The Teacher as Literacy First Responder: Practical Differentiation & Intervention Tools for the K-5 Classroom

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How To: Create a Written Record of Classroom Interventions

When general-education students begin to struggle with academic or behavioral issues, the classroom teacher will typically select and implement one or more evidence-based intervention strategies to assist those students. But a strong intervention plan needs more than just well-chosen interventions. It also requires 4 additional components (Witt, VanDerHeyden, & Gilbertson, 2004): (1) student concerns should be clearly and specifically defined; (2) one or more methods of formative assessment should be used to track the effectiveness of the intervention; (3) baseline student data should be collected prior to the intervention; and (4) a goal for student improvement should be calculated before the start of the intervention to judge whether that intervention is ultimately successful. If a single one of these essential 4 components is missing, the intervention is to be judged as fatally flawed (Witt, VanDerHeyden, & Gilbertson, 2004) and as not meeting minimum Response to Intervention standards.

Teachers need a standard format to use in documenting their classroom intervention plans. The *Classroom Intervention Planning Sheet* that appears later in this article is designed to include all of the essential documentation elements of an effective intervention plan. The form includes space to document:

- *Case information*. In this first section of the form, the teacher notes general information, such as the name of the target student, the adult(s) responsible for carrying out the intervention, the date the intervention plan is being created, the expected start and end dates for the intervention plan, and the total number of instructional weeks that the intervention will be in place. Most importantly, this section includes a description of the student problem; research shows that the most significant step in selecting an effective classroom intervention is to correctly identify the target student concern(s) in clear, specific, measureable terms (Bergan, 1995).
- *Intervention.* The teacher describes the evidence-based intervention(s) that will be used to address the identified student concern(s). As a shortcut, the instructor can simply write the intervention name in this section and attach a more detailed intervention script/description to the intervention plan.
- *Materials.* The teacher lists any materials (e.g., flashcards, wordlists, worksheets) or other resources (e.g., Internet-connected computer) necessary for the intervention.
- *Training.* If adults and/or the target student require any training prior to the intervention, the teacher records those training needs in this section of the form.
- *Progress-Monitoring.* The teacher selects a method to monitor student progress during the intervention. For the method selected, the instructor records what type of data is to be used, collects and enters student baseline (starting-point) information, calculates an intervention outcome goal, and notes how frequently he or she plans to monitor the intervention.

A completed example of the *Classroom Intervention Planning Sheet* that includes a math computation intervention can be found later in this article.

While a simple intervention documentation form is a helpful planning tool, schools should remember that teachers will need other resources and types of assistance as well to be successful in selecting and using classroom interventions. For example, teachers should have access to an 'intervention menu' that contains evidence-based strategies to address the most common academic and behavioral concerns and should be able to get coaching support as they learn how to implement new classroom intervention ideas.

References
Bergan, J. R. (1995). Evolution of a problem-solving model of consultation. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation, 6(2),* 111-123.

Witt, J. C., VanDerHeyden, A. M., & Gilbertson, D. (2004). Troubleshooting behavioral interventions. A systematic process for finding and eliminating problems. *School Psychology Review, 33,* 363-383.

Classroom Intervention Planning Sheet

This worksheet is designed to help teachers to quickly create classroom plans for academic and behavioral interventions.

Case Information

What to Write: Record the important case information, including student, person delivering the intervention, date of plan, start and end dates for the intervention plan, and the total number of instructional weeks that the intervention will run.

Student:		Interventionist(s):		Date Intervention Plan Was Written:	
Date Intervention is to Start:		Date Intervention is to End:		Total Number of Intervention Weeks:	
Description of the Student Problem:					

Intervention

What to Write: Write a brief description of the intervention(s) to be used with this student. TIP: If you have a script for this intervention, you can just write its name here and attach the script to this sheet.

Materials	Training
What to Write: Jot down materials (e.g., flashcards) or resources (e.g., Internet-connected computer) needed to carry out this intervention.	**What to Write**: Note what training--if any--is needed to prepare adult(s) and/or the student to carry out the intervention.

Progress-Monitoring

What to Write: Select a method to monitor student progress on this intervention. For the method selected, record what type of data is to be used, enter student baseline (starting-point) information, calculate an intervention outcome goal, and note how frequently you plan to monitor the intervention. Tip: Several ideas for classroom data collection appear on the right side of this table.

Type of Data Used to Monitor:		Ideas for Intervention Progress-Monitoring
		• Existing data: grades, homework logs, etc.
Baseline	Outcome Goal	• Cumulative mastery log
		• Rubric
		• Curriculum-based measurement
How often will data be collected? (e.g., daily, every other day, weekly):		• Behavior report card
		• Behavior checklist

Classroom Intervention Planning Sheet

This worksheet is designed to help teachers to quickly create classroom plans for academic and behavioral interventions.

