MODELS OF TRAINING FOR EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS

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In the current context of changes being introduced for the minimum level of training for psychologists wishing to practise in Australia, with the forthcoming requirement of six years of university training for membership of The Australian Psychological Society (APS), it is important that those educators involved in the development and delivery of such programs evaluate their usefulness and relevance. Issues that require consideration, particularly for the training of guidance officers (school or educational psychologists) include the content and structure of such programs, their optimal duration and the necessity for teacher education to be part of that training. Many of these issues are pertinent not only to Australia but are being aired in the UK (e.g., Lunt & Farrell, 1994; Maliphant, 1994; Wolfendale, Bryans, Fox, Labram & Sigston, 1992) as educational psychology seeks to expand and to develop appropriate standards for the training (Lunt & Farrell, 1994; European Federation of Professional Psychologists Associations [EFPPA], 1990).

What are the skills of guidance officers?
A fundamental question in the training of educational psychologists or guidance officers is what are such professionals being trained for. This question is not new and, once answered, can assist in the development of training programs. One way to examine this is to try and catalogue the unique capacities of guidance officers, and a suitable list would include such things as psychological and educational assessment as well as interventions with children and adolescents, and involving teaching staff, parents, programs and systems. However, this simplifies the range of skills that guidance officers can bring to bear and reflects the lack of consensus in the literature and the lack of critical texts and papers.

Another perspective is to examine the goals of a school psychologist. These can be described as follows:
- psychoeducational evaluation and assessment
- interventions with individuals or groups
- interventions to facilitate the educational services provided to children
- consultation with and collaboration with school personnel and/or parents
program development
supervision

This list looks remarkably similar to the catalogue of activities. Perhaps it would be helpful to determine who is the client, but even this tends to produce a list that includes assessment and intervention aimed at individuals, groups, programs or systems. While it appears that it is possible to document the core activities of the guidance officer, what is apparent in any analysis of what it is the school psychologist actually does is that there is a lack of research in this area and there is a lack of conceptual unification.

Assuming there are some core activities, it is possible to list these and to document how they change over time, both because of different prevailing political pressures, of different philosophies and of different legislative requirements. Legislation stipulating psychological reports for the provision of special education services means that the tasks of the guidance officer are not only enshrined in legislation but are circumscribed by the requirement to undertake psychological assessment for children's eligibility for services. The position of guidance officers within the educational system shifts according to educational changes and the value of the services being provided by the psychologists.

Classification of school psychological services
Guidance services can be defined in terms of the types of service provided to the client, with the focus being on the child (who may or may not be the client). Like the medical model, children are usually referred (by an adult) to the guidance officer, who can then offer a range of services. Presenting these services along a continuum, from direct influence on the child to indirect influence, has proved a useful classification system.

A second classification system is based on a centralised-decentralised organisational structure for the delivery and coordination of psychological services. Centralised services tend to be more coordinated but more remote from the schools, although can provide continuity of service and permit for supervision of staff. Decentralised services are less coordinated but are closer to the clients, and such school-based services tend to reduce travel time as well as permitting the development and implementation of prevention programs. It should be noted that in Australia at present, both centralised and decentralised systems are in operation and much of the frustration of guidance officers comes from the seemingly-constant organisational changes they must endure. They of course influence the type of work that can be undertaken.

Assumptions about school psychological services
The development of a taxonomy of psychological services, as I have already attempted to do, results in there being four major psychological services - assessment, consultation, intervention and research (Elliott and Witt, 1986). From consideration of these four can be developed a generic model of school psychological delivery systems, depicted as flow chart. This model is based on six assumptions, and is a compromise between the old-fashioned diagnostic/assessment model of guidance and the consultation/problem solving model of school psychologists.

The six assumptions are:
Behaviour and learning problems of children are functionally related to the setting in which they are manifest.
A primary goal of psychoeducational assessment is to determine what a child does and does not know, and how the child learns best so successful interventions can be designed.
Techniques for individual diagnosis and intervention need to be supplemented with techniques for diagnosing and intervening in specific school settings and in the school as a social system.
The greater the proximity in place and time of psychological services to educational settings, the greater the use of these services.
Psychological services should be directed toward the development and use of resources indigenous to schools.
Psychoeducational interventions require the ongoing attention of the person(s) who implemented them because over time a child's response to a particular intervention will change.

The resulting flow chart, or model, encompasses the best elements from both the other models, but is firmly anchored in the consultation/problem solving model with its indirect delivery emphasis. However, the model recognises the individual work continues to be necessary with individual children as is psychoeducational assessment for access to special services.

Guaranteeing quality in a guidance service
There are two ways in which quality can be assured - one through training programs and the other through the adoption of standards both for training and for on-going professional work. Historically, guidance services have been closely tied to the provision of special education services, and include recommendations for entry to special schools, classes, programs and funds. The focus was on psychometrics and child 'guidance'. More recently there has been a move away from categorising children to base educational provision on the unique needs of the child (particularly in the US and UK). In spite of the philosophical shifts, many of the roles of the guidance officer (including the label!) have remained and many are trapped in a narrow set of responsibilities and in modes of working.

The adoption of the consultation model or problem-solving approach has
greatly increased the capabilities of school psychologists to have a greater impact as well as ensuring greater accountability. The model discussed allows the school psychologist to be accessible to a greater number of children, to work collaboratively with school personnel and parents and the progress and success of interventions can be documented, adjusted if necessary and justified. Individual work is regarded as an adjunct to working in partnership with those pivotal in a child’s educational progress to improve behaviour and ultimately, learning.

