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Typical Reading Instructional Practices Provided to Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders in a Residential and Day Treatment Setting: A Mixed Methods Study

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Abstract

The current study investigated the typical reading practices provided to students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) at a residential and day treatment setting in the Northeast. Observations of reading instruction and teacher interviews were completed over the course of the 2013 to 2014 school year. The majority of students in observed reading groups were in the early elementary grades. Study findings include a considerable amount of lost instructional time due to problem behaviors and task transitions. Reading comprehension instruction and time spent reading text were observed infrequently. Fluency practice and phonological awareness activities were not observed. This study highlights the need for additional reading intervention studies for students with EBD and continued efforts to disseminate information on effective practices to educators who work with students that have pervasive behavioral difficulties. Teacher interviews revealed the need for strong models of professional development, coaching, and the provision of resources for implementation.

Keywords: emotional and behavioral disorder, reading, observation study

Students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) are at great risk for poor school and social outcomes (Rivera, Al-Otaiba, & Koorland, 2006). When providing services to this student population, practitioners often adapt behavioral and instructional practices to meet the specific needs of students (Kauffman, Bantz, & McCullough, 2002). While students with EBD could receive educational services anywhere within the continuum of educational placements, they are frequently educated in substantially separate educational settings than other student disability populations (U.S. Department of Education, 2005; Furney, Hasazi, Clark-Keefe, & Hartnett, 2003). Of those students six to twenty-one years of age receiving special education services for Emotional Disturbance (ED), 13.1% attend a separate school for students with disabilities and 2% attend a separate residential facility (U.S Department of Education, 2013). Students with EBD who have complex needs are placed in restrictive educational placements such as residential schools so that they can be provided intensive behavioral, social, and academic intervention that may be challenging to provide in less restrictive settings (Lane, Wehby, Little, & Cooley, 2005). One important consideration for practitioners working with students with EBD is the provision of reading instruction to enhance long-term literacy outcomes and college and career readiness.

Importance of Reading Instruction for Students with EBD

Reading achievement is associated with school and transition success (Kostewicz & Kubina, 2008). Poor reading skills are predictive of school drop out (Jolivette, Stichter, Nelson, Scott, & Liaupsin, 2000) and struggling readers are less likely to maintain full time employment (Kutner et al., 2007). These associations between reading performance and important life outcomes have particular implications for students with EBD. Students with EBD often have deficient reading skills (Wehby, Falk, Barton-Arwood, Lane, & Cooley, 2003; Nelson, Benner, & Gonzales, 2003). Further, analysis of reading growth trajectories for students with EBD using quadratic growth models suggest that based on letter-word identification and passage comprehension on the Woodcock Johnson achievement subtests, reading growth rates experience significant deceleration around age 12 following initial growth (Wei, Blackorby, & Shiller, 2011). This study suggests that many students with EBD are projected to demonstrate reading comprehension skills between the fifth and seventh grade level upon reaching the age of 17 (Wei et al., 2011). In sum, a need for consistent intervention across grade levels appears to be supported by the aforementioned reading difficulties of these students.

Students with behavior and reading difficulties make less progress in reading than students who have either reading difficulties or behavior difficulties (Kamps et al., 2003). While the majority of research for this student population has focused on behavioral interventions (Rivera et al., 2006), there appears to be a greater interest in determining effective reading interventions since the National Reading Panel (2000) recommendations (Kostewicz & Kubina, 2008) and the development of increased academic expectations for all students, including those with disabilities

(National Governor's Association Center for Best Practices, 2010). In sum, special educators of students with EBD must attend to heightened academic expectations and assessments in academic subjects while simultaneously attending to social and behavioral factors that may adversely affect academic performance. For example, the National Reading Panel suggests that long-term reading success stems from sequential instruction in 5 components that are linked to longitudinal growth (Kostewicz & Kubina, 2008). This includes phonological awareness, phonics, oral and silent reading fluency, vocabulary development, and reading comprehension strategy training. Considering the negative school and post-secondary outcomes associated with this student population, it is imperative that evidence-based instructional practices (i.e., practices validated through rigorous and plentiful peer reviewed research) are identified and employed.

Previous Research on Reading Instruction in Residential Schools

Researchers have previously called for an investigation of the barriers to providing effective reading instruction to this student population (Wehby et al., 2003). Researchers have also noted the need for observation studies of typical reading practices in residential schools (Wilkerson, Gagnon, Melekoglu, & Cakiroglu, 2012). This information can inform professional development, intervention studies, and research investigating the contribution of student and teacher-level factors on academic outcomes.

