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ABSTRACT

This research abstract summarizes two reports titled: (1) "Mainstream Assistance Teams to Accommodate Difficult to Teach Students in General Education" (Douglas Fuchs and Lynn S. Fuchs) and "Prereferral Intervention through Teacher Consultation: Mainstream Assistance Teams (Douglas Fuchs and others). The project investigated a prereferral intervention approach to enhance classroom teachers' ability to manage and instruct difficult-to-teach pupils. The project, called Mainstream Assistance Teams (MATs), is based on behavioral consultation, a problem-solving approach to designing, implementing, and evaluating an intervention to change behaviors that interfere with learning. The MAT model involves problem identification, intervention planning, implementation, and evaluation. Groups of teachers implemented different versions of the MAT process. Teacher ratings suggested that versions of the MAT in which the consultant was extensively involved were more effective, but observation data showed no reliable differences among versions. When teachers and consultants selected interventions from a set designed to reduce problem behaviors, the frequency of students' problem behavior was reduced and most teachers became more positive toward these pupils. Students in the experimental groups were less likely to be referred for special education than those in control groups. Students were able to effectively monitor their own behavior. (JDD)

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RESEARCH & RESOURCES ON SPECIAL EDUCATION

**ABSTRACT 24
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**PREREFERRAL
INTERVENTION:
USING MAINSTREAM
ASSISTANCE TEAMS
TO ACCOMMODATE
DIFFICULT-TO-TEACH
STUDENTS IN
GENERAL
EDUCATION**

Inaccurate referrals to and placements in special education are costly to school districts, disruptive to school programs, and cause unnecessary separation and stigmatization of pupils. Research evidence indicates that general education teachers, who make most of the referrals to special education, can be arbitrary in their referrals and typically make few, if any, modifications to instruction prior to making referrals.

Prereferral interventions are procedures designed to enhance classroom teachers' ability to manage and instruct difficult-to-teach pupils. Such interventions provide immediate assistance to both pupil and teacher and reduce the likelihood of inappropriate referrals to special education. In addition, they reflect the least restrictive environment doctrine of Public Law 94-142 (The Education for All Handicapped Children Act).

Mainstream Assistance Teams to Accommodate Difficult to Teach Students in General Education, by Douglas Fuchs and Lynn S. Fuchs, and *Prereferral Intervention Through Teacher Consultation: Mainstream Assistance Teams*, by Douglas Fuchs, Lynn Fuchs, and others, are two reports of a project that investigated one prereferral intervention approach.

The project, called Mainstream Assistance Teams (MATs), is based on Behavioral Consultation, a problem-solving approach to designing, implementing, and evaluating an intervention. This approach involves the consultant, teacher, and student in changing behaviors that interfere with learning. The process was applied, refined, and evaluated in inner-city elementary and middle schools in the Nashville, Tennessee, area.

SUBJECTS

In Year 1 of the 3-year study, 24 students and their teachers in fifth- and sixth-grade classes in four inner city middle schools in one district served as experimental subjects. An equal number of students and teachers in five matched control schools also participated.

The students were selected by asking each teacher to identify his or her most difficult-to-teach pupil. The students were described as most difficult to teach because of off-task or inattentive behavior, poor academic work, lack of academic skills, poor interpersonal skills, or poor motivation.

In Year 2, a total of 43 fifth- and sixth-grade teachers and their most difficult-to-teach pupils participated. Of these, 31 implemented the MATs, while 12 served as controls. In Year 3, the process was used in 17 elementary schools, and 48 second- through sixth-grade teachers and their most difficult-to-teach students implemented the MATs, while 12 were controls. In the experimental schools, building-based psychologists, elementary guidance counselors, or special educators served as consultants.

METHOD

The MAT model is implemented in four stages. The first, *problem identification*, involves a meeting between the consultant and teacher, who select a target behavior for intervention. Then the consultant observes the student in class on 2 days to validate the seriousness of the problem behavior and establish a baseline frequency.

In the second stage, *intervention planning*, the consultant reports the observation data to the teacher. They formulate an intervention plan and set an overall goal for behavior change. The teacher and student discuss the problem behavior, a corresponding desirable behavior, and the intervention. Interventions involve a monitoring plan and a feedback and reward system.

