

Examining Positive Behavioral Supports for Children with Challenging Behaviors Across Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Head Start Settings

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Project Description.

Children with externalizing behavior problems (EBPs), characterized by aggression, hyperactivity, inattention, and oppositionality, do not experience the same academic and behavioral benefits from Head Start as their peers, and are at risk for a host of negative outcomes later in life. The current mixed method study, rooted in an implementation science framework, aims to take the first step towards achieving an ultimate goal of developing a method for Head Start workforce enhancement that is effective in helping children with EBPs while being acceptable, feasible, and sustainable for the Head Start workforce. Through three phases of data collection including surveys (*Phase I*) and focus groups (*Phase II*) with all Head Start personnel, as well as observations of children with EBPs (*Phase III*), the project seeks to comprehensively understand the current practices for children with EBPs in Head Start, assess acceptability and feasibility of effective strategies for children with EBPs, and identify areas for sustainable workforce enhancement in a large culturally and linguistically diverse urban community.

Research Questions.

1. What are the current positive behavior supports for children with EBPs in culturally and linguistically diverse Head Start Centers?
2. To what extent are the best practices for children with EBPs in Head Start centers considered acceptable and feasible?
3. Where are areas for sustainable workforce enhancement across Head Start centers that will help support children with EBPs and their families in the transition to kindergarten?

Sample.

- *Phase I* of data collection includes teachers and assistant teachers (N = 250), mental health and disabilities coordinators, curriculum specialists, and family support specialists (N = 60), and center administrators (N = 30).
- *Phase II* of data collection includes teachers (N = 6-10), assistant teachers (N = 6-10), mental health and disabilities coordinators (N = 6-10), curriculum specialists (N = 6-10), family support specialists (N = 6-10), administrators (N = 6-10), and parents of children with EBPs (N = 6-10).
- *Phase III* of data collection includes children with EBPs (N = 50), their parents (N = 50), and their teachers (N = 50).

All Head Start personnel, children, and parents are working or enrolled in Head Start centers a large culturally and linguistically diverse urban community in the southeastern United States.

Methods.

- *Phase I* (January 2019-December 2019) includes online administration of surveys via a mass email distribution and coordinated in-person survey facilitation to all Head Start personnel. All participants receive a \$10 gift card upon survey completion.
- *Phase II* (January 2019-June 2019) includes a series of focus groups with Head Start personnel and parents. Separate one-hour focus groups will be held with each category of Head Start personnel. Participants receive a \$10 gift card upon focus group completion.
- *Phase III* (October 2019-March 2020) includes direct 90-minute observations of children with EBPs in their classrooms. Children will be observed in circle time, center time, and outside time. Parents and teachers of children with EBPs

will also fill out brief questionnaires about the child, and will each receive a \$10 gift card.

Progress Update.

Data collection for *Phase I* and *Phase II* are underway, and ongoing analyses are being conducted. *Phase III* will be initiated in the Fall of 2020.

Preliminary survey results are beginning to reveal emerging patterns in reported use and perceptions of classroom management strategies. For example, the highest rated strategies are all universal classroom management techniques (e.g., promoting respect for cultural differences, giving clear transitional warnings, giving clear directions), and the least utilized techniques are those that involve classroom removal (e.g., sending child to the office, sending child home).

Qualitatively, via focus groups, it is clear that managing EBPs in Head Start centers is of daily relevance, and there is a high perceived need of additional supports. Personnel report perceiving that challenging behaviors are “getting worse” and happening with increased frequency. Teachers, mental health and disabilities coordinators, administrators, assistant teachers, and curriculum specialists all agree that there is a need for specific training and coaching in how to manage challenging behaviors within Head Start, with a particular emphasis on continuity of training for staff, and increased parental involvement.

Implications for policy/practice

Understanding the current practices for children with EBPs, while assessing the acceptability and feasibility of strategies, and exploring avenues for workforce enhancement will aid in the development of a sustainable method of workforce enhancement that addresses children with EBPs within Head Start. The findings from this project will ultimately serve in the dissemination and implementation of best practices and policies for children with EBPs in Head Start settings.

Implications for research

The mixed-method project design, with three phases of data collection, will serve to comprehensively answer and address the study questions and aims. Additionally, this project will

represent perspectives from various key stakeholders, which will help to enhance the eventual sustainability, acceptability, and feasibility, of a later intervention.

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