Previous Observation Studies

Minimal research has investigated the reading practices used when providing instruction to students with EBD. Vaughn, Levy, Coleman, and Bos (2002) conducted a synthesis of observation studies of reading instruction for students with learning disabilities (LD) and students with EBD. The researchers noted that few observation studies involved students with EBD as only five of sixteen studies that met inclusion criteria included students with EBD. In addition, only one study (a dissertation study; Olinger, 1987) that met inclusion criteria focused exclusively on students with EBD. As a result of the small corpus of studies, Vaughn and colleagues (2002) were able to make few conclusions regarding typical instruction provided to this student population. However, the researchers noted that reading instruction appeared to be of poor quality because students spent large amounts of time waiting for instruction and in independent seatwork completing worksheets.

Levy and Vaughn (2002) conducted an observation study of the typical reading practices provided by six teachers of students with EBD in grades 1 through five. The majority of students were in the early elementary grades and students received reading instruction in self-contained settings. None of the teachers included in the study taught in a residential or day treatment setting. Each teacher was observed for four consecutive days providing reading instruction in their resource room setting. Two of six teachers were observed providing comprehension, fluency instruction, and phonological awareness instruction. No teachers were observed providing instruction in the application of word analysis/phonics skills. In addition students instructed by three teachers were observed on task for less than 20% of instructional time.

More recently, researchers have conducted observation studies to investigate teacher use of other instructional practices. Jackson and Neel (2006) conducted an observation study that focused on students with EBD who were enrolled in elementary general education, resource room, and self-contained classrooms. Twelve classrooms were observed on average five times each. This study focused on mathematics instruction and did not include teachers who taught in residential and day treatment settings. Maggin, Wehby, Partin, Robertson, and Oliver (2011) used observation and self-report data to compare teachers' use of the following instructional variables: opportunities to respond, active instruction, praise statements, student grouping strategies, and instructional content in elementary level general education and self-contained settings. The self-contained classrooms observed in this study were located in public schools and information on instructional content was based on self-report data rather than classroom observations. Although additional observation studies of instructional practices provided to students with EBD have been conducted (Jackson & Neel, 2006; Maggin, Wehby, Partin, Robertson, & Oliver, 2011), these aforementioned studies did not focus on reading instruction and these studies did not involve students in residential and day treatment settings.

Purpose

The current study extends the literature by providing a systematic observation study of typical instructional practices provided to this student population. Since the work of Levy and Vaughn (2002), no other reading observation studies for students with EBD have been published. Due to the lack of observation studies of reading as well as the absence of studies focusing on the instructional practices provided in residential and treatment settings, an investigation of the

provision of reading instruction in residential and day treatment settings will extend the extant literature and serve as an initial step to inform intervention, teacher professional development, and future observation studies.

In the current study, observations of typical reading instructional practices were conducted in a day and residential treatment setting to determine the extent to which teachers in Grades 1-6 (a) used evidence-based practices as part of typical reading instruction and (b) to determine the extent to which instructional time is spent on actual reading instruction compared to non-academic activities (i.e., behavior, logistics, etc.). Teacher interviews were conducted to better understand teacher perceptions regarding the barriers and facilitators of providing instruction to this population, professional development needs and resources, and the amount of time students with EBD spend reading text. We sought this information in an effort to confirm classroom observations of instructional practices and to identify the extent to which observed students made progress in this key academic area. Three research questions were evaluated in this study:

1. To what extent is reading instructional class time spent providing reading instruction (e.g., text reading, teaching phonics, etc.)?
2. What instructional practices do teachers use as part of typical instruction and to what extent are recommended reading practices incorporated into typical instruction?
3. What do teachers perceive to be the barriers and facilitators of providing reading instruction to this student population based on teacher interviews?

Method

Setting and Participants

The school was a residential and day treatment setting in a suburban area of the Northeast United States. The school was part of a program that also provided short-term acute diagnostic services to children in crisis and their guardians in addition to long-term comprehensive residential services. The school served approximately 40 students in grades 1 through 6, with the majority of students being Caucasian. All students attending the school were either day students or students enrolled in the long-term residential program. Classrooms had seven students on average and were staffed by a lead teacher, an assistant teacher, and a child behavior specialist. All students received special education services due to pervasive problem behaviors and almost all students were eligible for special education services for ED. In addition, more than half of students were also identified with a learning disability (LD). Furthermore, more than half of the students were residential students in the long-term program, meaning they received 24-hour support services while living on campus. No students that participated in this study were part of the short-term diagnostic service program.

