be as included as possible, but also knew we needed to do what was best for him. For a week, I recorded data of him when he was in the smaller classroom compared to when he was in his larger classroom. He had zero verbal or physical aggressions in the smaller classroom. He transitioned to every activity and would stay for most of the group time before asking for a break. After sharing this information with his guardians, they asked that he be moved to the self-contained room. Because Jacob had attachment disorder and had been abandoned in the past, we felt it was still necessary for him to have access to his old classroom. Once he began going to the small classroom, we included pictures of Celine in his schedule so he still had opportunities to pick small amounts of play time or story time in his old classroom. In the beginning, he did pick Celine’s room often, although he would usually scream and try to attack staff and peers when he was in there. After his third day he was no longer asking to go to Celine’s room for activities, but he did sometimes choose having three minutes of play time with Celine as his reward for completing a series of tasks and transitions within his new classroom. After two weeks in the self-contained room, his guardians reported he was having fewer outbursts at home too. Celine reported that she was very sad to see him go, and that she felt like she had failed by not being able to keep him integrated. I reminded Celine that she had done so much for Jacob, and that the goal would be that someday he would be able to integrate again.

These mini-case studies were very representative to how my role as a support teacher was utilized throughout the school year. It was evident that this process was creating change for the students we were targeting. Since my main role was to work directly with special education
teachers, I also wanted to be sure that I was building capacity and creating change for the staff members I worked with.

**Evaluating the ECSE Support Teacher Role After One Year**

As the end of the 2012-2013 school year neared, I felt it was important to evaluate how effective my project had been in supporting teachers to implement positive behavior supports for their students with challenging behavior needs. Since my role as a support teacher was non-evaluative, meaning I do not evaluate teachers' performance or skills in ways that an administrator would, I was not able to formally assess to what degree teachers were actually implementing the plans and supports that I had suggested. I knew that from my time in various classrooms, it appeared that the supports were having a positive impact on targeted children and classroom systems overall. One of the main roles of a support teacher or instructional coach is to provide ongoing professional development in the classroom setting. I wanted to evaluate whether the teachers on my caseload felt that they had been given adequate support and training in the areas of PBS and challenging behaviors.

In order to evaluate my project, I created an informal survey. This survey asked the following questions:

1) Which of the trainings provided to you by an ECSE support teacher did you find most meaningful? Structured learning, CPI, FBA, or in-class support to implement your specific needs

2) Please rank the following activities (1 being the least beneficial in your teaching practice and 3 being the highest)

   - having a support teacher to consult, problem solve, and provide in-class support
   - going to workshops, conferences
traditional staff meetings and PD events

3) The following is the NAEYC position statement about what constitutes quality PD. Please write Y or N if you feel having a support teacher met each requirement.

- Professional development should be an ongoing process. The recommended amount of training is 24 clock hours each year.
- Effective trainings should provide linkages between theory and practice.
- Effective trainings should be active, hands-on, and encourage professionals to learn from each other.
- Effective professional development should provide opportunities for application and reflection, along with chances to be observed and be given feedback.
- Professional development programs should be designed with input from the individuals who will be attending.

4) Which area did your support teacher provide most frequently to you?

☐ Overall classroom mentoring
☐ Child Specific behavior supports
☐ Positive behavior supports that could be used for more than one student
☐ Helping to transition new ECSE students into the daily routine of your classroom

This survey was emailed to the eight teachers that I spent the most time with over the course of the school year. Although I was assigned to three buildings, I only worked with new or new to their position teachers on a weekly basis. Career teachers in these buildings had access to my services on an as-need basis when they referred a child with severe behaviors, but since these teachers may not have experienced the full spectrum of support teacher services, I chose not to include them in my survey.
Five teachers returned the survey within the time frame asked. In order to keep responses as anonymous as possible, responses were printed off without names attached. Answers were sorted and matched with each question.

For question one, teachers were asked to pick the PD opportunity they felt was the most effective. Five (100%) of the teachers picked ongoing in-class support as their answer. Although teachers were not required to rank the other choices, two teachers indicated that their second preference was the training on visual structure. One teacher commented that this training gave them multiple resources of ways to structure activities throughout the day to meet the needs of all learners in the class.

Next, teachers were asked to rank several different types of PD based on benefits to their teaching practice. Again, all five teachers ranked having a support teacher to provide in-class support as their highest choice. Four of the five teachers chose traditional staff meetings as their second choice. Staff meetings occurred when various support staff, such as assistive technology, speech, consultants, and I would share videos or materials on various classroom topics. One teacher commented that she valued going to conferences or workshops, in which teachers were able to pick the topics they wanted to attend, but that those opportunities rarely happened in our department.

Teachers were then asked if having a support teacher met the PD criteria suggested by the NAEYC. 80% (four of the five teachers who responded) of the teachers marked “yes” to each of the criteria. One teacher marked that having a support teacher did not provide 24 clock hours of support. This may have been a teacher that I worked with less frequently, so my presence may not have seemed as intense to her. I also did not specifically ask teachers to consider both my in-
class support and the formal PD trainings that had been offered throughout the year by the support teachers.

