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Relationships Between Consultation Training and Practice: Serving Families and Schools

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INTRODUCTION
- Children and families face more challenges than at any time in recent history. For example, there are increasing numbers of children who live in poverty, and/or single-parent homes.
- Schools are being called to engage in deeper partnerships with parents and communities to address these complex needs (Ysseldyke et al., 1997).
- Consequently, home-school partnerships have become a top priority in the field of school psychology (Christenson, 2004; Ysseldyke et al., 1997).
- Additionally, indirect services are emphasized more than ever before, with data-based consultation models being recognized as an essential skill in the school psychology’s repertoire (Sheridan & Gierlak, 2000).
- Conjoint behavioral consultation (CBC; Sheridan, Kratochwill, & Bergan, 1996) is one method of service delivery that meets the challenges these issues present.

CONJOINT BEHAVIORAL CONSULTATION
- CBC is a structured, indirect model of service delivery wherein parents, teachers, and other service providers are brought together to address academic, behavioral, or social concerns of a student (Sheridan et al., 1996).
- Competency-based training models in CBC have been shown to produce mastery levels of performance in school psychology graduate students (Kratochwill, Sheridan, Saloman, & Raths, 1989; Sheridan, 1992; Sheridan, Espley, Cowan, & Mickelson, 2001).
- However, the extent to which training generalizes to future practice and the manner in which specific training outcomes and common barriers influence school psychologists’ use of CBC is unknown.

PURPOSE OF STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS
- To explore the degree to which skills and attitudes attained during CBC training generalize to professional practice, the following research questions were addressed:
  1. What is the extent to which school psychologists report generalization of training in CBC to the use of CBC strategies, partnership practices, and attitudes toward home-school partnerships?
  2. What is the relationship between perceived barriers and generalization of CBC strategies, partnership practices, and attitudes toward home-school partnerships?
  3. Is there a relationship between generalization of CBC strategies, partnership practices, and attitudes toward home-school partnerships and (a) case outcomes; (b) consultation effectiveness ratings; and (c) CBC integrity levels demonstrated during training?

METHODS
Participating:
- 49 school psychologists who completed a competency-based training course at 2 major universities from 1995-2001 were surveyed.
- 7 surveys were “undeliverable.” 28 surveys were returned for a response rate of 68%.
- There were no statistically significant differences between respondents and non-respondents on demographic and case outcome variables.

RESULTS
- 42-items rated on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree and 6 = Totally Agree). All items reflect a 6-point Likert Scale with a 6 = Strongly agree and a 1 = Strongly disagree.
- No statistically significant relationships were found between outcomes obtained during CBC training (e.g., effect size, consumer satisfaction, and integrity) and generalization of CBC strategies, partnership practices, and partnering attitudes.

DISCUSSION
- Consultants involved in a CBC competency-based training program reported continued use of their training in professional practice.
- CBC consultants reportedly:
  - use CBC strategies some of the time;
  - agree training partnership practices;
  - mostly agree that home-school partnerships are important;
  - mostly agree that “time constraints” and “inflexible work schedule” make it difficult to partner with homes and schools;
  - mostly disagree that other barriers impede their ability to engage in home-school partnerships.
- A significant negative relationship exists between barriers and generalization of CBC strategies, suggesting that the more barriers school psychologists encounter, the less likely they are to use CBC strategies in their current practice.
- Consultants hold positive attitudes toward home-school partnerships, but they report using CBC as a whole not very often and components of the process some of the time, indicating a gap between attitudes and practice.
- The negative impact that barriers have on generalization may account for this gap. However, it is also possible that school psychologists who use CBC some of the time are demonstrating accurate discrimination of the appropriate use of CBC.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS
- These results are based on self-reported practices and may not reflect actual practices and attitudes.
- This study cannot provide causal information about the relationship between CBC training and future practice and attitudes, which limits conclusions.
- Further research is needed to examine the psychometric properties of the survey (e.g., reliability and validity).
- Future research should explore the discrepancy between practice and attitudes using a more specific method approach to glean more specific information related to this issue.
- Conditions that promote the use of CBC strategies and partnership practices in applied settings need to be explored.