School Psychologists Walking the Talk in Authentic Teacher Preparation Programs

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Abstract

Knowledge and skills bases once confined to school psychologists are now considered critical to the functioning of effective teachers (CEC, 2003, NCATE, 2003, Wilson, S. M., Floden, R. E., & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001). This paper uses three assumptions to argue for the inclusion of doctoral level school psychologists in teacher preparation programs. The first assumption acknowledges school psychology's tradition of consultation with teachers (Bardon, 1990, Brown & Pryzwansky, 2002, Conoley & Conoley, 1992). Second, interdisciplinary teamwork is critical to effective educational planning (National Association of School Psychologists, 2003a, 2003b). Rather than merely informing future teachers that they will collaborate with other professionals, it is important to "walk the talk" by directly modeling expectations (Bandura, 1971, 1977). Lastly, teacher responsibilities have evolved to include more focus on assessment, intervention, prevention, research and planning, and family referrals than has been true in the past (Dilworth & Imig, 1995, Greene, 1995, Tienken & Wilson, 2001, Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 2003, Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001). Experienced teachers describe behavior management and students with exceptionalities as areas in which they felt least prepared by their professional preparation programs (Dilworth & Imig, 1995a, 1995b, Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001). The field of school psychology contains skills and knowledge able to provide support in these areas (NASP, 2003).

Introduction

Although not historically its first responsibility, the field of school psychology is recognized for its expertise in supporting learning through consultation with classroom teachers, parents, and administrators (Bardon, 1990, Brown & Pryzwansky, 2002, Conoley & Conoley, 1992, French, 1990). Why then is school psychology not better represented in teacher preparation programs? This paper uses three assumptions to argue for the inclusion of doctoral level school psychologists in teacher preparation programs. The first assumption acknowledges school psychology's tradition of consultation with teachers (Bardon, 1990, Brown & Pryzwansky, 2002, Conoley & Conoley, 1992). Partnerships between school psychologists and other educators are a relatively familiar concept with a proven track record of effectiveness (American Psychological Association, 1981, National Association of School Psychologists, 2003a, 2003b). University level programs seem a natural setting in which these relationships can grow and prosper. Second, interdisciplinary teamwork is critical to effective educational planning (National Association of School Psychologists, 2003a, 2003b). However, rather than merely informing future teachers that they will collaborate with other professionals, it is important to "walk the talk" by directly modeling expectations (Bandura, 1971, 1977). Lastly,

teacher responsibilities have evolved to include more focus on assessment, intervention, prevention, research and planning, and family referrals than has been true in the past (Dilworth & Imig, 1995, Greene, 1995, Tienken & Wilson, 2001, Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 2003, Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001). Knowledge and skills bases once confined to school psychologists are now considered critical to the functioning of effective teachers.

Background

Special education teachers and school psychologists are routinely interconnected service providers seeking to meet the needs of individual students, groups of learners, parents, administrators, communities, and other stakeholders (National Association of School Psychologists, 2003a, 2003b). Today's vast complexity of issues confronting academic achievement requires educators to use a holistic approach in meeting the needs of learners (Sattler, 2001, Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 2003). The approach must consider cognitive, emotional, physical, and social influences on student performance (National Association of School Psychologists, 2003a, 2003b). Only a finely orchestrated team with a shared knowledge base can collect and coordinate the data needed to generate possible solutions to underachieving, disruptive, and/or nonproductive behavior (National Association of School Psychologists, 2003a, 2003b).

Inclusion is a fundamental aspect of special education in public schools. The degree to which it is implemented effectively varies greatly, but few will argue its intent (Klinger, Vaughn, Hughes, Schumm, & Elbaum, 1998, Manset & Semmel, 1997, Marston, 1996, Waldron & McLeskey, 1998). Retaining students with exceptionalities in the regular education classroom is the point from which a placement decision is to begin (Osborne & DiMattia, 1994, Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 2003, Yell, 1995). Any removal must occur because the needs of an individual learner cannot be met otherwise (Manset & Semmel, 1997, Marston, 1996, Osborne & DiMattia, 1994, Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 2003, Yell, 1995). It is this focus on the importance of meeting the needs of students with exceptionalities that has placed the skills of special education teachers and school psychologists so near one another (U. S. Department of Education, 2002). And while this relationship must succeed in the public school system, there is little such collaboration modeled in most teacher preparation programs. How then, can future special education teachers prepare themselves to function in a system of inclusion? What about the "inclusion" of school psychology?