As part of typical school practice, each student participated in “check in” meetings with school staff. Check in meetings tended to occur at the end of classes and were led by a staff member. During these meetings, students were asked to rate their performance on specific target behaviors including staying safe, following directions, and completing schoolwork. Students were then given brief feedback by staff and awarded points for successful target behavior

performance. The school also used a continuum of positive behavior reinforcements, which included small tangible rewards for earning points and the opportunity to earn additional free time during the school day. Furthermore, school administrators and child behavior specialist supervisors were on site and on call to assist with crisis management. Lastly, students in the residential program were assigned a clinician who provided one-to-one therapy sessions as well as case management services.

Recruitment

This study used a purposive sampling procedure (Kuzel, 1992; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Specifically, the researchers wanted to identify residential and day treatment settings that provided educational services to students with EBD in order to observe typical teaching practices in these settings. During the 2013-2014 school year, the first author contacted the Executive Directors of two residential and day treatment settings for students with EBD in the northeast via an email that contained a study summary and outlined the goals of the study, such as discovering what reading instruction looks like in these classrooms to inform future research as well as professional development. These two schools were contacted because they provided comprehensive educational services to the student population of interest in this current investigation. One of the two schools granted consent to complete this study and the other school did not respond to the initial or second attempt at recruitment.

After an initial discussion with school administrators from the consenting school, a meeting was scheduled with the teachers. Four teachers, the school's literacy specialist, and a school administrator attended this meeting. The four teachers and the literacy specialist gave

informed written consent to participate. However, school administration would only permit the researchers to observe typical instruction upon receiving informed parental consent from all students in each reading group that was to be observed. Observations of typical reading instruction began after informed parental consent was obtained for one entire reading group. Additional teachers and reading groups were observed as informed parental consent was obtained. Informed parental or guardian consent was obtained for students in 4 of the five reading groups. As a result, one teacher was not observed but was interviewed for this study.

Providers of reading instruction. Three head teachers, an assistant teacher, and the school's literacy specialist participated. Consenting providers of reading instruction had a mean age of 32.4 years of age (range 27 to 48) years and on average had 3.8 years of teaching experience (range 3 to 5 years). According to administrator reports, the mean years teaching for consenting providers of reading instruction was similar to the mean years teaching experience of those educators at this facility that did not participate in the current study. On average, they held their current position for 3.2 years (range 2 to 4 years). Table 1 provides a summary of teacher characteristics, including certifications and previous training in positive behavior supports and reading instructional practices. Each adult participant provided reading instruction to one pre-existing group of students during one of two blocks of time devoted to reading instruction. All students in the school received either reading instruction or recess time in each of these blocks, with reading instruction occurring either before or after recess.

Student participants. A total of 11 students participated in this study. Seven were male and four were female. Six students were Caucasian and five were African American.

Although a slight majority of participants were Caucasian, the participant sample may differentially represent the ethnicity of the school population as it was reported that the majority of students at the school were Caucasian. Students ranged in grade from first to sixth, with the majority (72.7%) being in the early elementary grades. Students were in the following grades: first ($n = 1$), second ($n = 2$), third ($n = 5$), fifth ($n = 1$), and sixth ($n = 2$). All students received special education services for ED. According to administrator reports, all students were at least one year below grade level in reading and the majority of students were also identified as having an LD. All students had at least low average intelligence. The school did not identify which students resided in the residential program and which were day students due to confidentiality concerns.

Students were assigned to one of four pre-existing homogenous reading groups that were instructed by one of the aforementioned educator participants. The mean number of students in observed reading groups was 2.75. Group 1 had one student in second grade and two in third grade. Group 2 had one first grader and one third grader. Group 3 had one second grader and two third graders. Group 4 had one student in fifth grade and two students in sixth grade. Individualized instruction occurred during two reading groups, one of which had three students and the other two students.

In one group, students would alternate between working with the instructor and working independently. In the other group, one student worked independently on a packet of comprehension questions for a narrative text and the remaining students received instruction from their teacher. For purposes of data analysis, the activities that occurred during these two

groups were treated as a separate observation to give equal weight to both sequences of activities.

Data Collection

Two sources of data were collected. First, teachers that provided informed- written consent were observed. Second, upon the completion of observations, teachers were interviewed regarding their reading instruction for students with EBD who attended the school. In the following section, we describe each data source.

Classroom observations. Observations were conducted using the Instructional Content Emphasis- Revised (ICE-R; Edmonds & Briggs, 2003). The ICE-R has been previously used in observation study research because it provides a detailed description of the components suggested by the National Reading Panel (e.g., phonics) and teaching activities within each component (e.g., Swanson & Vaughn, 2010; Swanson, Solis, Ciullo, & McKenna, 2012). Content validity was established through a comprehensive literature review and consultation with experts in literacy and observation research. Operational definitions within the measure were adapted from definitions present in the literature on recommended instructional practices. The ICE-R provides information on instructional grouping (e.g., whole class, small group, pairing, independent, individualized/differentiated), teacher use of instructional time (e.g., instructional time, non-instructional time), instructional activities related to literacy instruction (e.g., oral reading fluency), and materials used during instruction (e.g., manipulatives, word wall, text-basal).

