

INFORMATION PAPER 7

INTERVENTIONS

The design and monitoring of individualized interventions is an important task in a systematic approach to problem-solving. Functional assessment techniques should be used to collect the information necessary to design such interventions. Under the Renewed Service Delivery System (RSDS), the selection of an intervention is not synonymous with placement in a special program. The problem-solving team should focus first on identifying the methods, procedures, and materials likely to improve student performance. Only after the intervention has been designed, should the team focus on identifying the specific program that is best suited to provide the intervention.

This paper will define what is meant by an intervention, will identify essential characteristics, and will describe basic procedures to be used in developing an intervention.

DEFINITION

An intervention should describes the individualized plan of action for addressing a student's specific performance problem. It stems from data collected as part of functional assessment, and addresses modifiable variables related to the student's environment. The intervention plan includes specific goals to be achieved, as well as efforts to monitor student progress throughout the intervention period.

CHARACTERISTICS

A) The intervention should focus on modifying aspects of the student's environment so as to improve performance. The data generated by functional assessment procedures serves to confirm or reject assessment hypotheses about factors affecting the student's performance. It also serves to identify relevant antecedent and consequent events related to the problem. This information is then used to select the environmental variables to be manipulated. Shapiro and Lentz (1985) describe research regarding a number of environmental variables that have been found to be related to academic achievement. Among these variables are time allotted for instruction, time engaged in academic work, content covered, task-related contingencies, and instructional procedures such as questioning techniques, and immediate feedback.

B) Intervention planning, implementation and monitoring should be viewed as a continuation of hypothesis-testing procedures. At the current time, there is little evidence to support the notion of aptitude-treatment interactions (Ysseldyke & Christenson, 1988). In other words, a particular pattern of student characteristics cannot be used to identify a particular intervention that will be guaranteed to succeed . At best, problem-solving teams can design interventions that are what Zins and Ponti (1990) describe as "high-probability hypotheses." In other words, teams can use functional assessment data and their knowledge of environmental variables such as the ones described above to design a reasonable intervention for a student. However, they cannot predict with certainty that the intervention will succeed. The effectiveness of the intervention must be evaluated by on-going progress monitoring. If the intervention proves to be less effective than is desirable, it should be altered in some fashion.

C) Interventions should be feasible for the person(s) responsible for implementing them. Implementors should willingly agree to carry out the intervention. They must have a clear understanding of and commitment to the plan. The plan must be reasonable in terms of other demands placed upon the implementor(s). Finally, implementors must have the skills and materials necessary to carry out the plan.

D) Problem-solving team members should share the responsibility and accountability for intervention outcomes. In other words, even if some team members do not provide direct service to the student as part of the intervention, they should still have some responsibility for supporting the

intervention through follow-up contacts with the implementor(s). This responsibility should also include an expectation of additional problem-solving assistance if the intervention must be modified in some fashion.

PROCEDURES

The development of an intervention plan is the third stage in collaborative problem-solving consultation. It makes use of information collected during the problem identification and problem analysis stages. Prior to the consideration of intervention options, team members should discuss the "organizational level" at which an intervention should occur. Some interventions are best directed toward the individual student. Other interventions should be directed toward an entire classroom, or even toward a particular building or system.

Once the appropriate organizational level has been determined, intervention planning and implementation should follow the following six steps:

1) Brainstorm solutions. Team members should attempt to identify as many solutions as possible. The team should consider a broad range of options in terms of people, materials, methods and sites for the intervention. Efforts should be made to defer judgment on the solutions while the team is brainstorming.

2) Evaluate solutions. Possible solutions may be judged according to a number of factors such as acceptability, potential effectiveness, ease of use, intrusiveness, compatibility with existing resources, and/or time and cost efficiency.

3) Select an intervention. Zins and Ponti (1990) suggest a number of guidelines for selecting an intervention from the available options. They suggest that positive intervention approaches should be implemented before behavior suppression or reduction techniques, and that the least complex and intrusive approach should be selected first. The final decision about which intervention to attempt should be made by the person(s) responsible for implementing the intervention.

4) Write an action plan. The action plan should promote treatment integrity and the accountability of team members by clarifying the specific aspects of the intervention. It should clearly delineate the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved in the intervention. It should also describe how the intervention will be carried out (in terms of methods and materials), when the intervention will occur, and where it will take place. If the team feels that it is necessary, it is at this point in time that a discussion of alternate program options should occur. Finally, the action plan should define specific goals to be accomplished by the student as a result of the intervention, and should also describe a plan for on-going progress monitoring.

5) Implement the intervention. While the intervention plan is being implemented, a number of other activities should also occur. Regular follow-up support should be provided to the intervention implementor(s). The intervention plan should be monitored with regard to its effect on student performance, but also with regard to the integrity of its implementation. If necessary, team members should engage in further problem-solving and revise the plan if it proves to be ineffective or unfeasible.

6) Evaluate the outcome. At the end of the designated intervention period, the final outcome of the intervention should be evaluated. The desired student outcomes should be compared to actual achievement. If performance levels are not yet satisfactory, the problem-solving team may decide to continue the intervention for another period of time in the same or modified form. If student performance is at a satisfactory level, the problem-solving team may decide to end the intervention. Prior to the discontinuation of an intervention, provisions should be made to ensure the generalization and maintenance of the desired behavior.

SUMMARY

The development of an intervention should be the outcome of the functional assessment of a student performance problem. It should be completed as part of a collaborative effort among all members of the problem-solving team. Interventions should be viewed as "high-probability hypotheses" about what is likely to improve student functioning. Interventions must be evaluated by on-going progress monitoring during their implementation. The responsibility and accountability for intervention outcomes should be shared by all team members.

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