

PRE-REFERRAL INTERVENTION WITH PARENTS AS PARTNERS (PIPP):
AN INVESTIGATION OF EFFICACY, IMPLEMENTATION FIDELITY, AND
PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN TEAM-BASED PROBLEM SOLVING PROCEDURES

by

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PREVIEW

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University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2006

Advisor: Susan M. Sheridan

LAY ABSTRACT

There were three main reasons for doing this study. The first reason was to find out if the Pre-referral Intervention with Parents as Partners (PIPP) model, a team-based problem-solving process that actively involves parents, was effective in helping students improve their school performance. The second purpose was to find out if school personnel used the problem-solving process in a consistent manner. Finally, parents' and teachers' were asked to rate how effective the problem-solving process was in helping their child/student.

The effectiveness of the PIPP model was evaluated by following four students as they went through the problem-solving process at his/her school. Individuals participating on the team included the student's parents, general education teacher and a team leader who facilitated the process. All four students also had additional school personnel, including the principal, school psychologist and/or reading specialist serve as occasional team members during the problem-solving process. The students in the study

included two 6-year-old males attending Kindergarten, a 7-year-old female attending first grade, and an 8-year-old male attending second grade.

The results of the study showed that the PIPP model was effective in helping students improve their behavior and academic performance at school. In addition, the results indicated that school personnel implemented the problem-solving process in a reliable manner. Finally, parents and teachers rated the problem-solving process as acceptable and effective. The results of the study are important because they show that the teaming process can help individual students improve their school performance. The results also show that parents enjoy being involved in the problem-solving process.

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The purposes of this study were threefold. First, this study examined the effect of the Pre-referral Intervention with Parents as Partners (PIPP) model on individual student outcomes. The second purpose was to assess the degree to which school-based teams implemented the problem-solving process in a reliable manner. The final purpose of the study was to evaluate the social validity of the process via participants' perceptions of acceptability, effectiveness, and satisfaction.

The study used a series of single subject multiple baseline design cases to evaluate the effect of the PIPP model on student and team outcomes. Cases were conducted in a large Midwestern city. Participants included four students referred to the pre-referral intervention team, the students' parents, general education teacher, and the team leader. All four student participants also had additional school personnel, including the principal, school psychologist and/or reading specialist serve as intermittent team members during the problem-solving process. Student participants included two 6-year-old males attending Kindergarten, a 7-year-old female attending first grade, and an 8-

year-old male attending second grade. The average age for parent, teacher, and team leader participants was 34.7 years, 38.3 years, and 42.5 years, respectively.

The results of the study revealed that the PIPP model produced positive outcomes for both academic and behavioral concerns for all four student participants. The results also indicated that the problem-solving process was implemented with moderate to high levels of procedural fidelity. Finally, the findings revealed that team members rated that process as highly acceptable, moderately effective, and were satisfied with the teaming approach. The results of this study extend the literature on school-based teams by directly examining the effect of the teaming process on student outcomes using a small n experimental design. The study contributed to the research by evaluating a model that provides a framework for actively family involvement in the problem-solving process. Although the findings associated with the study are promising, additional research on the efficacy of the PIP model is needed.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This study examined the effects of the pre-referral intervention with parents as partners (PIPP) model on individual student performance. Interventions targeting specific academic and/or behavioral concerns were implemented within the context of a structured problem solving procedure that paralleled Conjoint Behavioral Consultation (CBC) (Sheridan, Kratochwill, & Bergan, 1996). According to the annual report issued by the US Department of Education (2001), the number of children requiring educational support continues to rise. This trend, coupled with concerns regarding traditional special education practices, has led to the increased popularity of school based teaming approaches (Kovaleski, 2002).

