

Preface

I have served in the roles of a prereferral intervention team member, team coordinator, and administrator responsible for a school district's prereferral intervention process. It has been my experience that these teams are ineffective, inefficient, and sometimes used in harmful ways.

At best, the prereferral intervention team process was viewed as a bureaucratic necessity to be tolerated. Staff members went through the motions of the process because it was required by the policies of their school district. At worst, the process was a mechanism used to prevent children from being evaluated for services they may have required. All students were required to be referred to the school's prereferral intervention team before the teacher could initiate an evaluation for special education services. As a result, services to students who obviously required them were delayed and those students fell further behind.

Not wanting to rely solely on my own experience, I have engaged in conversations about this process with countless teachers and school administrators. To my dismay, my experience is not unique. Teachers bring students who demonstrate the greatest academic, behavioral, and health challenges to a group that is both poorly designed and managed. As a result, teachers do not develop new strategies for assisting these students, teachers end up frustrated, and the students' situations do not improve.

Being dissatisfied with the status quo, I embarked on a journey to determine what the research literature on this topic could offer. Interestingly, I found a significant discrepancy between what was being advocated in the literature and what was being applied in schools. Though interesting, this is not surprising; the studies were not synthesized into a set of practical steps that school administrators could follow to design, manage, and lead their schools' prereferral intervention team process.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

The content of this book is based on an extensive review of research literature on the topics of prereferral intervention teams, group dynamics, and team development. The review and analysis of this literature was a critical first step, but it was not the primary goal. Rather, my primary anticipated outcome is for readers to develop their ability to understand and apply a sequence of practical steps that, done correctly, will result in improvement of the quality of prereferral intervention programs.

A second anticipated outcome is for readers to develop their ability to understand and then strengthen the connection between prereferral intervention and response to intervention programs. Response to intervention is a concept currently receiving a great deal of attention among educators. In response to this attention, many schools and districts are creating new programs and structures designed to implement response-to-intervention models. This is usually unnecessary and sometimes counterproductive. Readers will see why the better alternative to meeting the intent of response to intervention may be the improvement and extension of existing prereferral intervention programs.

INTENDED AUDIENCE

The primary audiences for this book are the school and district staff members charged with implementing, managing, and leading prereferral intervention teams. Typically, this group includes principals, assistant principals, and supervisors or directors of special education, but it may also include guidance counselors or supervisors, basic skills staff, and Title I program coordinators.

Although not the primary audience, there are important reasons for upper-level district administrators to read this book as well. It has been my experience that their support and understanding is essential for successfully achieving the goals of change efforts that are focused on improving the quality of prereferral intervention programs. By familiarizing themselves with the content in this book, superintendents and assistant superintendents will gain the knowledge necessary for supporting those on the front lines of these improvement initiatives.

APPROACH

In Chapter 1, I introduce the reader prereferral intervention teams and the fictional character Ellen Santiago. In the following four chapters, the reader moves back and forth between Ellen's story and a description of research and practice.

Throughout the narrative, I help the reader understand the struggles and triumphs of an administrator seeking to improve the quality of her school's prereferral intervention program. Furthermore, Ellen's story provides a real-world context to better understand the application of the research and practices described.

In Chapter 6, I describe the methods for evaluating prereferral intervention activities. Chapter 7 focuses on connecting and strengthening the linkage between current prereferral intervention programs and response to intervention.

SPECIAL FEATURES

In writing this book, a major goal was to provide the reader with all of the tools necessary for implementing the model described. As a result, Resource A provides a step-by-step one-year plan that the reader can follow to successfully implement the activities described throughout this book. This synthesis makes it possible and practical to move from theory to action.

Resource B includes every reproducible form necessary for implementing and evaluating the prereferral intervention program described. Examples of completed versions of many of these forms are provided throughout the chapters.

Resource B also contains sample overhead transparencies that can be used for training staff members. A script that can be followed or modified to explain the content of these transparencies is found where each is introduced in the text. Similarly, training activities are introduced in the body of the text. Complete descriptions of these activities can be found in Resource B.

Finally, embedded in the chapters are tables and charts designed to increase the reader's understanding of the material. The tables provide quick summaries of the most critical points presented in the corresponding section of the text, and the charts give the reader the opportunity to visually follow the processes being described.