

HISTORY

Programs for teachers of students with special needs have come under a variety of labels: pre-referral intervention; teacher support teams; and teacher assistant teams (Canelli and Lange, 1990; West, 1990; Chalfant, Pysh and Moultrie, 1979). Our present use of problem-solving teams in New Brunswick school districts 28 and 29 originated with the teacher assistant team (TAT) concept developed by James Chalfant and his associates in the United States. This model was created to address the increasing referral of students to special education services and to stop the flow of referrals for formal assessment. The goal was to handle more situations at the school level, reduce the number of inappropriate referrals, and use special education personnel more effectively.

In 1979 we brought Chalfant and Pysh to our district to train teachers and administrators from each school in the use of their model. Subsequently, schools set up teams by either recruiting volunteers, holding elections or having the principal choose team members. Despite the fact that results were mixed and the model eventually fell into disuse with teams disbanding in most schools, we had many positive experiences with the TAT model. Those experiences became a useful resource as teachers worked hard to meet the challenge of integrating students. We looked anew at the elements of the TAT model that were most compelling for our circumstances and our present day problem-solving teams became an outgrowth of our experience with the teacher assistant team model.

Our revised model is a mix of old and new ideas. The purpose of referral is now to give teachers needed support to keep all students in regular classes. The facilitator is most often a school-based methods and resource teacher or a guidance counsellor. The make-up of the teams is flexible and open to whatever considerations seem relevant. The process followed during the thirty-minute meeting, however, is similar to the TAT model.