The primary instructional categories on the ICE-R include (a) concepts of print, (b) comprehension, (c) fluency, (d) oral language, (e) phonological awareness, (f) spelling, (g) text reading, (h) vocabulary, (i) word study/phonics, and (j) writing. Each primary instructional category is further broken down into subcategories. For example, comprehension has the following subcategories: prior knowledge and predicting, reading comprehension monitoring, listening comprehension monitoring, comprehension strategy instruction/use, and other comprehension activities. During classroom observations, an instructional activity involving the teacher modeling a procedure for self-monitoring comprehension would be assigned comprehension as the primary instructional category and comprehension strategy instruction/use as a subcategory.

Four providers of reading instruction were observed seven times each (e.g., each reading group was observed seven separate times) over the course of the 2013 to 2014 school year, resulting in a total of 28 observations. Observations occurred during the fall, winter, and spring, with each teacher observed on two consecutive days one time during the course of the study. At least two of the observations for each provider of reading instruction were conducted during each observation window. This procedure was followed to gain an understanding of what instruction looked like on a day to day basis as well as how instruction was delivered over the course of the school year. Observations were the duration of a class period during reading blocks, which was typically 40 minutes. In total, four providers of reading instruction were observed and five providers of reading instruction participated in the interview phase of the study.

Observation training. The gold standard technique (Gwet, 2001), which has been used in previous observation studies (e.g., Swanson et al., 2012), was utilized to establish reliability. The researchers reviewed ICE-R constructs, procedures as well as the study's purpose and research questions. The researchers also independently coded two videos of classroom instruction. Initial agreement was 84% and 88%. Each area of disagreement for both sets of coding was discussed until 100% agreement was obtained. In addition, the researchers again reviewed observation constructs and procedures prior to continuing classroom observations after the winter break.

Intercoder agreement. Selection of intercoder agreement procedures were informed by practices recommended in two syntheses of reading observation studies for students with LD (see McKenna, Shin, & Ciullo, 2015; Swanson, 2008). Twenty-five percent of observations ($n = 7$) were randomly selected for double coding. The first author and a trained graduate student completed the double coding. Using an exact agreement method, initial agreement was 91% (range from 88% to 100%) and each area of disagreement was discussed until 100% agreement was obtained. All studies and individual coding items within studies (e.g., time, content category, content subcategory, etc.) were at acceptable levels.

Teacher Interviews. Each teacher was asked nine open-ended questions regarding the barriers and facilitators of providing reading instruction to the students. In addition, teachers were asked questions related to the amount of time their students spend reading, professional development topics and needs, the reading instructional practices they used as part of typical instruction, and use of evidence-based practices EBPs. Prior to discussing their use of EBPs,

teachers were provided the following definition of EBPs: practices demonstrated effective through peer-reviewed research. Interviews on average were 28 minutes in duration and were conducted one-to-one with the first author.

Data Analysis

ICE-R provided data on teacher use of reading instructional time. We calculated descriptive statistics such as the total number of minutes and proportion of total class time for each of the ICE-R main and subcategories using an Excel spreadsheet. Data from each observation was aggregated to determine the degree to which class time was spent on reading instruction as well as determine the specific types of activities that were incorporated into reading instruction.

A three-step procedure was used to analyze interview transcripts (Boardman, Arguelles, Vaughn, Hughes, & Klingner, 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1994). First, all interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for content accuracy. Next, transcripts were read and coded to generate a preliminary set of codes. Two researchers discussed this preliminary analysis, resulting in a final set of codes. Finally, two researchers independently coded the transcripts using the final set of codes, identified themes (e.g., barriers to instruction) and relevant subthemes (e.g., task avoidant behaviors), and discussed areas of disagreement until 100% agreement was obtained.

Results

In the following section, findings from the current investigation of reading instruction for students with EBD in residential settings are reported. First, observation data pertaining to reading instruction and how instructional time was allocated is reported. Themes from teacher interviews are then described.

