

SPECIAL TOPIC: RESEARCH BRIEF

A Follow-up Study of Relational Processes and Consultation Outcomes for Students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

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Abstract. The purpose of this study was to link consultant and teacher verbal interaction patterns to consultation outcomes. Participants were 4 consultants, 20 teachers, and 20 elementary school students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Audiotaped Problem Analysis Interviews (PAIs) from Project PASS (Promoting Academic Success in Students) were coded using the Rogers and Farace (1975) relational coding system, and two interpersonal influence measures were calculated. Significant results were as follows: (a) teacher domineeringness (i.e., attempts to influence the consultant) correlated $-.66$ with treatment integrity; (b) teacher dominance (i.e., successful influence) correlated $-.63$ with Behavior Intervention Rating Scale intervention acceptability; (c) teacher dominance correlated $-.61$ with intervention effectiveness; and (d) consultant dominance correlated $.59$ with treatment integrity. Unlike Erchul et al. (2007), who found teacher influence within the Problem Identification (initial) Interview to be *positively* associated with outcomes, here teacher PAI influence was *negatively* associated with outcomes. Implications include the need to examine consultation as a process and the role of influence within this process.

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a diagnosis with significant educational implications. Children with ADHD struggle because of low engagement rates and inconsistent work productivity, and approximately 20–30% are classified as learning disabled because of deficits in the acquisition of specific academic skills (DuPaul & Stoner, 2003). Psychosocial interventions that can assist children with ADHD include those that are teacher, parent, and peer mediated; computer assisted; and self-directed. Until recently, these multiple strategies had not been evaluated in a comprehensive study. However, Project PASS (Promoting Academic Success in Students; DuPaul et al., 2006; Jitendra et al., 2007) has incorporated them within a behavioral consultation approach with teachers (Kratochwill & Bergan, 1990). Project PASS results clearly indicate the utility of behavioral consultation to improve reading and mathematics achievement for students with ADHD over an 18-month period.

Behavioral consultation represents a four-stage problem-solving process, and its stages include three separate interviews, each of which contains specific objectives a consultant must address. These four stages are problem identification, problem analysis, plan implementation, and problem evaluation. Although the plan implementation stage does not have a specific interview type associated with it, interviews incorporated into the other

stages are the Problem Identification Interview (PII), Problem Analysis Interview (PAI), and Problem Evaluation Interview (Kratochwill & Bergan, 1990).

Early behavioral consultation research (Bergan & Tombari, 1976) highlighted the importance of the PII as a critical phase during which a consultant's influence that is displayed through verbal behavior is linked to both proximal (e.g., problem identification) and distal outcomes (e.g., problem resolution). Later research documented positive relationships between consultant influence and various participant perceptions of favorable consultation outcomes within behavioral consultation (see Table 14.5 in Erchul, Grissom, & Getty, 2008). Relatedly, *teacher* influence during the PII has been associated with negative outcomes (e.g., Erchul & Chewing, 1990).

Erchul et al. (2007) recently investigated the connections between verbal interaction patterns and outcomes of behavioral consultation involving students with ADHD. They adopted a relational communication research perspective, evidenced in prior school consultation research (e.g., Grissom, Erchul, & Sheridan, 2003). Two key variables within relational communication research are *domineeringness* (i.e., directiveness or one's attempts to influence another) and *dominance* (i.e., one's demonstrated success in influencing another; Erchul et al., 2008). With several decades of prior research informing their hy-

potheses, Erchul and colleagues predicted: (a) consultant PII dominance would be positively related to consultation outcomes, and (b) teacher PII dominance would be negatively related to consultation outcomes.

Erchul et al. (2007) coded 42 Project PASS PIIs using the Rogers and Farace (1975) relational communication coding system. All cases were drawn from the Intensive Data-based Academic Intervention (IDAI) teacher consultation model in which research-based academic interventions were designed within a data-driven framework that provided ongoing feedback to teachers. Participants were 42 elementary school students with ADHD, 42 teachers, and 5 consultants. Domineeringness and dominance as displayed in the PII were calculated for teachers and consultants and then correlated with four case outcome variables. Based on 31 cases that met more stringent criteria (i.e., higher base rate of teacher domineeringness), teacher dominance was associated with the following: (a) teacher ratings of intervention effectiveness on the Behavior Intervention Rating Scale (BIRS; Elliott & Von Brock Treuting, 1991; $r = .48, p < .02$); (b) teacher ratings of student progress-to-target behavior using Goal Attainment Scaling (GAS; Kiresuk, Smith, & Cardillo, 1994; $r = .33, p < .05$); and (c) consultant observations of teachers' treatment integrity ($r = -.32, p = .054$).