Finally, teachers were asked which kind of support they felt was provided most often. Two of the teachers chose classroom mentoring, while two teachers chose child specific behaviors. One of the teachers chose classroom wide positive behavior supports. The two teachers who chose classroom mentoring also commented that the mentoring process encompassed all of the options that were listed and that they enjoyed having a staff member that could help them with everything from planning small group instruction to helping to write an FBA.

Based on the feedback provided by teachers, it was clear that they appreciated having a support teacher present this school year. However, because my role was new and still undefined, some teachers were not sure what exactly my role was. Although implementing PBS was the purpose of my project and the guiding structure that I used when working with teachers, this process was not always explained thoroughly to all staff, either by leadership or me.

Through personal conversations with the teachers I serve, I know that many of them are excited to use my role again next year. Going forward, I feel it is necessary to have more of a defined role for support teachers that should be shared and reviewed with staff frequently. Our department gains new staff members each year as new positions are created and existing staff transfer to different assignments. It is important to be consistent in presenting information to all staff members, especially since our building locations are so spread apart. Both special education and general education staff should be aware of the support teacher role. Hopefully in upcoming years, there will be an official, systematic way to access a support teacher and evaluate the success of the interventions.
Chapter IV

Conclusions and Recommendations

After concluding my project, I was able to reflect on the overall effectiveness of using the instructional coaching model in early childhood special education classrooms. This chapter will give an overview of my personal insights and knowledge gained from spending a year mentoring teachers to implement positive behavior supports in their classrooms. I will also highlight comments shared by my colleagues noting their satisfaction in having positive behavior supports and in class mentoring. Finally, my recommendations for continuing this PD initiative for future years and potential future projects will also be shared.

Personal Insights

This project provided me with plenty of insight into my new role. Not only did this project give me a more in-depth understanding of PBS in early childhood classrooms, but it also served as an anchor for me in my first year of a new position within my district. My role as support teacher was undefined at the start of the school year, and developing this project gave me a solid focus for working within all of the different classrooms that I served. I firmly believe that without this project breaking down the supports in each tier, I would have spent a lot of time in classrooms focusing on a higher level support when perhaps a lower level support had been overlooked that would have better served that student. It is the goal of all teachers to provide the least restrictive environment, which means that teachers should first implement general interventions that would benefit all children before moving a child to an IEP or a self-contained classroom due to a disruptive behavior.
Value to Colleagues - Teacher Practices of self & others

This research project proved to be very valuable to myself and my colleagues. First of all, having positive behavior supports became a main theme of our professional learning time as a staff throughout the school year. Having PBS as a guiding framework, along with many of the supports discussed in the paper, helped to keep all staff more positive in our discussions rather than constantly complaining about the inappropriate behaviors teachers were experiencing. As a staff, we became more of a solution focused team.

Working to improve student behavior also helped to address the positive behavior we saw in our students. Teachers delivered more positive affirmations to students and used positive reminders of rules throughout the day. Many teachers began using the concept of “catching students being good” to point out appropriate behavior. As I visited classrooms, I even heard children reminding other students of the rules or praising peers for making good behavioral choices.

An area of great importance in this project was the district assigning teachers to take on the coaching role. Support teachers were new roles in the early childhood department, and this project went hand-in-hand with finding ways to best utilize my position. My colleagues expressed their gratitude for having an instructional coach to provide ongoing support in addressing new concerns as they arose, as well as being able to revisit past professional development topics. In contrast to traditional professional development that teachers were accustomed to attending, I was able to research past topics and re-deliver them to teachers as needed in a way that was meaningful in the teacher’s day to day life.
As the end of the school year approached, I asked some of the ECSE teachers with whom I worked to provide some comments about what they enjoyed about having a support teacher to help implement behavior supports. An ECSE teacher in a Head Start classroom said:

I really enjoyed having someone come in and be very supportive and positive about how things were going in our room and providing suggestions for specific children. I also appreciated that she was willing to make/loan/find activities/pictures/tasks to assist me in implementing them more quickly. It also helped me feel more confident as a special education teacher. She was also very supportive and willing to demonstrate how to use some techniques and what limits to set, and how to fade prompts more effectively. I feel that I benefited from her modeling, suggestions, and support. I would like to see her role continue as it has been this year. Heather has always given very realistic expectations and support from what needs to be and could be done with my students. (personal communication, April 10, 2013)

One of the ECSE teachers integrated with the Universal Preschool program, enjoyed the benefits of having support in her classroom this year, especially since her collaborating teacher was on maternity leave for several months. This teacher said:

The support teacher helped students stay at the large group longer, thus increasing their learning. The whole room became more organized and positive. I used the materials and ideas provided for individual students. I need this to continue next year. (personal communication, April 11, 2013)

My role in self-contained classrooms differed slightly, since those students were already in a very restricted environment with a higher staff to child ratio. Since these students generally
had the most intense behaviors, my role was less focused on classroom wide expectations, and rather more focused on individualized instructional support. A teacher in a self-contained behavior classroom said:

I loved having her available to take data to find the correct function of behaviors. Using her to complete a preference assessment to figure out what might motivate a student more was also helpful. I enjoyed having the extra staff in the room especially at the start of the school year and as new students came to the room.

