

Chapter 44

The Use of Mobile Technologies for Students At-Risk or Identified with Behavioral Disorders within School-Based Contexts

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ABSTRACT

Students at-risk or identified with behavioral disorders often present complex challenges to educators. The purpose of this chapter is to: (a) highlight the benefits and challenges of using mobile technologies within school-based contexts; (b) provide a brief overview of the contemporary research regarding the use of mobile devices for improving the outcomes of students with behavioral disorders within schools; and (c) offer essential techniques, methods, and ideas for improving instruction and management for students with behavioral difficulties via mobile technologies. Taken together, the intent is to call attention to the evidence that supports the use of mobile technologies for students who are at-risk or identified with behavioral disorders in schools, raise awareness of those strategies that appear to be the most effective for such students and assist service providers in providing accountable education.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Students who exhibit behavioral and learning problems present complex challenges for schools (Cook, Landrum, Tankersley, & Kauffman, 2003). Typically, students with behavioral problems are those who have been identified, or who are at risk of being identified as having a disability, and who exhibit one or more of the following behaviors: (a) attention problems; (b) hyperactivity; (c) aggressive behavior(s);

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-0034-6.ch044

(d) withdrawn behavior(s); (e) bizarre behavior(s); (f) poor academic performance; (g) difficulties with memory; and/or (h) poor language abilities (Vaughn & Bos, 2012). While any student can demonstrate behavioral problems, most often, individuals who qualify for special education and related services under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act* (IDEIA, 2004) categories of Emotional Disturbance, Specific Learning Disabilities, and Other Health Impaired (which encompasses many children diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder; ADHD) constitute the majority of focus within school-based settings. Historically, such students have been described as the toughest to teach, the most often segregated, and the most likely to fail (Cook et al., 2003). Hypothesized reasons for such detrimental outcomes rest upon the notion that students who exhibit behavioral problems often are judged by others to be disruptive, disobedient, and engaging in behaviors that impede learning (Alisauskas & Simkiene, 2013). According to Berger (1995) and Swaggart (1998) students with behavioral problems often: (a) waste time during academic assignments, (b) engage in academic content less frequently, (c) demonstrate increased inattentiveness and impulsivity, (c) exhibit poor social skills, and (d) require increased instructional attention and effort from teachers. Taken together, such areas of deficit likely result in incomplete schoolwork, lack of instructional gains, and frustrated educators.

As a group, students with behavioral problems represent a large portion of those students receiving special education instruction in schools. As part of the IDEIA, each state's Department of Education (DOE) and the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) are required to record specific childhood disabilities for each school year. In 2012, the total number of students between the ages of six and 21 receiving special education and related services for Emotional Disturbance (ED), Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD), and Other Health Impaired (OHI) combined was close to three and a half million (IDEA Data Center, 2014). It is possible that the number of children receiving special education under these categories is a gross underestimate of the actual frequency of services necessary to support the education of those who are at-risk or have been identified as having behavioral problems. This is due to the fact that some children may not be included in IDEIA counts because they attend private schools, are home schooled, or do not meet eligibility criteria for special education but require some level of supportive services. Moreover, aside from the exact number of students served, placement in general education settings has become a dominant service delivery issue for students with behavioral difficulties. Data from the Office of Special Education Programs (IDEA Data Center, 2014) suggest that students with behavioral difficulties increasingly are served in inclusive settings. Specifically, 43% of students with Emotional Disturbance received their special educational instruction in the general education curriculum. Similarly, 62% of students identified as Other Health Impaired and 64% of those identified as having a Specific Learning Disability were educated within general education classrooms.

Given the percentages of students receiving services within inclusive contexts, combined with the fact that these statistics likely are underestimates of the true number of students who need support, educators likely face challenges instructing and managing students with behavioral problems. As such, school professionals not only need to be prepared to support children with behavioral problems, but also be aware of the evidence-based practices that are available. Moreover, as technology begins to permeate educational programming, educators need to identify the most promising and helpful tools that can be deployed readily within classroom contexts to assist in supporting the education of students with behavioral difficulties. The awareness and understanding of the use of mobile technologies for individuals with disabilities who demonstrate behavioral problems has particular relevance to the field of education, as practitioners increasingly have been called upon to support the educational needs of such students. Moreover, it is highly likely that parents and advocates frequently request the use of mobile

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