



Providing Research-Based Tools and Supports to Teachers MATTERS for Children who Struggle with Writing

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www.cehd.umn.edu/edpsych/dbi-tlc/

Many children, including those with disabilities, struggle to learn to write. In fact, data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (http://www.nationsreportcard.gov/writing_2011/), show that about 20% of 8th- and 12-graders perform below a basic level in writing. Many children who struggle with writing would benefit from early intervention that is individualized to meet their specific needs. As Annamary Boler, a special educator in Minneapolis Public Schools, describes, teachers need research-based assessment and intervention tools to meet the individual needs of their students:

I believe it is important for teachers to have research based tools because every kid is different...one intervention may work with one student and not another. A certain intervention may work in one environment and not another. I like to begin with a researched based intervention and tweak it as needed for the individual student. Better to start with something that at least has some potential. ~Annamary Boler, MPS

How can research address this problem? To provide teachers like Annamary with the tools and supports they need to provide intensive writing intervention, researchers at the Universities of Minnesota and Missouri have partnered with local schools to develop *DBI-TLC*, a professional development system that provides *tools, learning opportunities, and collaborative supports* to implement “Data-Based Instruction”—an approach that uses children’s assessment data to individualize their writing instruction. With ongoing input and feedback from school partners, including administrators and classroom teachers, the researchers developed and revised a system that would be *usable and feasible* to implement in real school settings.

What does the research show? Initial evidence indicates that *DBI-TLC* shows promise to improve both teacher and student outcomes. In a small randomized control trial conducted in two districts in Minnesota and Missouri, 20 special education teachers were randomly assigned to participate in *DBI-TLC* or to serve as a business-as-usual control group. After 20 weeks, *DBI-TLC teachers outperformed controls on a measure of DBI Knowledge and Skills*, with a large effect size ($d = 3.05$). Students who received *DBI* showed consistently higher mean performance on several proximal measures of early writing. Work is ongoing to continue to refine *DBI-TLC* and evaluate its effectiveness in school contexts. Annamary describes the impact that *DBI* has had on her practice:

The thing I really like about DBI is that I am the researcher. I can come to an IEP meeting and show the team, especially the parent, that the student is making progress with this intervention at this time. I like DBI because it helps me improve my practice. Instead of asking "What is wrong with the student?" I ask "What is it that I need to change, so that this student can make progress?" ~Annamary Boler, MPS

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