Observation Data

Broad overview. A total of 28 observations across four teachers were performed, resulting in a total of 1465 minutes of reading class time observed. The following non-instructional activities were documented: managing student behavior (34.6% of total non-instructional time, 13.2% of all observed class time), class transitions (58.8% of all non-instructional time, 22.8% of all observed class time), and providing reinforcement (6.7% of all non-instructional time, 2% of all observed class time). It should be noted that non-instructional activities were coded when the teacher was observed performing one. Data on the amount of non-instructional time does not account for time in which students were off task or disruptive while teachers were providing instruction because the focus of this investigation was to observe the instructional characteristics of the teachers. It should also be noted that class transition was coded when students engaged in problem behaviors while the teacher was managing a transition. Managing student behavior was coded only when challenging behaviors interrupted teacher provision of reading instruction. As a result, the percentage of time reported for managing student behavior underestimates the impact of student behavior on instructional time.

Student grouping. Students were observed in whole group instruction (e.g., all students working with the teacher on the same task/activity) during 42.6% of instructional time. However, it should be noted that 2-4 students were present in each reading group. As a result, time spent in whole group instruction is best categorized as small group instruction. Students were engaged in independent work (i.e., all students working on an identical task without adult support and working individually on a task) for 34.6% of instructional time and in individualized work (i.e., students working with one-to-one support or on a differentiated assignment) for 22.1% of instructional time. Students were not observed working in peer-mediated groups during this study.

Instructional activities. During the 1465 minutes of observed reading class time, 60.8% (870 minutes) of the time was spent providing reading instruction. Table 2 provides the amount and proportion of observed time spent on each reading component measured by the ICE-R observation instrument. The following main instructional components were observed less than 5% of the total recorded observation time: spelling (2.5% of observed time, 37 minutes), direct vocabulary instruction before reading (2.5%, 36 minutes), writing (e.g., independent writing/publishing, dictation; 1%, 15 minutes), concepts of print (.2% of observed time, 3 minutes total), and alphabetic knowledge (.2%, 3 minutes). Activities to develop phonological awareness and fluency instruction and practice were also not observed during any of the 28 observations.

Word study/phonics was the most frequently observed main instructional component, accounting for 18.7% of observed class time. The following phonics activities were observed:

providing opportunities for application of letter/sound knowledge to reading/writing/spelling (8.4%, 124 minutes), word reading (5.1%, 76 minutes), teaches letter/sound relationships (e.g., consonant digraphs; 4.4%, 65 minutes), teaching irregular words (less than 1%, 9 minutes).

Reading comprehension accounted for 17.1% (251 minutes) of observed class time. The most frequently observed comprehension activities were coded as “other” comprehension related activities (e.g., students independently completing a worksheet packet based on an assigned text for the duration of a class period; 9.6% of observed class time, 141 minutes), prior knowledge and prediction making prior to text reading (3.1% of observed class time, 46 minutes) and reading comprehension “monitoring”, which is defined by the ICE-R as asking questions during or after reading such as retelling, fact-based questions, or completing multiple choice worksheets without the provision of an actual strategy (2.6% of observed class time, 39 minutes). Comprehension strategy training (i.e., paraphrasing, cognitive main idea techniques, summarization strategy instruction) and use was infrequently observed (.06% of observed class time, 1 minute).

Text reading was observed during 15.5% (227 minutes) of observed class time. Teacher supported oral reading (students read and teacher provides help as needed) was the most frequently observed text reading activity, which was observed for 6.7% (99 minutes) of observed time. One teacher provided more than one third (37%) of the time spent on supported oral reading in this study. Students spent similar amounts of class time engaged in independent silent reading (3.5%, 52 minutes) and listening to a story read aloud by a computer or iPad (3.2%, 47 minutes). In regards to students reading connected text (e.g., sentences, paragraphs, narrative

stories, expository text), students were observed engaged in this activity for 11.4% (167 minutes) of observed class time.

Use of technology. Students were observed using computers and iPads for 9% (133 minutes) of observed class time. This accounted for 14.8% of class time that was spent on actual instructional activities. Computers and iPads were used by students for the following purposes: listening to stories (47 minutes, 3.2% of observed class time), completing word reading activities (28 minutes, 1.9% of observed class time), completing listening comprehension activities and questions (21 minutes, 1.4% of observed class time), reading stories (20 minutes, 1.3% of observed class time), spelling practice (12 minutes, less than 1% of observed class time), reading sentences (3 minutes, less than 1% of observed class time), and working on reading comprehension skills (2 minutes, less than 1% of observed class time). It should be noted that the researchers recorded that students were often engaged in off task behaviors when technology was incorporated into instruction. For example, students were observed attempting to play computer games that were not part of assigned instruction and this behavior often resulted in teachers having to redirect students, which caused reduced time spent on learning activities. In addition, students often had difficulty transitioning into technology based activities due to the equipment not being set up for students to use immediately. For example, headphones were sometimes not available, resulting in lost class time due to transitions.