Training in educational psychology
Training courses in educational psychology tend, in Australia, to be located in Departments of Psychology, mainly because of the legislative restrictions over the term 'psychologist' throughout all Australian States and Territories. This does have the advantage of ensuring that specialised training in educational psychology is based on a four year sequence in psychology. In contrast, while the training in the UK is largely concentrated in Psychology Departments, the training programs in England and Wales require as an entry criterion, the completion of teacher training plus two years' post-training teaching experience. Because it is only recently that Masters training in educational psychology has become adopted as essential for work as a guidance officer (and even then, not everywhere), the issue of where teacher training fits has not been properly addressed. The debate over the need for teacher training to be mandatory for guidance work also relates to the length of the training program.

In the UK, there has been agreement over what constitutes the core curriculum in educational psychology training. These central components are:
personal skills and communication
information collection and assessment
intervention approaches
disabling conditions and special educational needs
professional practice
research and evaluation
issues in child development
These are based closely on the optimal standards for professional training in Psychology (EFPPA, 1990).

In Australia, the College of Educational and Developmental Psychologists of the Australian Psychological Society has Guidelines for the Approval of Courses for membership of the College. These are currently being revised for incorporation in the Accreditation Guidelines manual of the Society. The existing guidelines apply to formal 5th and 6th year training programs for the purposes of membership of the College. The Guidelines are divided into three areas - Formal knowledge and Skills, Practical Work, and Research. In terms of formal knowledge and skills, courses must contain the following
(greater detail is provided in the actual guidelines):
theoretical knowledge of lifespan developmental psychology
contemporary theories as applied to educational and developmental contexts
contemporary approaches to exceptionality
theoretical foundations of assessment and intervention;
plus additional knowledge of lifespan psychopathology
physiological bases of impairment
contemporary neuropsychology and psychopharmacology.
professional issues including ethical considerations and relevant legislation
human service systems.
Skill training should be provided in:
interviewing
counselling
consultation
assessment
planning, implementing and evaluating educational and developmental interventions.

The Guidelines also specify the length and content of the practical placements associated with the training programs. Of the 128 days placement over 2 years, at least half of the days must be spent in a setting that is clearly of an educational and developmental nature, such as a school guidance service. These are also requirements to do with monitoring the quality of the placements and of the supervision. Areas in which students must demonstrate competence are stipulated and include:
administration and interpretation of major intellectual assessment instruments
administration and interpretation of general developmental assessment scales
assessment of academic performance using norm- and criterion-referenced tests
behavioural observation and recording
interviewing and basic counselling skills
design, implementation and evaluation of intervention programs
writing psychological reports.
Finally, the research component requires that the research topic has direct relevance to educational and developmental psychology.

These requirements have recently been redrafted as individual competencies, which could be used as standards against which professional performance could be judged. College membership requires completion of an approved training program plus an additional two years of supervised practice. Alternatively, intending members can demonstrate their competence in relation to agreed-upon standards. Assessment of professional competence will be by way of examination. The College is currently exploring ways in which alternative entry can
be introduced and how examinations can be conducted, once there is agreement within the College and between different Colleges, on the competencies and the appropriate level of their specification.

The Master of Psychology (Education) program at the University of Tasmania
This 5th and 6th year training program was introduced in 1994, and the first intake should complete all the requirements this year and graduate in 1996. Intake has been limited, both by demand as well as the high entry standards necessary for such programs. It is envisaged that up to 6 students per year can be accommodated in the program.

Uniquely in Australia, the program combines all the coursework, placements and research necessary for accreditation and approval as Masters-level training in Psychology, coupled with a modified Diploma of Education component, that meets the formal teaching requirement. In terms of a Psychology program, the APS stipulates that at a minimum, 70% of the program must be in Psychology, with the further 30% in Psychology or a related discipline. In the case of the MPsych (Ed) program, that 30% is taken in the University's Department of Education, as a Diploma of Education. For students who already have a teaching qualification, the 30% is taken from selected relevant units from the Master of Education program. The overall effect is that the program is intensive and busy, as students have to meet classroom experience requirements as well coursework related to teaching.

As in all MPsych (Ed) programs, placements as guidance officers can only occur during term time which limits the opportunities to those times when children are at school. Furthermore, in Tasmania, guidance officers work school hours and take school holidays, restricting placement opportunities even further. Nonetheless, the program has a good relationship with the Department of Education and the Arts and works co-operatively with the guidance staff. This involves liaison between the University and the guidance staff, which is further facilitated by regular meetings of the course Liaison Committee.

The coursework of the program covers the following (in a 2-year cycle)
semester-length units:
Methods in School Psychology
Interviewing, Guidance and Counselling: Theory and Practice
Research Design
Exceptionality and Special Education
Theories of Learning and Development
Psychoeducational Assessment
Applied Issues in Development and Education
Clinical Child Psychology
plus, in each year, students are enrolled in a year-long unit on Professional Practice and Ethical Issues, which comprises the
placements and associated seminars, and an annual unit for research.

It is important, at this the end of the first 2-year cycle, to evaluate the program and assess its usefulness in providing adequate professional training. Feedback from the students has been sought continuously, particularly in relation to the workload, which has been heavy and sometimes uneven. Greater integration of coursework with the current placement experiences has also been attempted, although this is occasionally difficult when students are not in schools. Once working in schools, the trainees have been in high demand and have had to cope with acknowledging (to themselves and to the school personnel) their professional limitations. Procedures have been developed to assist students with these issues as they arise.

On final reflection, I believe the training we are offering students is rigorous and covers the breadth of knowledge and skill required for work as a guidance officer. There is room for improvement and the program will require on-going monitoring and evaluation, to ensure it is equipping students to work as professionals and maintaining the high standards required by professional associations.

References