While research suggests teaming procedures are effective in reducing inappropriate referrals and placements (Burns, 1999) and improving teacher and student performance (Nelson, Smith, Taylor, & Dodd, 1991), several gaps are still evident. Specifically, few studies have investigated the effect of teaming procedures on student behavior using direct measures of performance, a primary objective of teaming approaches (Safran & Safran, 1996). Further, evidence-based models that involve families in a meaningful way and foster cross-setting relationship building are noticeably absent from the literature. An additional limitation is inconsistent implementation fidelity for field-based teams (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1989; Kovaleski, Gickling, & Morrow, 1999; Telzrow, McNamara, & Hollinger, 2000), which is believed to directly impact the effectiveness of teaming procedures (Burns, Vanderwood, & Ruby, 2005).

CBC (Sheridan et al., 1996) is one model that addresses these limitations and serves as a framework for advancing pre-referral services. However, to date, CBC has not been tested in the context of pre-referral team-based services. Further, though the CBC model may include additional members beyond the parent-teacher-consultant triad, it is not consistently implemented within a larger team format.

This study sought to extend the research base by merging CBC and traditional Pre-referral Intervention Team (PIT) approaches to form a Pre-referral Intervention with Parents as Partners (PIPP) model. A multiple baseline design across four participants was used to investigate the effect of the model on individual student performance. Given the importance of consistent implementation of problem solving procedures, audiotapes were used to measure the degree to which teams adhered to process objectives. Upon completion of the teaming process, parent and teacher perceptions were assessed to evaluate the social validity of the problem solving procedures.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Federal and state laws such as No Child Left Behind, the President's Commission on Excellence in Education (2002) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1997) mandate that schools must be accountable for meeting the needs of *all* children, including those who are difficult to teach. Further, those needs must be met within the least restrictive environment. Taking responsibility for student success has become increasingly difficult as the number of students that need educational support continues to rise. The number of students aged 6 to 21 served under Part B of IDEA for severe emotional disturbance increased by 21.4% between 1989-1990 and 1998-1999. Likewise, the percentage of those students served within regular education classrooms has also continually increased (US Department of Education 23rd Annual Report to Congress, 2001). Therefore, it is critical that general education teachers receive support and assistance in providing services that successfully meet these growing needs.

The responsibility of meeting students' needs does not rest fully on the shoulders of teachers and school systems. Parents must be viewed as equal partners in the educational process. According to the eighth National Educational Goal, promoting partnerships between schools and families on behalf of students' social, emotional, and academic development, is vital. The recent policy reforms highlight the importance of providing opportunities for parents to become meaningful partners in their children's education. One evidence-based approach used to achieve goals set forth by federal and state initiatives, meet needs of difficult-to-teach children in general education classrooms,

and provide meaningful opportunities for parent involvement is pre-referral intervention teams (PITs).

Pre-referral Intervention Teams

Pre-referral Intervention Teams Defined

Over the past few decades, the field has witnessed a shift in the delivery of special education services, resulting in the emergence of pre-referral intervention teams. Pre-referral intervention teams evolved as a way to better serve difficult to teach students and provide greater support to general education teachers (Bahr & Kovalski, 2006). Several models have been developed including Teacher Assistance Teams (Chalfant, Pysh, & Moultrie, 1979), Mainstream Assistance Teams (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1989; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Bahr, 1990; Fuchs, Fuchs, Bahr, Fernstrom & Stecker, 1990), Pre-referral Intervention Teams (Graden, Casey, & Bonstrom, 1985; Graden, Casey, & Christenson, 1985), Instructional Consultation Teams (Rosenfield & Gravois, 1996), and Instructional Support Teams (Kovalski, Tucker, & Duffy, 1995). Despite differences in design and terminology, shared responsibility in problem solving and decision-making is a commonality among all the approaches (Welch, Brownell, & Sheridan, 1999). For the purposes of the present discussion, pre-referral interventions teams will refer to systematic problem solving procedures aimed at developing interventions for difficult to teach students.