Thus, in contrast to prior studies using similar methodologies, Erchul et al. (2007) found *teachers' influence over consultants* during the PII was associated with important outcomes. The more teachers directed the flow of conversation during the PII and consultants followed that direction, the more favorable were perceptions of intervention effectiveness and student progress, as assessed by teacher report. Erchul et al. also documented a negative association between teacher PII dominance and teachers' carrying out interventions with integrity. They discussed these findings in light of the explicit focus of these interventions being on students' academic rather than behavioral problems, a focus that may not have always been the teachers' highest priority. Overall, Erchul and colleagues concluded

that the "results suggest that it may be advisable for consultants to be more influential under certain conditions and teachers under others" (p. 124), but what exactly these "conditions" are remains unclear.

The purpose of this investigation was to further explore the associations between relational processes and consultation case outcomes by analyzing Project PASS IDAI PAIs (instead of PIIs) from the same cases reported by Erchul et al. (2007). The PAI, or second behavioral consultation interview, involves selecting and/or developing an intervention and then planning its implementation (Kratochwill & Bergan, 1990). Because Erchul and Chewing (1990) observed "a mixture of persuasion and negotiation" (p. 15) during the PAI, it would seem appropriate to apply a relational communication framework to study this interview (i.e., "condition") in greater depth. Furthermore, having a better understanding of how teachers and consultants interact during this stage of consultation has implications for optimizing classroom interventions and increasing treatment integrity, concepts integral to a response to intervention orientation (Jimerson, Burns, & VanDerHeyden, 2007).

Drawing from the same research literature and rationale presented by Erchul et al. (2007), the following two hypotheses were tested:

1. Consultant PAI domineeringness/dominance will be *positively* related to consultation outcomes.
2. Teacher PAI domineeringness/dominance will be *negatively* related to consultation outcomes.

Method

Details of this study's methodology have been documented previously by DuPaul et al. (2006), Jitendra et al. (2007), and Erchul et al. (2007). Therefore, they are presented briefly here.

Participants

The complete set of consultation cases involved 5 consultants who were school psychology graduate students at Lehigh Univer-

sity. All were Caucasian and 4 were women. The 31 teachers were 87.1% Caucasian, 3.2% Hispanic, and 9.7% other/unspecified. Most (82.1%) were women, and 96.4% taught in general education and 3.6% in special education. The 31 students were referred to Project PASS by teachers because of concerns about significant difficulties with ADHD symptoms and below average academic performance. These students met established criteria for the diagnosis of ADHD, including *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (4th ed., text revision; American Psychiatric Association, 2000) criteria for one of the three ADHD subtypes. The students were 51.6% Caucasian, 29% Hispanic, 9.7% African American, and 6.5% mixed racial/ethnic background. Their average age was 8.5 years ($SD = 1.4$); 81% were male.

Study Variables

Process variables. The Rogers and Farace (1975) relational communication control coding system (RCCCS) was used to study consultant/teacher verbal communication within the PAIs. This coding system has acceptable reliability and validity (Ayers & Miura, 1981).

Within the RCCCS, a message is considered both a response to the preceding message and a stimulus for the message that follows it. Each spoken message is assigned a three-digit code, with each digit representing one of three categories: (a) speaker, (b) grammatical form of message, and (c) metacommunicational function the message serves relative to the message that preceded it. Taking the second- and third-digit code combinations, one of three control codes is assigned to each message based on a matrix (Rogers & Farace, 1975, Figure 2). These control codes are as follows: *one-up*, signifying an effort to gain control or assert definitional rights; *one-down*, a request or acceptance of the other speaker's control; and *one-across*, an indication of neither an attempt to gain nor request/accept control.