Interviews

Each teacher was interviewed immediately following the study. Interviews were coded into themes based on the coding and analysis procedures that were described within the methods section. Analysis revealed the following themes relating to the implementation of reading intervention for students with EBD.

Theme 1: EBP Use. Interview analysis across transcripts revealed that four of five educators stated they used evidence-based reading instructional practices. Three educators stated that evidence-based instruction was a predominate element of reading instruction while one stated that evidence-based reading practices were used “as much as possible”. One provider of reading instruction stated that she was unclear about how “evidence-based practices” were defined, and asked for additional clarification as well as examples, which were subsequently provided by the researcher. Teachers stated that they received professional development and training in evidence-based reading and behavior management practices during their university coursework (teacher preparation and certification program) as well as professional development from the school designed to increase their capacity to deliver effective reading instruction. Three of five teachers stated that the school provided the majority of the training they received in EBPs.

Theme 2: Instructional Practices. In regards to reading instructional practices that teachers incorporated into typical instruction, all teachers discussed their use of specific phonics based programs with a record of effectiveness (e.g., Wilson, Foundations; Wilson Language Training, 1996, 2002). Three of five teachers stated that the use of multisensory instruction,

instructional practices that incorporate visual and auditory methods, was a core component of their reading instruction. While all teachers spoke of reading comprehension and reading comprehension strategies, transcripts did not indicate evidence of a specific strategy or an example of classroom implementation (strategy instruction was not observed during the study). One teacher discussed fluency instruction, but stated that fluency activities are not allocated the instructional time that this component likely requires to enhance reading fluency skills. This teacher did not describe any specific activities or strategies for promoting reading fluency.

Theme 3: Barriers. Pertaining to barriers to providing effective reading instruction, all teachers cited the following as having a negative impact on student performance and instruction: task avoidance behaviors, low frustration tolerance, a lack of prior success in reading and reading groups, and a lack of time spent reading outside of class time. All teachers spoke of the importance of increasing the amount of time students spent reading connected text outside of school but that this was not a focus of programming. In summary, analysis of transcripts and details pertaining to “barriers” indicated that a mixture of student characteristics associated with students with EBD coupled with other extraneous factors such as unwillingness to work outside of class or at home for students who were enrolled in the day treatment program, limited teachers’ ability to implement high-quality reading instruction at times.

Theme 4: Time Allocation. Teachers mentioned the following strategies as effective methods to maximize reading instruction time: planning for flexible lessons, highly-structured lessons to keep students on task and actively responding, and consistency in behavior management practices. The majority of teachers also mentioned the use of technology (e.g., iPads) as an

effective way to promote student engagement and minimize off task behaviors. In regards to professional development needs, the majority of teachers (4 of 5) indicated the following needs: (a) procedures for providing comprehension strategy instruction using low level text to meet student needs , (b) techniques for incorporating high interest activities to increase student learning and engagement, and (c) new strategies to increase motivation and reading comprehension skills.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to contribute to the limited extant research on literacy instruction for students with EBD by gaining an initial understanding of the typical reading instructional practices provided to students who attend a residential and day treatment setting. In addition, we sought to determine the extent to which instructional time was spent on actual instruction as well as to collect information regarding teacher perceptions of the barriers and facilitators of providing reading instruction to this student population in order to inform future research (e.g., intervention studies, observation studies) and professional development. There are no previously published studies to date that have investigated the extent to which providers of reading instruction for students with EBD who attend residential and day treatment settings use evidence-based practices as part of typical practice or contextual issues that promote or hinder teacher use.

Findings from this observation study are consistent with previous studies that have reported that students with EBD often receive less instruction than students in general education

(e.g., Shores et al., 1993; Steinberg & Knitzer, 1992; Wehby, Symons, Canale, & Go, 1998). Close to 40% of class time was spent on non-instructional activities including managing student behavior and logistical tasks, which was not unexpected given the needs of these students. In regards to students with EBD, researchers have questioned the benefits of self-contained educational settings due to students not adequately benefiting from these placements (Wehby, Lane, & Falk, 2003). However, classrooms that are a “separate place but a better place” (Kauffman et al., 2005, p. 403) for students with EBD have been conceptualized. Considering the pervasive needs of students with EBD who attend residential and day treatment, some lost instructional time is expected. Findings from this initial investigation may suggest that the presence of a strong and effective continuum of behavioral supports is necessary to maximize instructional opportunities and limit the potentially negative affects of student behavior, which can result in decreased instructional time. While the teachers that were interviewed for this study emphasized the importance of highly structured classes, highly structured lessons were infrequently observed with this sample due to aforementioned factors including extra time spent on logistics such as locating needed materials.

