VKRP Virginia Kindergarten Readiness Program

Understanding the CBRS as a Teacher Rating Scale:
Recognizing and Reducing the Impact of Teacher Bias

Overview of the CBRS

The *Child Behavior Rating Scale* (CBRS) is a teacher rating scale used as part of VKRP to gather information about a student's self-regulation and social skills in the classroom:

- **Self-regulation skills:** skills that support students to manage their attention, emotions, and behaviors to adapt to the demands of the school environment (e.g., listen to others, follow expectations and multi-step directions, and stay focused on tasks).
- **Social skills:** skills that support students to successfully navigate interactions and build relationships with peers and adults (e.g., cooperate in a group, express thoughts and emotions, and resolve conflicts in a positive way).

The CBRS includes 17 items 10 for self-regulation (e.g., "concentrates when working, not easily distracted") and seven for social skills (i.e., "willing to share"). Teachers report on how often they see a student demonstrating a behavior on a 5-point scale from 1 (never) to 5 (always). Although most items of the CBRS are worded positively, two items are worded so that a higher rating indicates a more negative behavior.

Why VKRP uses the CBRS

VKRP uses the CBRS because it demonstrates reliability and validity across cultural contexts and with students across different ages, ranging from 3 to 8 years of age. It also was found to be reliable and valid across different racial and ethnic groups. A summary of this research can be found here.

The CBRS provides valuable information about students' classroom behavior as seen by the teacher. For example, teachers' ratings of children's self-regulation skills using the CBRS relate to other self-regulation measures, such as classroom observations of behavioral self-regulation or direct assessments (e.g., Schmitt et al., 2014). In addition, students' self-regulation skills as rated by their teachers using the CBRS is linked to their growth in academic achievement, even when accounting for students' age, gender, and their parents' education (e.g., Gestsdottir et al., 2014). See the CBRS overview in link above for a more extensive review.

Teachers' Perceptions of Students' Skills are Influenced by Teacher Bias

Despite the valuable information that the CBRS provides, the CBRS is *one* brief, screening measure. It is not designed to comprehensively assess students' self-regulation and social skills. An accurate interpretation of the CBRS scores requires an understanding that the *CBRS measures teachers' perceptions of children's behavior.* In other words, the CBRS scores are based upon teachers' views of students' behaviors in the classroom. The CBRS is **not** a direct, standardized task that a student completes to assess their skill level. Teachers are not impartial reporters of students' behavior. Their reports of students' skills and behavior are influenced by

their own lens and their own characteristics (Mason et al., 2014; Pigott & Cowen, 2000; Waterman at al., 2012), to include their biases and understanding of diverse cultures. Teachers' explicit and implicit biases—related to gender, race/ethnicity, culture, disability, religion, language, or socioeconomic status—can affect how they perceive and interpret students' behavior in the classroom. Without a commitment to reflect upon and take action to counteract these negative automatic thoughts or assumptions, a teacher's biases will be reflected in how they report on and interpret students' behaviors. The good news is that teachers can make intentional efforts to stop racially biased thoughts, judgments, and decisions when completing and using rating scales including the CBRS (see below for how to enact anti-bias action when completing and using the CBRS information).

Taking an Anti-Bias Approach when Completing and Using Information from the CBRS

Here are some practices teachers can use to reduce their bias when completing the CBRS and when interpreting and using the data from the CBRS:

1. *Wait at least four weeks into the school year to complete the CBRS.* Students need time to acclimate to their classroom context. Teachers also need time to interact with students, make personal connections with them, build supportive teacher-student relationships, and learn about children's families and cultural values before completing the CBRS.

2. *Observe a student's behaviors across settings*. The self-regulatory and social behaviors students display will vary across activity settings (e.g., whole group, small group, individual activities, lunch, outdoor, etc.). Observing students across settings allows a teacher to obtain a more complete picture of students' average behaviors, avoiding biased overgeneralizations. Teachers can observe students across various points in time by selecting a few students at a time to intentionally observe and score, completing the CBRS in multiple rounds.

    Teachers may be less likely to interpret a student's undesired or negative behavior as internal, or due to something about the child, and stable, or unlikely to change, when they have the opportunity to see a student engage across various activities during the school day.

3. *Make notes of specific behaviors.* Taking notes about specific, concrete behaviors that relate to the scale items during observations is a helpful strategy for increasing rating accuracy. Describing specific behaviors allows teachers to move away from interpretation and evaluation—both of which are more influenced by their own biases and cultural values.

    When noticing specific behaviors, teachers can reflect on whether those behaviors may be culturally influenced and whether their teaching is responsive to students' cultural backgrounds. Learn [more about culturally responsive practice](#).

4. **Reflect on their own biases.** Teachers should examine their CBRS data and look to see if there are any patterns in the characteristics of students (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, disability status, language, socioeconomic status, etc.) they rate as displaying the lowest self-regulation and social skills. Teachers should then consider whether they are holding these students to different behavioral expectations compared to other students in the classroom.

   In addition, reflecting on the strength and quality of their relationship with a student when rating student behavior and when interpreting the CBRS data might alert teachers to potential biases in their ratings. If they feel disconnected from particular students, they can examine the reasons for these feelings, and reflect on whether they are making assumptions and attributions about particular behaviors based on a student's cultural background, race/ethnicity, gender, age, socioeconomic status, or other student characteristics.

5. **Seek out and incorporate information from other sources.** Getting the perspective(s) of other staff members who work directly with students (e.g., educational specialists, counselors, etc.) while completing ratings and when interpreting the data from their ratings provides a teacher with a more complete picture of the student's skills in different contexts. Importantly, the items on the CBRS do not provide teachers with any information about _why_ a student may be demonstrating certain behaviors. Students' demonstration of self-regulation and social skills are heavily dependent upon the classroom context. For example, if a teacher reports that a student has trouble following instructions, this could be because the instructions are too complicated or unclear, the student has difficulties remembering things, and or there is a cultural mismatch in the teacher and student expectations.

   Teachers need to gather more information to understand how to support a student to meet the demands of their classroom and build positive connections with teachers and peers. Teachers can (1) talk with other individuals who interact with and know the student well (e.g., caregivers/family members or other teachers), (2) intentionally observe to identify when and where certain behaviors are most likely to occur, and what happens before, during, and after they occur, and (3) examine of the ways in which their own feelings and actions in the moment influence a student's behavior or how they, as the teachers, interpret it.

In summary, the CBRS is a teacher rating scale that has been used extensively in early childhood education research and provides useful information about a student's self-regulation and social skills. However, as a teacher rating scale, it measures teachers' perceptions of a student behavior and, is subject to teacher bias. Intentionally using the practices described above can help reduce teacher bias when completing using the CBRS**.**

References

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