Domineeringness and dominance were the process variables of interest. Domineering-

ness is an index of attempts to influence another and operationally defined as the ratio of Person A's one-up messages to the total number of his or her messages. Dominance is an index of successful attempts in influencing another and operationally defined as the number of one-up messages by Person A that are responded to with one-down messages by Person B.

Outcome variables. The BIRS (Elliott & Von Brock Treuting, 1991) is commonly used to gather teacher ratings of treatment acceptability, treatment effectiveness, and rate of behavioral change; it presents good psychometric properties (Elliott & Von Brock Treuting). Only the items corresponding to treatment acceptability and treatment effectiveness were utilized here, and these data were collected 2 months after implementing the intervention. The anchor points for the BIRS range from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 6 (*Strongly Agree*). The Acceptability subscale contains 15 items for a maximum total score of 90; the Intervention Effectiveness subscale contains 7 items for a maximum total score of 42. The internal consistency for BIRS (total score) was $\alpha = .94$.

GAS (Kiresuk et al., 1994) was used to gauge teacher perceptions of a student's progress-to-target behavior. Numerous studies document the reliability and validity of GAS (Cardillo & Smith, 1994). Teachers provided GAS ratings at three points in the process, and the GAS outcome measure used in analyses is the difference between the T_3 GAS (taken about 2 months after intervention was initiated) and T_1 GAS (taken just before the start of the intervention). The anchor points for GAS are 0 (*Never*) to + 3 (*Very Often*), and teachers rated the frequency of student demonstration of specific academic goals in reading or math that had been set for that student (i.e., frequency of meeting individualized goals).

Treatment integrity (TI), the percentage of intervention steps correctly implemented by a teacher, was evaluated for the primary intervention implemented. Unlike the other three outcome measures that are based on teacher

perceptions, TI is based on consultant observations of teacher behavior. TI reflects the mean of at least three separate observations made across the course of the intervention for a student. Consultants monitored treatment integrity using checklists that were created using the steps of the intervention plan given to each teacher. The steps of the intervention plan were modified to include a space to record the occurrence of each step during an observation. TI was then calculated as the percentage of steps completed correctly relative to the total number of steps in the prescribed plan (i.e., range of scores from 0 to 100%). The mean treatment integrity collected across at least three separate observations during the semester was used as the dependent measure in analyses.

IDAI Consultation

IDAI behavioral consultation cases were conducted as described by DuPaul et al. (2006) and Jitendra et al. (2007). Generally speaking, IDAI consultation is a more involved version of traditional “consultation as usual,” and adds new or augments existing components (e.g., data-based decision making, individual student academic skills assessment, functional academic assessment of the classroom, teacher training, and ongoing teacher feedback). With specific reference to the IDAI PAI, a consultant proposed several research-based academic interventions and then had the teacher choose the interventions believed to be most appropriate to his or her situation. Based on 20% of the PAIs, consultants’ procedural integrity for this interview protocol was 96.6%. Although students may have received interventions via IDAI consultation for as long as 2 academic years, this study takes into account only their first semester of participation.

Interview Coding Process

Each audiotaped IDAI PAI was transcribed and coded using the RCCCS, incorporating minor changes proposed by Erchul (1987). If an interview lasted longer than 30 min, only a 30-min middle-to-end portion was used; seven PAIs were sampled in this way.

Simple percent agreement between two coders, calculated using six interviews (2089 messages), was 99.3% for second-digit codes and 94.1% for third-digit codes. Domineeringness and dominance scores for consultants and teachers were then calculated by individual case.

Results

Data Analysis Considerations

The original goal was to follow up on all 31 of the Erchul et al. (2007) cases. Meeting this goal unfortunately was not possible, because 11 audiotaped PAIs were inadvertently taped over and reused before this study began. Thus, the results that follow are based on PAIs from 20 teachers, consisting of 5754 total messages.

The missing 11 cases were comparable to the remaining 20, however, differing from them on only BIRS intervention acceptability scores. This situation suggests that any significant findings involving BIRS acceptability may need to be interpreted with caution. Also, this degree of case attrition notwithstanding, the following bears noting: (a) in the seminal study by Bergan and Tombari (1976), only 31% of original cases proceeded through the PAI; and (b) a total of 20 cases is typical for this type of verbal interaction consultation research (cf. Grissom et al., 2003).