Case Information

What to Write: Record the important case information, including student, person delivering the intervention, date of plan, start and end dates for the intervention plan, and the total number of instructional weeks that the intervention will run.

Student:	Sandra S.	Interventionist(s):	Mrs. Thomas	Date Intervention Plan Was Written:	Dec 5, 2016
Date Intervention is to Start:	Dec 12, 2016	Date Intervention is to End:	Jan 20, 2017	Total Number of Intervention Weeks:	5 weeks

Description of the Student Problem:	Sandra has difficulty retaining essential information from assigned informational passages.

Intervention

What to Write: Write a brief description of the intervention(s) to be used with this student. TIP: If you have a script for this intervention, you can just write its name here and attach the script to this sheet.

Repeated Reading with Written Retell
The teacher and other adults working with Sandra will use this strategy whenever Sandra is assigned a challenging passage to read.

Materials

What to Write: Jot down materials (e.g., flashcards) or resources (e.g., Internet-connected computer) needed to carry out this intervention.

Copy of reading retell student recording sheet.

Training

What to Write: Note what training--if any--is needed to prepare adult(s) and/or the student to carry out the intervention.

Teach Sandra to use the RR strategy (1-2 sessions).

Progress-Monitoring

What to Write: Select a method to monitor student progress on this intervention. For the method selected, record what type of data is to be used, enter student baseline (starting-point) information, calculate an intervention outcome goal, and note how frequently you plan to monitor the intervention. Tip: Several ideas for classroom data collection appear on the right side of this table.

Type of Data Used to Monitor: Readiness Assessment Test (Quiz)

Baseline	Outcome Goal
3-wk quiz average: 2.8 (of possible 5 points)	Final wk quiz average: 4.0 or higher

How often will data be collected? (e.g., daily, every other day, weekly):

Weekly

Ideas for Intervention Progress-Monitoring
- Existing data: grades, homework logs, etc.
- Cumulative mastery log
- Rubric
- Curriculum-based measurement
- Behavior report card
- Behavior checklist

How To: Define Academic Problems: The First Step in Effective Intervention Planning

Students who struggle with academic deficits do not do so in isolation. Their difficulties are played out in the larger context of the school environment and curriculum—and represent a 'mismatch' between the characteristics of the student and the instructional demands of the classroom (Foorman & Torgesen, 2001).

It may surprise educators to learn that the problem-identification step is the most critical for matching the student to an effective intervention (Bergan, 1995). Problem identification statements should be defined in clear and specific terms sufficient to pass 'the stranger test' (Howell, Hosp, & Kurns, 2008). That is, the student problem can be judged as adequately defined if a person with no background knowledge of the case and equipped only with the problem-identification statement can observe the student in the academic setting and know with confidence when the problem behavior is displayed and when it is not.

Here are recommendations for increasing teacher capacity to describe student academic problems in specific terms, and generate a hypothesis about why the problem is occurring.

1. **Describe the academic problem in specific, skill-based terms with a meaningful instructional context** (Batsche et al., 2008; Upah, 2008). Write a clear, brief description of the academic skill or performance deficit that focuses on a specific skill or performance area. Include information about the conditions under which the academic problem is observed and typical or expected level of performance.

   - *Conditions.* Describe the environmental conditions or task demands in place when the academic problem is observed.
   - *Problem Description.* Describe the actual observable academic behavior with which the student has difficulty. If available, include specifics about student performance, such as rate of work, accuracy, or other relevant quantitative information.
   - *Typical or Expected Level of Performance.* Provide a typical or expected performance criterion for this skill or behavior. Typical or expected academic performance can be calculated using a variety of sources, such as benchmark norms, local (classroom) norms, or expert opinion.

Academic Problems: Sample Definitions		
Environmental Conditions or Task Demands	Problem Description	Typical or Expected Level of Performance
When shown flashcards with mixed-case letters for 3 seconds	Annika can name 38 of 52 correctly	while most peers in her class can name all letters correctly.
When asked to blend / segment onsets and rimes of single-syllable spoken words	Thomas (grade 1) is inconsistent in this skill	while this is a Kindergarten ELA/Reading standard.
When shown CVC words from all vowel families via flashcards	Terrance requires adult prompting, hints, and occasional direction to sound out and blend the words	while classmates perform the task with prompting only.
When reading aloud from a 1-minute 4th-grade passage	Benjamin reads an average of 45 words	while the fall norm (20th percentile) at Grade 4 is 68 words per minute.

