

Cooperation Between School Psychologists and Counselors in Assessment

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The role of school psychologists and counselors in assessment is well established and is a frequent research topic. For example, a review of the ERIC database from 1987 to 1994 revealed 64 entries for "assessment and school psychology" and 622 entries for "assessment and counseling." Similar results were obtained for a review of the *Psychological Abstracts* database with 146 entries for "assessment and school psychology" and 924 entries for "assessment and counseling." However, studies that explored the joint role of counselors and school psychologists in assessment could not be located. With the current emphasis on collaboration in schools and the use of a pupil services model to deliver services of counselors, school psychologists, school social workers and school nurses, it is important to examine ways in which school psychologists and counselors can work together in the assessment process.

School Psychologists and Assessment

While the assessment activities of school psychologists emphasize services to children and youth, usually within a school setting, the assessment activities of counselors frequently cover a wider age range and emphasize the adult population. The assessment of individual students is both the traditional and the major role of school psychologists (Fagan & Wise, 1994). In fact, surveys of school psychologists continue to show that the majority of their time is centered on assessment activities. A recent survey (Smith, Clifford, Hesley, & Leifgren, 1992) indicated that the typical school psychologist devoted 53% of his or her time to assessment with the assessment of intellectual ability being the primary focus. Techniques that are used emphasize structured, standardized formats with an emphasis on quantitative rather than qualitative approaches (Smith & Mealy, 1988; Smith, Clifford, Hesley, & Leifgren, 1992). In general, the school psychologist's involvement in assessment begins with a student who has been referred by a parent or teacher for academic or behavioral difficulties. As part of the assessment process, an individual test of intelligence and an achievement test are likely to be administered. Additional data that are collected may include behavioral observations, rating scales completed by teachers and parents, and interviews with the student and with the student's parents and teachers.

Counselors and Assessment

As Hood and Johnson (1991) note, "assessment is an integral part of counseling...[and] provides information that can be used in each step of the problem-solving model" (p. 11). In general, assessment information is used to clarify concerns of clients, to plan programs or interventions and evaluate their effectiveness, to provide career planning information, and to assist clients in understanding themselves. Thus, counselors, especially

in school settings, are more likely than school psychologists to be involved in developmental assessment approaches that are holistic in nature, are qualitative rather than quantitative, and emphasize developmental norms. These approaches may include checklists or rating scales, unfinished sentences, writing activities, decision-making dilemmas, games, art activities, story-telling and bibliotherapy techniques, self-monitoring techniques, role-play activities and play therapy strategies (Vernon, 1993). Surveys of counselors in different counseling settings including counseling agencies, secondary schools, and private practice indicate that counselors use a variety of test instruments with an emphasis on interest inventories, personality inventories, and aptitude tests (Hood & Johnson, 1991).

Both school psychologists and counselors are involved in the assessment process with differing emphases and orientations that are complementary to each other. School psychologists often emphasize the use of quantitative approaches to measure ability and academic skills while counselors often utilize developmental as well as qualitative approaches to assess personality characteristics, interests, and aptitudes. The two approaches, when combined, can offer a more comprehensive picture of a student than either approach alone.

Multidisciplinary Teams and Collaboration

With the advent of Public Law 94-142 (the *Education of All Handicapped Children Act*) and the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*, emphasis was placed on a multidisciplinary approach to assessment and placement activities for students referred for possible disabilities. Multiple sources of information, multiple procedures and multiple settings are required in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of students' needs and abilities. The basis for such an approach is collaboration among professionals including regular education teachers, special education teachers, administrators, pupil services personnel, and parents.

Collaboration, of course, is not a new concept. Sullivan (1993) describes it as "a reform movement that has been gaining in momentum over the past five years" (p. 1) and suggests that it was created as a response to the fragmentation in service delivery that often occurs in educational and mental health settings. Both benefits and obstacles are associated with collaboration. A major benefit of collaboration is the opportunity to create a more comprehensive approach to service delivery. It facilitates development and sharing of new perspectives on how students can be served and promotes improved communication among those working with students. Collaboration can also foster an emphasis on prevention and can create more effective services by reducing duplication. In order for collaboration to be successful, however, it must

receive support at all levels and participants must display cooperation and trust (Sullivan, 1993).

Recommendations for Collaboration

Counselors and school psychologists have much to offer in the assessment of students and both sets of professionals should be members of multidisciplinary assessment teams. Counselors contribute skill in developmental assessment approaches and provide a holistic view of the student. In addition, their expertise in interpersonal assessment and career/vocational assessment is valuable in program planning, especially for adolescents. School psychologists' contributions include expertise in the assessment of cognitive and academic skills and the development of classroom interventions. Their background in behavior management and educational psychology along with training in psychological assessment provides a unique perspective for program planning.

The increased focus on involving families in prevention and intervention programs offers counselors and school psychologists the opportunity to collaborate in a number of ways. Activities in which the two sets of professionals can work together include family counseling, parent training, and the development and implementation of behavior management programs in the home. The assessment skills of both specialties can also be utilized to develop evaluation procedures to examine the effectiveness of programs.

Within the school setting itself, a number of opportunities exist for counselors and school psychologists to work together. These include developing support groups for students, working with classroom teachers to implement developmental guidance materials and curriculum within the classroom, and developing aggression/violence prevention programs and curricula. By utilizing the unique assessment training and expertise of counselors and school psychologists we can develop a more accurate picture of the whole student and his or her specific needs. In this way more effective intervention and prevention programs can be developed and implemented.

Summary

Both counselors and school psychologists are trained in assessment with somewhat differing emphases and areas of expertise. The multidisciplinary approach to assessment required by P. L. 94-142 and *IDEA* is especially suited for the two groups of assessment professionals to work together in a collaborative manner. In this way a more complete picture of students' needs can be developed and service delivery can be enhanced.

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