The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Educators (NCATE) and the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) advocate eleven core Program Standards embedded within special education teacher preparation programs (CEC, 2003, NCATE, 2002). Standards range from content knowledge to professional conduct, and will be discussed in terms of their possible relationships to the competencies of school psychologists. The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) certifies school psychology programs and providers. This organization describes the responsibilities and areas of expertise expected of school psychologists across seven major areas (NASP, 2003). The following narratives contrast and compare the NCATE/CEC Program Standards with NASP's list of school psychology responsibilities. This will provide the basis from which to argue for the involvement of doctoral level school psychologists in special education teacher preparation programs.

Common Ground

Consultation

School psychologists have typically functioned as consultants on issues such as strengthening working relationships, child development, learning environments, communication with families, social skills, assessment, and alternative strategies to address learning and behavior (Maher & Zins, 1987, NASP, 2003a, 2003b). Each of these concerns is important in creating successful school experiences and is an issue with which teachers can become local "experts". Identifying teachers as "experts" on a variety of topics not only validates them as professionals, but may also give them greater ownership in developing the overall academic climate (Borg, 2003, Cook, 2001, National Clearinghouse for Comprehensive School Reform, 2001). A consultative model of service delivery may recognize the knowledge base available within most schools and districts. The same cries of limited resources that at one time helped define the school psychologist's role as consultative currently negate extensive traveling for large groups of educators who seek professional training (Austin, 2003, Dilworth & Imig, 1995a, 1995b, Rice, 2003, Thies, 2003, Zureick, 2003). With increasing levels of violence, unique learning needs, and pressures to academically perform the demand for such training has seldom been greater (Austin, 2003, Dilworth & Imig, 1995a, 1995b, Rice, 2003). One viable possibility, in-house consultation, may provide a cost-effective alternative to promote continuous learning and professional development in schools with competing financial obligations. To better prepare to meet this challenge, teacher education programs could further equip graduates with the skills and knowledge necessary to function in a consultative capacity for on-site peers, parents, administrators, and others. Future special education teachers can utilize their expertise not only of specific content knowledge, but also of characteristics of individual learners, classroom environments, instruction, communication with parents and families, and other topics (Rice, 2003, Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 2003). Historically rooted in consultation, school psychologists are trained and experienced to instruct future teachers to develop their own "expertise" as consultants (Maher & Zins, 1987).

Assessment

Knowledge of a wide variety of assessment tools and techniques further distinguishes school psychologists from other educators (Sattler, 2001). This distinction however, seems to be marred by policies mandating group administered standardized testing, curriculum-based commercially produced tools, and widespread and continuous evaluations of student achievement for all (Committee on Education and the Workforce, 2001, U. S. Department of Education, 2003). Once considered the exception, comprehensive assessments of individual learning are now the norm (Committee on Education and the Workforce, 2001, U. S. Department of Education, 2003). Classroom teachers cannot afford to delegate all testing to school psychologists or other educators. The task of monitoring student progress relative to performance standards is accepted only annually, or perhaps biannually, by state or federal agencies (Committee on Education and the Workforce, 2001, U. S. Department of Education, 2003). Diagnostic and prescriptive testing must occur weekly, or even daily, in the classroom for teachers to determine if instructional and/or curricular modifications are necessary. Once

considered an after thought, assessment is now expected to drive instruction and decision making (Committee on Education and the Workforce, 2001, U. S. Department of Education, 2003). Formal, informal, semi-structured interviews, structured interviews, performance-based, authentic, teacher-made, standardized, non-standardized, objective, subjective, projective, portfolio, self-report, observation, anecdotal, reflective, ability, achievement, norm-referenced, criterion-referenced, and so on, are terms attempting to describe aspects of assessment (Sattler, 2001). Future classroom teachers will find these skills and knowledge critical as they are increasingly expected to align, select, administer, and communicate regarding various assessments.

Intervention

Intervention is a term school psychologists typically use to describe methods for addressing individual or group emotional and academic needs. Special education teachers apply the term strategies to define specific attempts at teaching content. Sharing a common language is a major step forward in building effective partnerships in teacher preparation programs. Teachers intervene on a daily basis, sometimes planned but more often not, to effect learner behavior. School psychologists are too few in number to respond to all the demands of students with exceptionalities and those considered at risk of academic failure (Thies, 2003). Theirs is not a deficit in skill or knowledge, school psychologists are simply outnumbered (Thies, 2003). Future teachers are likely to find it necessary to take the initiative in providing face-to-face contact with students and families, addressing complex learning difficulties, garnering informal counseling support, and responding to individual crisis. When extreme in nature, responsibilities such as these, as well as social skills training and behavior management, have been referred to school psychologists (NASP, 2003a, 2003b). Special education teachers are likely to benefit from the skills and knowledge needed to encounter these dilemmas when necessary, without additional service personnel.

