



A randomized controlled trial of the impact of a teacher classroom management program on the classroom behavior of children with and without behavior problems

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ABSTRACT

This randomized controlled trial (RCT) evaluated the efficacy of the Incredible Years (IY) Teacher Classroom Management (TCM; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2002) program to assess whether training teachers in IY-TCM principles improve teacher behavior, whether any observed improvements impact pupil behavior classroom-wide, and whether these effects can be demonstrated with children at risk of developing conduct problems. Six intervention and six control classrooms comprising 12 teachers and 107 children (aged 3 to 7 years) were recruited. Children were screened for high or low behavior problems using the cut-off points of the teacher-rated Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, 1997). The primary outcome measure was independent classroom observations using the Teacher–Pupil Observation Tool (Martin et al., 2010). Multilevel modeling analyses were conducted to examine the effect of the intervention on teacher, classroom, and child behavior. Results showed a significant reduction in classroom off-task behavior ($d = 0.53$), teacher negatives to target children ($d = 0.36$), target child negatives towards the teacher ($d = 0.42$), and target child off-task behavior ($d = 0.48$). These preliminary results demonstrate the potential impact of IY-TCM on both teacher and child behavior.

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1. Introduction

In the UK between three and seven percent of children aged five to 15 years meet diagnostic criteria for conduct disorder (CD; National Institute for Health Clinical Excellence [NICE], 2006); boys are three times more likely than girls to have such problems (Hutchings, Williams, Martin, & Pritchard, 2011; Office for National Statistics, 2007). Children with early onset behavioral problems likely to develop into CD are at high risk for social and emotional problems, poor school attendance, school dropout, academic failure and delinquency (Webster-Stratton, Reid, & Stoolmiller, 2008). Over the last decade, teachers have reported increasing levels of behavioral problems within the classroom (Hutchings et al., 2011). These children are often taught by teachers who are ill prepared to cope with disruptive behavior (Webster-Stratton et al., 2008). They are also likely to receive less support and positive feedback from their teachers and their peers (Arnold et al., 1999). Exposure to a supportive teacher and a positive classroom environment improves the academic achievement of high-risk children (Werner, 1999). High levels of praise for appropriate behavior improve children's behavioral, social, and emotional adjustment as do the use of proactive teaching and

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positive discipline strategies (Webster-Stratton et al., 2008). These studies demonstrate that there is a need for effective, evidence-based classroom intervention programs to support teachers.

1.1. The incredible years (IY) teacher classroom management program

The IY series is a suite of evidence-based programs (Webster-Stratton, 2005) for parents of children aged 0 to 12 years, therapeutic and classroom-based programs for children, and a Teacher Classroom Management (TCM) program. The series has demonstrated efficacy and effectiveness through high-quality randomized controlled trials (RCTs) and is one of 11 “Blueprints” for Violence Prevention Model Programs (Webster-Stratton et al., 2001a, Webster-Stratton et al., 2001b) identified from over 900 programs reviewed.

The IY-TCM program (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2002) is delivered to groups of teachers for one day a month for five or six months. It aims to improve teacher–pupil relationships by improving home–school links, increasing teacher competencies in supporting children in the classroom, and developing children's social and problem-solving skills. Specific skills include proactive teacher strategies around rules and transitions and ensuring that fewer instructions are given but that they are clear specific and positive (i.e., that they tell the child what to do rather than what not to do; Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2002; Webster-Stratton & Taylor, 2001). It also incorporates all of the strategies that maximize behavior change through a collaborative delivery style (Hutchings, Gardner, & Lane, 2004; Webster-Stratton & Herbert, 1994). Teachers identify key classroom management skills through discussion, observation of videotaped examples of classroom situations, role-play rehearsal and classroom-based practice between sessions, including behavior planning. Feedback is provided at the start of the following session, and verbal and written assignments are reviewed and returned (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2002).

1.2. Supporting evidence for IY-TCM program

A number of RCTs of the IY series have included the TCM program, in various combinations with the parent and child programs. Outcomes vary between studies with some measuring both teacher and child outcomes, while others have focused on only teacher or only child outcomes.

1.2.1. Teacher and child outcomes

The first trial was conducted by Webster-Stratton et al. (2001b) and examined the effectiveness of the IY parent and teacher training programs with 4-year-old children and their mothers. Participants were randomly assigned to either the intervention condition, which included both the IY parent and teacher training, or a control condition. Children in the intervention condition showed significantly less conduct problems at school, and teachers in the intervention condition showed significantly better classroom management skills than children and teachers in the control condition. No effect sizes were reported in this trial.

A second trial by Webster-Stratton, Reid, and Hammond (2004) with children diagnosed with oppositional defiant disorder included five combinations of IY programs (three of which included the TCM program) and a no-treatment control group. Conditions that included the TCM program showed significant effects on teacher's negative behavior compared with controls, with Cohen's *d* values ranging from 0.46 to 0.63 depending on the condition. There was also a significant reduction in children's negative behavior in the conditions including TCM training (*ds* = 0.41–0.46).

A third trial of the IY-TCM program conducted by Webster-Stratton et al. (2008) examined the effects of the program in combination with the IY child training component. Participants were teachers and children from Head Start, kindergarten, and first-grade classrooms. Multilevel modeling was used to assess the intervention effects and point-wise effect sizes were calculated as the intervention slope mean divided by the standard deviation of the teacher level normative slope. They found that teachers in the intervention condition showed significantly fewer harsh and critical strategies ($z = -0.49$) compared to teachers in the control classrooms. Children in intervention classrooms showed a significant reduction in conduct problems ($z = 0.03$) and levels of disengagement ($z = -0.14$).

Shernoff and Kratochwill (2007) examined the IY-TCM program in conjunction with mental health consultation. The aims of their study were to examine the transportability of the program to a preschool setting and to investigate the potential contextual barriers of implementation. They compared two methods of training, namely videotape modeling (VM) versus videotape modeling plus consultation (VMC). Teachers in the VMC condition reported significantly higher confidence ratings, significantly higher acceptability ratings, and significantly greater use of proactive instructional practices. Preschoolers in both conditions displayed nonsignificant reductions in disruptive behaviors; however, preschoolers in the VMC condition showed additional positive trends in social competence and increased adaptation to the school environment. No effect sizes were reported. Time was considered the most significant barrier to completing the training, while implementation barriers included coteacher's lack of exposure to program content and lack of congruence regarding appropriate classroom management strategies.

Williford and Shelton (2008) also conducted a study examining the effectiveness of an adaptation of the IY-TCM program delivered using mental health consultation. Ninety-six preschoolers who displayed disruptive behaviors, their teachers, and their caregivers participated in the study. Teachers in the intervention group reported significantly greater use of effective teaching strategies and stable levels of child disruptive behaviors across the school year compared to teachers in the control group who reported increasing levels of disruptive behavior across the school year. Greater ease of implementation and usefulness of the teaching strategies was also reported by teachers in the intervention group. No effect sizes were reported.

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