When completing sets of 5 short-answer questions based on assigned readings	Neda scores an average of 40% (2 of 5 correct)	while classmates score an average of 80%.
When directed to match terms and definitions for 20 social-studies terms…	Lucy can correctly match 10 items	while this entry-level vocabulary is a prerequisite for the course.

2. **Select a hypothesis to explain the academic skill or performance problem.** The hypothesis states the assumed reason(s) or cause(s) for the student's academic problems. Once selected, the hypothesis acts as a compass needle, pointing toward interventions that most logically address the student academic problems. Listed below are common reasons for academic problems. Note that occasionally more than one hypothesis may apply to a particular student (e.g., a student may demonstrate a skill deficit as well as a pattern of escape/avoidance).

Academic Problems: Determining the Root Cause (Hypothesis)

Struggling students can appear quite similar on the surface. They might be reluctant to engage in academic tasks, seem to work more slowly than peers, and lack the range of academic skills expected for their grade-level. In fact, though, there are differing explanations for why a student might encounter roadblocks to learning. This table lists the most frequent 'root ccauses' of classroom learning problems. When teachers select a specific cause as the most likely explanation for a student's academic difficulties, that hypothesis acts as a compass needle, pointing toward interventions that most logically address the student academic problems.

Hypothesis	Recommendation
• *Skill Deficit.* The student has not yet acquired the skill(s).	Provide direct, explicit instruction to acquire the skill. Reinforce the student for effort and accuracy.
• *Fluency Deficit.* The student has acquired the skill(s) but is not yet proficient.	Provide opportunities for the student to practice the skill and give timely performance feedback. Reinforce the student for fluency as well as accuracy.
• *Retention Deficit.* The student can acquire the skill(s) but has difficulty retaining it over an extended period.	Give the student frequent opportunities for practice to entrench a skill and help the student to retain it over time. Begin by scheduling more numerous practice episodes within a short time ('massed review') to promote initial fluency and then strengthen longer-term skill retention by scheduling additional periodic review ('distributed review') across longer spans of several weeks or more.
• *Endurance Deficit.* The student can perform the academic task(s), but only for brief periods.	• Provide scaffolding supports to help the student to perform the academic task. • In structuring lessons or independent work, gradually lengthen the period of time that the student spends in skills practice or use. • Have the student self-monitor active engagement in skill-building activities--setting daily, increasingly ambitious work goals and then tracking whether he or she successfully reaches those goals.
• *Generalization Deficit.* The student possesses the skill(s) but fails to use	• Enlist adults to prompt and remind the student to use the target skills when needed. • Train the student to identify relevant characteristics of

across appropriate situations or settings.	situations or settings when the skill should be used—and to self-monitor skill use. • Provide incentives (e.g., praise, rewards) for the student to use the skill in the appropriate settings.
• *Learned Helplessness.* The student lacks confidence in his or her academic abilities and—as a result—withholds efforts.	• Adjust the work to the student's ability level. • Use scaffolding and accommodation strategies to make the academic work more manageable, e.g., breaking larger tasks into smaller increments ("chunking"), allowing the student to take brief breaks during work sessions, etc. • Use positive communication techniques to build student motivation and optimism, including praise, growth-mindset statements, and wise feedback.

References

Batsche, G. M., Castillo, J. M., Dixon, D. N., & Forde, S. (2008). Best practices in designing, implementing, and evaluating quality interventions. In A. Thomas & J. Grimes (Eds.), *Best practices in school psychology V* (pp. 177-193). Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

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Upah, K. R. F. (2008). Best practices in designing, implementing, and evaluating quality interventions. In A. Thomas & J. Grimes (Eds.), *Best practices in school psychology V* (pp. 209-223). Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

Worksheet: Identifying a Student Academic Problem

1. **Describe the problem.** Think of a student currently or previously in your class whose **reading** problem(s) require significant amounts of your time, energy, and support. In 1-2 sentences, briefly describe the nature of that student's **reading** problem(s).
Description of student academic problem(s)

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2. **Write a 3-part Problem-Identification Statement.** Use this organizer to rewrite your student's **reading** problem in the form of a 3-part Problem ID statement. For examples, see pp. 5-6:		
3-Part Academic Problem ID Statement		
Environmental Conditions or Task Demands	**Problem Description**	**Typical or Expected Level of Performance**

3. **Write a Hypothesis Statement.** Based on your knowledge of this student, write a 'hypothesis' statement that pinpoints the likely 'root cause' of the **reading** problem. See **pp. 6-7** for a listing of possible hypotheses.
Hypothesis Statement