Federal mandates such as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) and academic expectations prevalent in many states (i.e., Common Core) point to the necessity of using strategies grounded in research to improve the academic achievement of all students. Researchers have consistently reported that evidence-based instructional practices are necessary to improve student achievement (Kauffman, 2010; Lane & Menzies, 2010). However, a number of issues may adversely affect teacher use of evidence-based practices, such as the educators that were observed in this study. For example, providers of reading instruction to students with EBD

have a limited body of intervention research to draw upon compared to general education or students with LD (Benner, Nelson, Ralston, & Mooney, 2010; Burke, Boon, Hatton, & Bowman-Perrott, 2015; Coleman & Vaughn, 2000; Garwood, Brunsting, & Fox, 2014; Griffith, Trout, Hagaman, & Harper, 2008; Rivera et al., 2006). If practitioners are unable to access what research is available or if the research for this population is limited, educators may use practices that currently lack empirical support. Another potential factor is inadequate implementation fidelity with practices that have the potential to improve student achievement (McKenna, Flower, & Ciullo, 2014). In addition, contextual factors such as the availability of resources and pervasive student needs may play a role in instructional decision-making.

Historically, special education researchers have critically evaluated the provision of educational and special education services to those students who are most in need of expert instruction. For example, Dunn (1968) critiqued the provision of educational services to students who were culturally and linguistically diverse and from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Dunn (1968) brought attention to a number of issues including invalid and unreliable assessment practices, segregation, a lack of educational opportunities, and the provision of inadequate and inappropriate services. More recently, Landrum, Tankersley, and Kauffman (2003) reminded the field that special education services should indeed be “special” for students with EBD, such as task differentiation and remediation in specific areas of need. While the researchers reported on effective practices for improving student behavior (e.g., self regulation, goal setting), they noted an ongoing research to practice gap pertaining to academic achievement and social skills training. Findings from this observation study serve as a reminder that the provision of special education services to those students who are extremely vulnerable for negative academic and

social outcomes can be challenging for educators and requires adequate resources, school level expertise, and conditions that permit teachers to continually develop their repertoire of skills.

The systematic observations in this study using the ICE-R suggest that the teachers in this study infrequently used some evidence-based reading practices that were recommended by the National Reading Panel (2000) with the exception of phonics. Intensive professional development and training of teachers in evidence-based reading instructional practices is paramount (Rivera et al., 2006). The disconnect between observed teacher instructional practices and interview data where teachers indicated that they do apply evidence-based instruction, suggest that training procedures in the area of reading may require examination. For example, teachers may have experienced difficulty incorporating effective reading practices into typical instruction due to difficulties managing student behavior while simultaneously developing proficiency in reading practices. As a result, it may be beneficial for Universities to work directly with residential settings to provide the support for ongoing coaching and technical assistance so that skills acquired during professional development can transfer to actual changes in teacher instructional practices.

Fluency instruction was also not observed during any of the live observations. While one systematic review of the literature reported on only two studies that investigated fluency interventions for students with EBD in the elementary grades (Rivera et al., 2006), positive effects were noted. Fluency practice has also shown to be beneficial for adolescent students with EBD (Garwood et al., 2014). Developing oral reading fluency skills may improve reading proficiency as well as student behavior (Kostewicz & Kubina, 2008). However, more recent

research suggests that developing literacy skills may be insufficient to improve student behavior on its own without a behavioral, social, or motivational component (Roberts, Solis, Ciullo, McKenna, and Vaughn, 2015).

Research suggests that interventions that include reading and behavior components are more effective than interventions that include only reading or only behavioral strategies for students with reading and behavior difficulties (Roberts et al., 2015; Stewart, Benner, Martella, & Marchand-Martella, 2007). Further, self-monitoring and self-regulation interventions implemented in concert with evidence-based reading practices may improve the effectiveness of reading interventions for this student population (Bruhn & Watt, 2012). Based on interviews and observations, teachers included in this sample appear to have received insufficient training and coaching in effective reading and behavior management practices. This finding is consistent with a previous observation study (Levy & Vaughn, 2002). Another potential factor is the lack of intervention studies that include both reading and behavior components (Burke et al., 2015) to guide teaching practice via professional development efforts.

Implications for Practice

The observations for this sample result in four considerations for practice. First, because 40% of instructional time consisted of non-reading tasks (logistics, behavior, etc.), ways to increase instructional time and opportunities to respond are suggested such as material preparation when transitioning between tasks (Sutherland, Alder & Gunter, 2003). Teachers may also find it beneficial to employ interdependent group contingencies during reading instruction to improve student on task behavior and limit task avoidant behaviors (McKenna & Flower, 2014).

