Efficacy of the BEST in CLASS Intervention for Young Children at High Risk for Emotional and Behavioral Disorders

84.324 Goal Three under Social and Behavioral Outcomes to Support Learning Special Education Research Grants

Purpose: Through funding from the Institute of Education Sciences (Goal 2), BEST in CLASS was developed as a secondary level intervention to be implemented by teachers in early childhood classroom settings with a focus on improving social, emotional, and behavioral functioning, and concomitantly, the preacademic competence of 4 year olds at high risk for the development of EBD. BEST in CLASS is a strength-based intervention comprised of seven intervention modules which include effective instructional strategies that promote engagement and learning: (1) Basics of Behavior, (2) Home-School Communication, (3) Rules, Expectations, and Routines, (4) Behavior Specific Praise, (5) Precorrection and Active Supervision, 6) Opportunities to Respond and Instructional Pacing, and (7) Teacher Feedback. Classroom teachers participate in an introductory inservice training session, including didactic instruction and active learning, followed by 14-weeks of classroom-based coaching. Through increases in positive, effective instruction, BEST in CLASS improves the overall classroom atmospheres including reciprocal positive interactions between teachers and children. BEST in CLASS has demonstrated feasibility of implementation by early childhood teachers as well as promise for preventing and ameliorating problem behaviors demonstrated by high-risk children in early childhood settings. However, the efficacy of BEST in CLASS has not been tested. We propose to implement and examine the efficacy of the BEST in CLASS intervention with children who are at elevated risk for the development of EBD in early childhood settings.

Project Activities: A fully manualized version of BEST in CLASS is ready for implementation by teachers in early childhood classrooms, including prototypes of all materials and products. In this proposal we will examine the efficacy of BEST in CLASS in comparison to existing classroom-based instruction. We also propose to examine teacher self-efficacy and teacher-child relationships as mediating variables.

Products: We will conduct a methodologically and pragmatically successful project to determine the net positive impact of the BEST in CLASS on children's social, emotional, and behavioral development and concomitant changes in preacademic competence. We also will contribute to the theoretical understanding of the transactional nature of building positive teacher-child relationships through effective instruction within classroom ecologies.

Setting: A total of 150 early childhood classrooms across the 4 years of the project will be selected. Classrooms will be in the surrounding rural and urban areas of Gainesville, FL (15 treatment and 15 control per year) and the urban and metropolitan area of Richmond, VA (15 treatment and 15 control per year).

Population: Three children at elevated risk for EBD per classroom will participate, for a total of 180 children (90 treatment, 90 control) per year. The Early Screening Project will be used to identify participants at risk for EBD. Children who demonstrate developmental delays in the cognitive domain will be excluded.

Research Design and Methods: A randomized block design will be employed, and classrooms will be randomly assigned to treatment or comparison ("business as usual") groups. A hierarchical linear modeling approach will be used to examine the effect of BEST in CLASS.

Key Measures: Measures will include the Social Skills Improvement System Rating Scales, the Caregiver-Teacher Report Form, and the Bracken Basic Concept Scale – 3: Receptive. The Teacher-Child Interactions Direct Observational System will be used to examine occurrence of teacher behavior, focal children's adaptive and problem behaviors, and teacher-child interactions. The Classroom Assessment Scoring System, Pre-K will examine classroom atmosphere and inCLASS will be used as a standardized measure of individualized teacher-child interactions. Treatment fidelity will include measurement of both adherence and quality of implementation. Teacher self-efficacy (Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale and Teachers' Self-Efficacy Beliefs Scale) and teacher child relationships (Student Teacher Relationship Scale) will be examined as potential mediators.