This was extremely helpful! (personal communication, April 10, 2013)

Since I also served as more of a mentoring role for new teachers, sometimes my role covered both individual children and whole class instruction. A teacher who was new to ECSE, had the following comment:

The greatest benefit of having the support teacher is her experience and expertise. I appreciated the weekly support and her ability to be in the classroom for an extended period of time for large group/small group/center play/ transitions, which increased her ability to mentor by being both a ‘model’ whom we can shadow and then a ‘coach’ who can shadow us while we work/interact with student(s), all while providing "real time" feedback and ideas. This also provides time and opportunities for both the teacher and the associate to benefit from this ‘modeling/coaching’ in real time and real situations with our specific student(s). Another advantage/benefit of this amount of time (8 hours a week) is that there is time after the students leave, and time the following week, for feedback and to discuss what worked, what to try differently, any questions, additional modeling, planning. This also gives time to collaborate with SLP/others and discuss any concerns, carry over
ideas for home, and discussion regarding IEP goals. (personal communication, April 10, 2013)

As these comments demonstrate, teachers overall were very happy with the role of an instructional coach. It is my hope that my role will continue to evolve. Since this was the initial year for my position, I have several recommendations that would help the support teacher program to better serve ECSE teachers in our district.

Recommendations

As I reflected on completing this project, I saw many areas in which my work in classrooms could have been stronger. Since PBS was such a new initiative, I felt that I had to skip many important phases that were not yet in place in our preschool programs. For the most part, all programs and teachers were capable of implementing the Tier One supports with very little additional training. However, at the Tier Two and Three levels, there was no decisive way to pinpoint the students in need of assistance. This contributed to the feelings of teachers that they were constantly “re-inventing the wheel” and repeatedly trying the same handful of strategies with little change in outcome. Also, many of our preschool children went on to school age programs with no documentation of their behavior concerns and past interventions. My recommendation would be that the early childhood program implements a system for tracking behavior occurrences to establish the appropriate level of intervention. The school age program does currently have a program they use, so it would not be too difficult to train preschool staff to use the same system.

Additionally, no small group intervention supports are offered at the Tier Two level, other than what teachers may choose to provide in their own classrooms. It is my hope that teachers will find a flexible way to group their students in need of social skills training from
various classrooms and perhaps take turns teaching one lesson a week to these students. If teachers’ own schedules do not allow, instructional coaches, the mental health support personnel, or the SUCCESS case workers could work out a schedule to support these students. This approach could prevent many of these students needing the Tier Three supports if they were adequately supported at the Tier Two stage.

An additional recommendation would be in the area of FBA training. It is the current practice for teachers to receive the special education files of their current class only a day or two before school starts. When teachers have much planning to do, many times they will overlook reading all of the paperwork and preparing for each child’s individual needs. FBA training should be mandatory for all new teachers and should be individualized to meet the needs of their particular students. All teachers receiving new students, whether in the fall or throughout the year, should review the student’s current FBA and receive coaching to make needed accommodations before the student arrives in the classroom. Since I have the capability to reach out to my assigned staff members at the start of each school year, I will automatically make this a practice in my initial professional development and follow up throughout the year. It is my recommendation that my fellow support staff members will do the same.

Future Projects and Research

My work on this project opened the door to many future project ideas. I became very interested in the topic of PBS while doing this research, and am eager to see more of the stages unfolded in the programs in which I work. In future years, the program should expand efforts to include families in the PBS process, such as having a make it take it night for families to make visuals and items they would like to use at home. I also think it is imperative in the future for a
social skills curriculum to be designed to be used throughout program, classroom, and individual interventions.

Working on the project also opened my eyes to future research that can be done within my own school setting. Since some of the classrooms I support are located in elementary schools that are not using PBS, I would be interested to collect data, perhaps using the current individual comprehensive assessments used in each classroom, on how well children in PBS buildings are scoring in the social and emotional domains compared to their peers who are not in PBS programs. The hypothesis would be that students who are continually receiving positive feedback and interventions would score higher in those areas. This data could be used to help non-PBS school staff to begin to see the importance of these supports and hopefully begin implementing them at their schools, or at least in the ECE departments of those buildings.

Finally, I would be curious to research how often professional development suggestions, such as those given in this project, are actually implemented in classrooms that had support teachers versus those classrooms that did not have a support teacher during the school year. I am unsure that my presence always indicates that teachers will follow through with training initiatives, although that is definitely the intent. It would be interesting to see how many new initiatives are started, and then continued, if the teachers had no support in their classrooms. If continual implementation was low, even with my support, it would be good to research why teachers are hesitant to follow through and what support teachers and professional development coordinators could do in the future to ensure a better implementation rate.
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