Peer tutoring interventions may be beneficial for this student population (Rivera et al., 2006; Ryan, Reid, & Epstein, 2004; Vaughn & Coleman, 2000). Peer-mediated reading frameworks that involved partner reading, scripted questions, and the use of white boards to actively respond to teacher questions can potentially increase on-task academic behavior and opportunities for engagement (Ryan et al. 2004). Second, teachers are encouraged to implement more reading fluency activities (no fluency observed during this study). Repeated readings of high interest books can be one mechanism for increasing reading instructional time and fluency (Staubitz, Cartledge, Yurick, & Lo, 2005). However, because students were observed completing silent reading practice, this practice could be continued to build independent proficiency for fluency. Third, because there are two specific comprehension strategies with promising results from single-case research (graphic organizers and strategy training; Garwood et al., 2014), providing these activities during or after reading can potentially increase main idea identification. Fourth, periodically regrouping students based on reading progress monitoring data is a recommended literacy practice that was absent during this study according to the teacher interviews. Using progress-monitoring data to create more homogenous groups could potentially enable teachers to more adequately meet the individual reading and behavioral needs of their students.

Limitations

Some limitations should be noted. First, this study included a small number of teachers and students from one school setting, limiting the ability to make generalizations from this study. Furthermore, one consenting provider of reading instruction could not be observed due to the inability to acquire informed parental or guardian consent for all students in her reading group.

However, this study does provide some initial information pertaining to the provision of reading instruction to a student population that is in urgent need of expert instruction. In addition, the total number of observations and observed minutes of class time are comparable to the most recent observation study of reading instruction involving students with EBD (Levy & Vaughn, 2002). A second limitation is the absence of student progress monitoring data, which would have documented potential relations between instruction and student reading performance.

Future Research

This study has led to several considerations for future investigation. First, future observation studies should continue to explore the provision of academic instruction to students with EBD. Considering the dearth of studies in this area, future research should focus on instruction provided within the continuum of school placements (i.e., self contained, inclusion) and investigate instruction provided to students with EBD in the elementary and secondary grades to investigate college and career readiness preparation for these students (National Governor's Association Center for Best Practices, 2010). These studies should attempt to employ larger sample sizes and include interviews and focus groups to gain a better understanding of potential barriers to instruction and teacher professional development needs. Second, future observation studies should investigate the provision of reading instruction in residential schools and include detailed descriptions of teacher and student participants. At this time, the current investigation represents the only observation study conducted in this setting. Considering the importance of reading skills for school and transition success, future studies should be conducted to provide a better understanding of how residential schools operationalize

and implement reading instruction. Third, future observation studies should consider the utilization of student outcome data to offer additional context to observation and interview data or to explore the relationships between instructional quality, instructional components taught, and student outcomes.

Lastly, although there are several promising strategies for reading intervention for this population including graphic organizers, peer-mediated reading, and repeated readings (Garwood et al., 2014), future intervention research using these instructional approaches is warranted using both single-case designs and group design studies with results for students with EBD disaggregated. Replications of previous studies in different settings are also recommended. These investigations should be aligned with current standards for research design given the concerns about research quality in previous studies (Griffith et al. 2008). Finally, research pertaining to methods of supporting teachers, administrators, and providers of professional development in residential settings is warranted, such as randomizing teachers to different professional development conditions. In closing, residential schools should then be provided the resources to implement findings from these future studies to maximize the effectiveness of special education and related services for students with EBD.

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Table 1 Teacher Participant Demographics

Demographic	n	%
Gender		
Female	5	100
Ethnicity		
Caucasian	5	100
Level of education		
Bachelor's	2	40
Master's	2	40
Some master's	1	20
Certification		
General education	1	20

Special education	2	40
Dual certification	2	40
Type of Reading Training		
Wilson Foundations	5	100
Words Their Way	1	20
Making inferences	2	40
Reading A-Z	1	20
Phonics games	1	20
Incorporating writing into reading instruction	1	20
Reading comprehension	1	20
Type of Behavior Training		

TCI	5	100
Social Thinking	2	40
Cognitive Behavior Therapy	2	40
Executive functions	2	40
Child trauma	1	20
Project Adventure	1	20
Collaborative Problem Solving	1	20

Note: TCI = Therapeutic Crisis Intervention

Table 2 Main Instructional Components Observed in Reading

Main Instructional Component	Minutes	% of Total Time
Word study/phonics	274	18.7
Comprehension	251	17.1
Text reading	227	15.5
Spelling	37	2.5
Direct vocabulary instruction	36	2.5
Writing or language arts	15	1
Oral language development	5	.3
Concepts of print	3	.2
Alphabetic knowledge	3	.2
Phonological awareness	0	--

Fluency	0	--
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