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations for the eight process and outcome measures. These mean values for PAIs appear to be similar to those reported by Erchul et al. (2007) for PIIs.

Relationship Between Process Measures and Consultation Outcomes

Depicted in Table 2 is the intercorrelation matrix displaying the relationship between (a) consultant and teacher domineeringness and dominance scores and (b) the four outcome measures. Significant results (all values $p < 0.02$, one tailed) were as follows: (a) teacher domineeringness (i.e., attempts to

Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations of Relational Communication Process
Measures for Problem Analysis Interview and Consultation Case Outcome
Measures

Measure	Potential Range	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Consultant Domineeringness	0–1	0.31	0.07
Consultant Dominance	0–1	0.78	0.12
Teacher Domineeringness	0–1	0.15	0.07
Teacher Dominance	0–1	0.61	0.15
BIRS Intervention Acceptability ^a	15–90	70.43	7.07
BIRS Intervention Effectiveness ^a	7–42	28.10	4.57
Student Progress-to-Target Behavior (0–3 GAS rating; $T_3 - T_1$) ^a	0–3	1.11	0.45
Mean Treatment Integrity (minimum of 3 observations) ^b	0–100	92.55	15.99

Note. BIRS = Behavior Intervention Rating Scale; GAS = Goal Attainment Scaling T_3 = time 3; T_1 = time 1.

^a Teacher rated.

^b Consultant observed.

influence the consultant) correlated $-.66$ with consultant observations of teacher treatment integrity; (b) teacher dominance (i.e., successful influence over the consultant) correlated $-.63$ with BIRS intervention acceptability; (c) teacher dominance correlated $-.61$ with BIRS intervention effectiveness; and (d) consultant dominance correlated $.59$ with consultant observations of teacher treatment integrity. Taken together, these findings provide at least partial support for Hypotheses 1 and 2.

Discussion

The study of behavioral consultation as a helping process that unfolds over time has been a topic in the school psychology literature for over 30 years. The present investigation showed that, within the PAI, teacher attempts to influence (i.e., domineeringness) and teacher influence (i.e., dominance) were negatively associated with consultation outcomes, and consultant influence (i.e., dominance) was positively associated with outcomes. This pattern of results stands in contrast to that of Erchul et al. (2007), who found positive associations between teacher PII dominance and intervention effectiveness as well as student-progress-to-target-behavior.

Interestingly, this study's findings are entirely consistent with the research literature

Erchul et al. (2007) cited to build the rationale for their hypotheses but, as noted, for which they received virtually no empirical support. Results are also consistent with a perspective on the modern practice of school-based behavioral consultation ascertaining important consultant responsibilities are to change teachers' behaviors so that they will become more effective change agents and to have teachers implement evidence-based interventions with integrity (Martens & DiGennaro, 2008). With current federal legislation such as the Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act 2004 (and considering its scientifically based intervention and response to intervention provisions in particular), it seems "a traditional, passive consult-and-hope approach [to consultation] is...no longer defensible" (Erchul et al., 2008, p. 318).

It is also instructive to briefly examine several null findings. For example, similar to Erchul (1987), consultant domineeringness was unrelated to any outcomes. Also, whereas Erchul et al. (2007) found student progress-to-target behavior to be positively related to teacher PII dominance, this outcome measure was unrelated to the four process measures studied here. Considering the present study's smaller sample size (and reduced statistical power), it is not surprising that null results

Table 2
Intercorrelation Matrix of Relational Communication Process Measures for Problem Analysis Interview and Consultation Case Outcome Measures

	BIRS Acceptability ^a	BIRS Effectiveness ^a	Student Progress-to-Target Behavior (GAS; $T_3 - T_1$) ^a	Mean Treatment Integrity ^b
Consultant domineeringness	.15 (n = 13)	.38 (n = 12)	.27 (n = 18)	-.11 (n = 16)
Consultant dominance	-.01 (n = 13)	.31 (n = 12)	-.11 (n = 18)	.59** (n = 16)
Teacher domineeringness	.20 (n = 13)	-.28 (n = 12)	.03 (n = 18)	-.66** (n = 16)
Teacher dominance	-.63* (n = 13)	-.61* (n = 12)	-.36 (n = 18)	.18 (n = 16)

Note. BIRS = Behavior Intervention Rating Scale; GAS = Goal Attainment Scaling; T_3 = time 3; T_1 = time 1.

