

Editorial Note: Research Updates on Teacher Consultation for Children With Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Thomas J. Power
University of Pennsylvania

A brief survey of the science base in school psychology and related fields reveals that there have been numerous school intervention studies published about students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). This is not surprising given the high prevalence of the disorder (3% to 10%) and the important and exciting roles that school mental health professionals can serve in addressing the needs of these children and their families. The articles related to the special topic of this issue are unique in that they describe research conducted in general education settings, as opposed to specialized schools or summer camps, and they investigate the effectiveness of intervention delivered indirectly via teacher consultation.

Each of the special topic articles addresses Outcome Goal 1 of the School Psychology Futures Conference (i.e., improving academic outcomes; Power, 2006; Dawson, Cummings, Harrison, Short, Gorin, & Palmares, 2004). In addition, these articles present findings from studies that have previously been described in the school psychology literature, specifically in *School Psychology Review* (Erchul et al., 2007; Evans, Serpell, Schultz, & Pastor, 2007; Jitendra et al., 2007). The articles either report additional findings from these studies (Erchul et al., 2009; Volpe, DuPaul, Jitendra, & Tresco, 2009) or offer a

novel perspective on the findings reported in a previous article (Schultz, Evans, & Serpell, 2009).

Although numerous investigations have demonstrated that interventions for children with ADHD are effective during the time periods and in the contexts within which interventions are applied, the study by Volpe et al. (2009) is the first to demonstrate the problem of generalization across time when applying academic interventions for these children. Volpe et al. showed that students generally were able to maintain gains in academic functioning for 1 year after receiving specialized intervention provided via teacher consultation, but they did not demonstrate further improvement in functioning during the follow-up period. The findings highlight the need to maintain intervention efforts over extended periods to close the achievement gap commonly manifested by children with ADHD.

Challenging Horizons is an innovative program that has substantial promise for middle school students with ADHD. Schultz et al. (2009) provide an alternative perspective of the findings from their study of the effectiveness of this program (Evans et al., 2007). They reexamined their data to investigate the extent to which the intervention was successful in reducing or delaying the onset of poor academic grades, outcomes that have substantial

Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to Thomas J. Power, The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, 34th Street and Civic Center Boulevard, 3535 Market—Room 1471, Philadelphia, PA 19104; E-mail: power@email.chop.edu

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significance within the context of a multitier, prevention-oriented model of service delivery. The methodology used for data analysis, referred to as a “survivor analysis,” should prove highly useful for professionals conducting intervention and prevention projects in schools.

Although researchers have made substantial gains in identifying evidence-based practices for children with attention, learning, and behavior problems, the science base is extremely limited with regard to understanding how interventions are effective—in other words, the mechanisms of action. The study conducted by Erchul et al. (2009), which examines the processes of teacher consultation, takes a significant step in the direction of elucidating mechanisms of action. Their findings demonstrate how the processes of consultation vary as a function of consultation phase. Specifically, the extent of teacher influence has a differential effect on treatment integrity and perceived outcome depending on whether consultation is being provided in the problem identification versus problem analysis phase.

Intervention research in general has focused primarily on technique, that is, the *what* of intervention, as opposed to process, that is, the *how*. The outstanding commentary by Nadeem and Jensen (2009) notes that the “nonspecific factors of treatment,” which researchers typically try to control in intervention studies, may include critical components that ought to be a primary focus of investigation, including relationship variables (e.g., consultant–teacher, student–teacher, parent–teacher) and organizational variables (e.g., classroom climate, responsiveness of school to community values, and administrative support of teachers). The authors of this commentary recommend the use of qualitative and participatory methods to elucidate the processes that might explain why an intervention worked or did not work for a particular child.

As a final note, the expanding research base on ADHD can be contrasted to the much

more limited science base related to school-based interventions for children with autistic spectrum disorders; emotional disorders, including anxiety and depression; and combinations of behavioral and emotional disorders. Given that autistic spectrum disorders, emotional disorders, and comorbid conditions can have a dramatic effect on school performance, there is a critical need to grow the science base related to these latter disorders in a manner similar to that of ADHD.

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