

The Science of Organizational Skills in Children?



“Organizational Skills Study Program”

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PI: Howard Abikoff, Ph.D.
Co-I: Richard Gallagher, Ph.D.
NYU Child Study Center
Renee David, M.S.
Louis Armstrong Middle School

Background and Rationale

- Many children do not develop routines for meeting the demands of home and school
- Deficits in organizational, time management, and planning (OTMP) skills are associated features of limited school success
- Ineffective OTMP skills compromise school success, result in family conflict, and decreased work performance
- May worsen over time

Background & Rationale (cont.)

- No comprehensive, “real-life” assessment measures of OTMP skills in children
- No systematic efforts to develop and test interventions that specifically target OTMP deficits
- For those with the greatest problems, lack of measures and interventions leave problems unresolved

Impact on Real-Life

- A teacher’s perspective on problems
- An administrator’s perspective
- The effect of school demands
 - Elementary school circumstances
 - Middle school demands
 - High school demands
 - College demands

Initial Measurement Research

- We developed “real-life” OTMP skills measures
 - Developed the Children’s Organizational Skills Scale (COSS)
 - Used to identify specific areas of impairment
 - Lapses in Memory and Materials Management
 - Time Management Problems
 - Task Planning Problems
 - Used to child status & assess treatment outcome

Initial Measurement Studies

- Administered the COSS to over 900 children in 3rd to 8th regular education settings
- The New York Metropolitan Region was sampled in public, parochial, and private schools including NYC and suburban districts
- Teachers provided data on 5 randomly selected students
- Analyzed through factor analysis
- Important comparisons were conducted

Initial Measurement Results I

- Three factors were revealed –Teacher Form
 - Use of Organized Actions
 - ...uses a calendar to remember dues dates
 - ...uses folders to separate papers
 - Lapses in Memory and Materials Management
 - ...completes homework but can't find it
 - ...comes home without needed books
 - Task Planning Problems
 - ...does not know how to begin assignments
 - ...runs out of time before completing tasks
 - ...is able to manage schedule in order to complete several assignments

Initial Measurement Results II

- There were variations on these factors
- Girls were more organized than boys
- Those who had special educational support were less organized than those without
- Children with ADHD were less organized than typically-developing children
- Children with ADHD were less organized than children with other emotional and behavioral problems
- Parent observed variations as well as teachers

Simple & Probably Effective Steps - I

- Provide Overt Instruction in OTMP Skills
- Provide Physical Tools for Organization
 - Planners
 - Review the classroom environment for storage and placement of assignments
- Schedule Time to Complete Needed Routines
- Teach Kids How to Plan

Efforts to Assist Special Populations: The Story (so far) of ADHD

- Deficits in organizational, time management, and planning (OTMP) skills are associated features of ADHD
 - DSM-IV: problems in organizing tasks & activities; disorganized work habits; tendency to scatter, lose, or carelessly mishandle task materials
- Ineffective OTMP skills compromise school success, result in family conflict, and decreased work performance



“MY WHAT? IS DUE WHEN?”
(AND, Where Is It?)

Initial Research: NIMH Treatment Development Grant

- We developed “real-life” OTMP skills measures
 - Developed Children’s Organizational Skills Scale (COSS)
- We developed an Organizational Skills Training (OST) intervention to improve OTMP skills
- We conducted pilot study to determine program’s utility and to guide design of current randomized controlled trial

OST Intervention

- For 3rd-5th graders with ADHD and OTMP impairments
- Remedial intervention, not 1st line Tx for ADHD
- Informed by several assumptions
 - Children with ADHD:
 - have organizational skills deficits
 - can learn skills but do not access them appropriately

OST Intervention (cont’d)

- 20-session manualized program
 - Clinic-based, after school
 - 3 Major Domain Modules
 - Materials management
 - Time management
 - Planning for short and long-term projects
- Treatment focuses on child but also involves
 - Parents
 - Teachers

Findings from Pilot Study: Summary

- Significant improvement in Parent and Teacher ratings on the COSS
- Significant improvement on Homework Problems Checklist and Academic Planning Task
- Improvements occurred regardless of children’s medication status or ADHD subtype
- No drop-outs
- High level of attendance
 - All children had at least 17 sessions
- Treatment satisfaction
 - Parents “very satisfied”
 - Teachers “satisfied”

Current NIMH Study

- Primary aims
 - Compare two OTMP treatment approaches
 - “OST” --- Organizational Skills Training
 - “PATHKO”---Parents and Teachers Helping Kids Get Organized”
 - Wait-list control – choice of Tx after wait period
 - Assess short and “long-term” effects
 - Evaluate children’s functioning in the next school grade, to determine if treatment effects have been maintained

Secondary Aims

- Examine impact of level of parental ADHD symptoms on treatment implementation and outcome
- Examine maintenance of treatment strategies over time and relationship to child's functioning at follow-up

Study Outcome Measures

- Academic measures
 - report card grades
 - teacher ratings of academic performance
 - parent ratings of homework problems
- Ratings of organizational skills
- Planning tasks
- Family relations
- Children's attitudes toward school and teachers

Study Inclusion Criteria

- 8-11 year old boys and girls in 3rd-5th grade (medicated or unmedicated)
- In mainstream education setting (resource room services OK)
 - Not appropriate for children in an all-day special education classroom (or if child has a Para)
- Meets diagnostic criteria for ADHD
 - Questionnaires completed by parents and teachers
 - Formal clinical evaluation done by study staff
- Has OTMP impairments at school or home
- Estimated IQ \geq 85
- Teacher willing to participate

Potential Study Benefits

- Improvement in children's organizational, time management and planning skills could:
 - facilitate children's academic functioning
 - enable them to handle increasing task demands as they enter higher grades
 - result in less conflict with adults
 - improve children's attitudes toward school and teachers
- Findings will yield essential information about the relative effectiveness of two different treatment approaches for children with ADHD
 - Influence clinical interventions for children with OTMP deficits
- Teachers have the opportunity to learn new skills to help students with organizational difficulties

Practical Issues

- Current status of the project
 - Study approved by NYU IRB and NYC DOE Research Protocol Review Committee
- Cost
 - Treatment is free of charge
- Availability of treatment
 - Provided at Child Study Center Manhattan and Lake Success offices (located at Queens/Nassau border)
 - Facilitates travel
 - Parents reimbursed for travel expenses
 - Children seen after school

Study Extensions

- Completing a Treatment Development Project for Middle School /Departmentalized Settings
- Louis Armstrong Middle School is the Laboratory
- Changes in program
 - Small group setting
 - Change in characteristics of the students
 - Aiming to have school personnel deliver the program