Pre-referral intervention teams are embedded within an ecological framework that views children in context. In contrast to the traditional special education process, this approach considers multiple variables both internal and external to the child as well as the

reciprocal interactions across systems (Graden et al., 1985). Ecological assessment explores individual capabilities in relation to environmental demands and provides opportunities to establish a match between the child and task/environmental expectations. Within this framework, team members gather information from the broader social context to develop and implement effective interventions.

Objectives of pre-referral approaches include: (a) lowering the amount of students referred for testing (Fuchs, Fuchs, Harris, & Roberts, 1996; Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006), (b) decreasing the number of students receiving inappropriate placements in special education (Graden et al., 1985; Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006), (c) helping integrate students with disabilities into the general education classroom (Iverson, 2005; Nelson et al., 1991) and (d) providing assistance to students and teachers regarding interventions in the least restrictive environments (Graden et al., 1985; Truscott, Cohen, Sams, Sanborn, & Frank, 2005). The degree to which the pre-referral interventions achieve these goals is related to the quality of the problem solving process. Flugum & Reschly (1994) outlined several potential quality indices including (a) behavioral definition, (b) baseline data collected in the student's natural setting, (c) systematic intervention plan, (d) treatment integrity, (e) a graphic representation of the intervention; and (f) assessment of change based on a comparison between baseline and treatment data. Stemming from the quality indices, a four stage problem solving approach for pre-referral interventions was developed (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1989). The model parallels traditional behavioral consultation, and includes four stages: (a) problem identification, (b) problem analysis,

(c) plan implementation, and (d) problem evaluation (Bergan, 1977; Bergan & Kratochwill, 1990).

History and Rationale

Historically, the special education process was characterized by a “test and place” approach, centered on diagnosing a problem internal to the child and placing a child in a special education program (Iverson, 2002). Once a child was referred for testing, the process generally resulted in special education placement (Foster, Ysseldyke, Casey, & Thurlow, 1984). The previous model not only undermined the ability of referring teachers to work effectively with children with diverse needs, but also underestimated the complexity of variables impacting the child (Graden et al., 1985). Similarly, previous practices typically resulted in a discrepancy score, which did not provide teachers with instructionally relevant results. Likewise, teachers were not given alternate suggestions to support the child in the regular education classroom (Thurlow & Ysseldyke, 1982). Inadequacies of the traditional model served as one impetus for modifying the delivery of special education services.

In addition to criticisms associated with the traditional model, legal and public policies paved the way for service delivery reform. Public Law 94-142 and more recently the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1997), No Child Left Behind, and the President’s Commission on Excellence in Education (2002) mandate that students’ needs must be met in the least restrictive environment. Further, such initiatives require that teams be used to determine eligibility for special education services to ensure diverse perspectives and parental involvement in decision-making (Iverson, 2002). The

shift in service delivery has resulted in an unprecedented increase of pre-referral intervention teams and has generated research on the effectiveness and implementation integrity of these approaches.

Pre-referral Intervention Team (PIT) Research

There is extensive research supporting the effectiveness of problem solving procedures used within the context of pre-referral intervention teams. Studies have examined the efficacy of team-based procedures on systemic outcomes (i.e., referral rate) as well as individual student outcomes (i.e., student performance on a target goal). Studies have also assessed the implementation integrity of the PIT process. Additionally, the social validity of the problem solving procedures has been explored. Finally, research highlighting the importance of parent involvement in problem solving has also received considerable attention.

PIT Outcome Research

Several studies have examined the effectiveness of pre-referral intervention teams at the systems level. Over the past 20 years, the instructional consultation teams (IC Teams) model is one teaming approach that has investigated the effect of the problem-solving process on systems-level change. Specifically, Gravois and Rosenfield (2006) evaluated the impact of the IC Teams model on special education referral rates and placements for minority students. Data on referral and placement patterns were collected for 13 IC Teams schools and 9 control schools. Findings revealed a significant reduction between IC Teams schools and comparison schools regarding the risk of minority students being referred to and placed in special education. Likewise, results indicated