^a Teacher rated.

^b Consultant observed.

* $p < .02$.

** $p < .01$.

would be at least as numerous as those Erchul and his colleagues found.

Given the PII results of Erchul et al. (2007) and the PAI findings of this study, why would the dynamics of interpersonal influence in behavioral consultation be so different across these two interviews? Certainly the objectives for these interview types are not the same (Kratowill & Bergan, 1990), which logically would then lead to differential consultant verbal behavior. Another explanation is that in the IDAI PAI protocol, the consultant proposes several research-based academic interventions that the teacher then accepts or rejects. This approach is quite different from brainstorming or jointly developing interventions, which is usually the practice of behavioral consultation (termed "traditional data-based academic intervention" by Jitendra et al., 2007). It would seem a Project PASS consultant needs to be adept at suggesting appropriate, evidence-based interventions and then securing the cooperation of teachers to implement them, thus making the social influence task (Erchul & Martens, 2002) more pivotal during the PAI than PII.

Much of the discussion thus far has emphasized differences between the results of Erchul et al. (2007) and the current study. It is worth noting, however, that Erchul and colleagues found a negative association between teacher PII dominance and treatment integrity ($r = -.32$), and in the present study there was an even stronger negative association between teacher PAI domineeringness and treatment integrity ($r = -.66$). These findings suggest that teachers are *less likely* to implement proposed interventions with integrity when they try to influence, or are successful in influencing, the consultation process. In conjunction with another result of the present study (i.e., consultant PAI dominance correlated .59 with treatment integrity), a complementary conclusion may be reached that holds teachers are *more likely* to implement proposed interventions with integrity when a consultant is successful in influencing them in the problem analysis/intervention development stage. Furthermore, these three results together appear to document a reciprocal pattern of consultant/teacher influence consistent with the finding of Erchul et al. that consultant dominance and

teacher dominance are negatively correlated ($r = -.36$), suggesting “when one participant is more influential, the other is less influential” (p. 124). Much more research is needed not only to specify the optimal working relationship between consultants and teachers but also to demonstrate how this relationship leads to important consultation outcomes.

It is hoped this study’s results will revive interest in behavioral consultation as a *process* during which consultants and teachers often change the ways they relate to one another. Moving on from the efforts of Bergan and Tombari (1976) to promote the view that the success of consultation hinges on the attainment of problem identification, it may be that the contemporary practice of school-based consultation—involving evidence-based interventions to a greater extent—depends more on what a consultant does in the later stages of problem analysis and plan implementation. Results of the present study shed some light on the problem analysis stage and other investigations have begun to address the plan implementation stage (e.g., Noell et al., 2005).

This study’s limitations are essentially those reported previously by Erchul et al. (2007) and include the following: three of the four outcome measures consisted of subjective ratings rather than direct observations of behavior; all outcomes had some data missing, which reduced the 20 observations per measure to 12 to 18; and the use of audiotapes did not allow for the consideration of nonverbal communication, which is important to achieving a more complete understanding of interpersonal communication. In addition, case attrition as a result of the missing audiotapes decreased the statistical power of analyses and generalizability of findings to some degree. As noted earlier, results pertaining to BIRS intervention acceptability may have been affected in particular.

In conclusion, results from Erchul et al. (2007) and the present study together indicate that favorable outcomes of IDAI behavioral consultation are associated not only with teachers’ influence over consultants during the problem identification stage but also to some degree with consultants’ influence over teachers during the

problem analysis/intervention development stage. Implications for school consultants operating from a behavioral framework are thus: (a) it is useful to view consultation with teachers as a process, with different actions called for at different points in time; and (b) although it is important to understand a teacher’s frame of reference to initially assess a student’s problem, it may be equally important later on to exert one’s influence to achieve a teacher’s endorsement and successful implementation of an evidence-based intervention within consultation. Clearly, more research is needed to determine whether consultants’ influence over teachers in the PAI is associated with favorable student outcomes.

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