Prevention

As effective educators are likely to agree, prevention is preferable to later intervention (Forness & Kavale, 2001, Forness, Kavale, MacMillan, Asarnow, & Duncan, 1996). But prevention requires early identification (Forness & Kavale, 2001). Future teachers, skilled with reliable and valid methods for identifying and responding early to potential learning difficulties, may be significantly more effective than those who do not have these skills (Greene, 1995). Teacher preparation programs can utilize this knowledge to equip future graduates to design programs for children at risk of academic failure, a task that would likely benefit an entire learning community. Other tools commonly employed by school psychologists to support prevention include skills training for parents coping with disruptive behavior, understanding and appreciating diversity, and the development of school-wide initiatives to increase school safety NASP, 2003a, 2003b). In many ways, welcoming the skills of doctoral level school psychologists to inform future teachers may facilitate one of the earliest opportunities for primary prevention.

Education

"Content knowledge" in the field of school psychology is not confined to a specific academic area (NASP, 2003a, 2003b). Rather, content is the knowledge and skills to use collect and data to design unique teaching and learning strategies and classroom management techniques (NASP, 2003a, 2003b). Special education teaching majors will find such a knowledge base particularly applicable to instructional delivery. To a large extent, the effectiveness of a future teacher's repertoire of strategies will depend upon his/her understanding of human development, learning, motivation, and student characteristics (CEC, 2003, NCATE, 2003). Teachers in the new millennium could find it difficult to develop instruction and curriculum without an awareness of typical and atypical behavior (CEC, 2003, NCATE, 2003). Independent of academic content area, such information can provide an opportunity to predict, influence, and perhaps control the performance of learners in their own classrooms.

Research and Planning

Personal reflection is one aspect of research and planning that many future teachers are introduced to in their preparation programs (CEC, 2003, Kleinfeld, 1992, Merseth, 1991. NCATE, 2003, Richert, 1991, Wasserman, 1994). But beyond the implications of personal reflection, are the roles of future teachers in evaluating the effectiveness of entire programs. The issue is less "does it work" than it is "when does it or doesn't it work, and with whom?" Teacher preparation programs may further concentrate on producing graduates who can participate in planning and evaluating school wide reforms and policies, generating new knowledge about learning and behavior, and responding to outside mandates. A yet stronger voice from future teachers outside the classroom may ideally cause further reconsiderations of the placement of limited resources. Rather than merely respond to demands, a proactive approach founded in current knowledge and skills may cause some to rethink the position in which many teachers have been placed (Dilworth & Imig, 1995a, 1995b). School psychology and teacher education professionals can join to empower future educators to become advocates for their profession (NASP, 2003).

Health Care Provision

Children often require a variety of services across disciplines to achieve academic success (Hawkins, Catalano, Kosterman, Abbott, & Hill, 1999, Hunter, 2003, National Health/Education Consortium, 1990a, 1990b, Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 2003). School psychologists have traditionally established relationships with community based resources who can participate in the delivery of a comprehensive set of services (Dryfoos, 1994, Fagan & Wise, 1994, Hunter, 2003, NASP, 2003). School linked health care is a viable recommendation from the classroom teacher as well (Dilworth & Imig, 1995a, 1995b, Dryfoos, 1994, Hunter, 2003). Future teachers, who have established linkages with community service providers, find it beneficial to refer parents to sources for psychosocial wellness and other health related issues (Epstein, 2001, Hiatt-Michael, 2001). School psychologists understand the systemic nature of achievement. Future teachers often find they can increase a child's chance of academic success by providing referrals that strengthen a child's family system (Epstein, 2001, Hiatt-Michael,

2001). Partnering with parents and families will facilitate healthy school climates as well (Epstein, 2001, Hiatt-Michael, 2001).

Summary and Conclusions

Inclusion demands the collaborative efforts of educators from a variety of specific disciplines, yet this model is seldom demonstrated in teacher preparation programs. Considering one's peers as potential consultants is likely to be met with significant resistance when new graduates enter school settings for the first time. Having never seen it in practice, recent program completers may find their philosophy giving way to the experienced pressures of old views and out dated methods of teaching. Including school psychologists in teacher preparation programs may be one contribution to authenticating teacher preparation curriculum. A review of school psychology responsibilities and special education Program Standards seems to suggest significant overlap and the potential for a mutually supportive relationship between the professions. Experienced teachers describe behavior management and students with exceptionalities as areas in which they felt least prepared by their professional preparation programs (Dilworth & Imig, 1995a, 1995b, Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001). The field of school psychology contains the skills and knowledge to provide support in these areas and may serve to be a beneficial partner in teacher preparation programs. The evolving roles and responsibilities of teachers seem to be increasing parallel to those supports traditionally provided by school psychologists. Aligning teacher preparation curriculum and instruction to include doctoral level school psychologists is a logical step in confirming this relationship.

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