In the third stage, *implementation*, the teacher and student agree on a goal, expressed as the percentage of time the problem behavior is displayed. The teacher monitors the student's behavior for the first 2 days, then the student self-monitors for 5 days or until the goal is met for 3 consecutive days. At the end of each day, the teacher and student agree on a global rating for the day. The teacher provides verbal feedback and, if the goal is met, provides the reward. At the end of Stage 3, the consultant conducts post-intervention observations.

In the fourth stage, *evaluation*, the teacher and consultant compare pre- and post-intervention observation data to determine whether the overall goal was achieved. If so, a slow fade of intervention procedures is begun. If not, the teacher and consultant either continue or change the goal or the intervention. The consultant conducts another observation.

Several aspects of the model were explored in these studies. These aspects include whether all steps in the process are essential and whether the involvement of the consultant in all stages is necessary; whether student self-monitoring is effective; and whether the process can be transferred to other classes taken by the same student.

To address the first question, equal or near-equal groups of teachers implemented different versions of the process. In version 1, the consultant and teacher worked collaboratively on Stage 1 (problem identification), but the consultant did not help the teacher implement the intervention and no formative evaluation was conducted. In version 2, the teacher worked collaboratively with the consultant during the first two stages, and the consultant made two classroom visits to help with

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implementation. Again, no formative evaluation was conducted. In version 3, teachers and consultants used all four stages of the process.

To test the effectiveness of self-monitoring, half of the students were monitored by their teachers, while the remaining half self-monitored. In Year 3, an additional stage was added to the MATs: transfer to another classroom. A simplified version of self-monitoring was conducted in both the initial classroom and in another of the student's classes. At the end of the school day, the two teachers met to compare the global ratings of the student's behavior. If the student met his or her goal in both classrooms, the reward was given.

RESULTS

In Year 1, teacher rating data suggested that the two more inclusive versions of the MAT (versions 2 and 3) were more effective, but the observation data showed no reliable differences. The absence of between-group differences was attributed to the fact that in Year 1, teachers and consultants devised their own interventions, and there were great differences in the quality of the interventions they developed.

In the second and third years, teachers and consultants selected from a set of interventions designed by the study investigators and their staff. The interventions dramatically reduced the frequency of students' problem behavior and caused most teachers to become more positive toward these pupils. Students in the experimental groups were significantly less likely to be referred for special education than those in the control groups.

Exploration of the self-monitoring technique showed that students were able to effectively monitor their own behavior. In addition, the students' use of the technique in a second classroom showed that it can effectively reduce problem behaviors in multiple settings.

IMPLICATIONS

The MAT approach to prereferral intervention holds promise for reducing the number of referrals to special education and increasing the capabilities of general education teachers to effectively manage and motivate a diverse range of students. The authors have expressed concern that the availability of their staff may have contributed to the success of the technique. A recent study showed that MATs can be used with limited technical assistance. This finding suggests that it may be possible for districts in other areas to effectively implement the process.

Mainstream Assistance Teams to Accommodate Difficult to Teach Students in General Education, Douglas Fuchs and Lynn S. Fuchs, George Peabody College of Vanderbilt University. 42 pp. plus appendices. (Undated). U.S. Department of Education Grant No. G008530158. In J. L. Graden, J. E. Zins, & M. J. Curtis (Eds.), *Alternative Educational Delivery Systems: Enhancing Instructional Options for All Students*, National Association of School Psychologists. (1988). Available for \$85 (microfiche) or \$6.00 (hard copy), plus postage, from ERIC Document Reproduction Service, 3900 Wheeler Avenue, Alexandria, VA 22304 (1-800-227-3742). Order number ED 292277.

Prereferral Intervention through Teacher Consultation: Mainstream Assistance Teams, Douglas Fuchs, Lynn Fuchs, Susan Gilman, Peggy Reeder, Michael Bahr, Pamela Fernstrom, and Holley Roberts, George Peabody College of Vanderbilt University. 14 pp. plus appendices. (Undated). U.S. Department of Education Grant No G008530158. EC 212 790; ED number not available.

A guidebook, *Mainstream Assistance Teams: A Handbook on Prereferral Intervention*, is available for \$12.00 from the MAT Project. John F. Kennedy Center, Box 40, George Peabody College, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN 37203.

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