Chapter 6

Interventions for Academic Problems

The interventions in this chapter are designed to enhance academic skills in the areas of reading, written language, spelling, math, and organization skills. Many students with behavior problems also exhibit low academic skills and poor academic performance—either because their behavior has interfered with the learning of new skills, because they have learning disabilities, or both. Without basic academic skills, these students are destined for failure. Early identification of students who are at-risk for academic difficulties and behavioral problems and providing strategic intervention to address these problems is particularly important in helping them to achieve a successful school outcome.

Effective instruction is essential to children’s success in learning academic skills and most teachers are well prepared with the academic curriculum and teaching skills to provide this instruction. While most children (about 80–85%) respond favorably to basic academic instruction, a significant number of children including nondisabled learners have not mastered the important academic skills needed to function successfully as adults by high school graduation. In practice, teachers need to incorporate a large repertoire of strategies and techniques to meet the needs of these students. Effective teachers utilize varied instructional activities, a range of grouping arrangements, quick instructional pacing, and active student involvement to increase the academic growth of both high and low achieving students.

The interventions described below are designed to supplement the repertoire of instructional strategies and techniques, not to supplant the existing classroom curriculum. Tailoring academic instruction to meet the individual needs of students with learning and behavior problems may require extra teacher support and individual guided assistance, as well as personalized adaptations to curriculum
and assignments. However, most of the interventions presented in this chapter are practical and low maintenance. They may be incorporated within a general education classroom to benefit students with learning difficulties while helping other low achievers and without detriment to average or high achieving students. They can be incorporated into a typical instructional period (20–50 minutes), as part of a daily or weekly schedule.

Effective academic interventions incorporate the principles of (1) quick pacing and including a variety of instructional activities, (2) high levels of student engagement, (3) challenging standards of achievement at individualized levels, (4) self-verbalization methods, and (5) physical or visual representations of difficult concepts. They are designed to increase student active participation and time on-task, increase student motivation and interest, and provide immediate feedback and reinforcement. They utilize well-established strategies such as peer-tutoring, self-monitoring, and positive reinforcement contingencies.

A critical step in prevention and reduction of behavior problems is helping students with behavior disorders develop academic competence. Unless academic deficits are remediated and these students are successful in their efforts, they will continue to become frustrated, will develop a negative perception of school, and will most likely act-out or dropout. It is our hope that the academic interventions listed below will provide some practical instructional strategies for educators faced with this difficult challenge.

**READING—SIGHT WORDS**

*Keywords* E9 F9 E8 C9 T7 I8 V8 +9 T = 8.3


*Goal:* Keywords is a method of instruction in which students are taught sight words by use of a similar sounding keyword as a verbal and visual cue.

*Age Group:* Elementary or Secondary.

*Materials:* List of vocabulary words to be learned, vocabulary cards with pictures of keywords.

*Steps:*

1. The keyword method is an application of mnemonic instruction in which a concrete, acoustically similar word is selected for students to use to help learn and remember the meaning of an unfamiliar vocabulary word.
2. The teacher and/or students can create keywords to use with any vocabulary list or sight word list they are learning. The teacher previews the reading material (stories, chapter in textbook, chapter books, etc.) and determines a list of important and challenging vocabulary words for