

2009 School Psychology Research Collaboration Conference

Early Career Scholar Application

*Proposal to Investigate Personal and Environmental Factors
that Impact School Psychologists' Use of Consultation*

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Personal Research Agenda of Cynthia E. Hazel

My interest in school-based consultation practice and training comes from my belief that the best outcomes for children will be obtained through meaningful services embedded in the natural environment. However, there is still much that we do not fully understand about consultation: such as methods to increase implementation by consultees, understanding the links between consultation theory and student outcomes, and how best to prepare school psychology students to be consultants. Recently, my interests have focused on the training of school psychology students; however, knowing how to best train future school psychologists requires understanding how school-based consultation services can be most effective. In the next 3 to 5 years, I would like to delve more deeply into understanding what leads practitioners to embrace consultation as a service-provision model and the role that student training plays in promoting practitioners' effective use of consultation.

Previous Scholarly Efforts in This Area

I have contributed to three published peer-reviewed articles (Athaniou, Geil, Hazel, & Copeland, 2002; Athaniou, Hazel, & Geil, 2007; Hazel, 2007) and have one more under review (Hazel & Laviolette, 2008) regarding consultation. The manuscript that is under review was a study of consultation syllabi of doctoral school psychology programs. The major findings were that most doctoral school psychology students were being instructed in consultation and some received supervised practice in consultation. However, 12% of responding programs' syllabi did not address indirect service provision at all, 16% did not have one full course dedicated to consultation, and 32% of programs did not require any consultation field experience. A

provocative finding was that some syllabi suggested a desire to instill in students a systemic, planful, change-oriented, socially conscious approach to their consultation practice. The major conclusion of the study was that most students are not being adequately prepared to provide comprehensive school-based consultation services.

Questions to be Addressed through the Proposed Research Agenda

Based on my previous consultation research, I have three interrelated questions: 1) What personal and environmental factors lead to school psychologists' utilization of consultation?; 2) What school-based consultation factors lead to consultee's implementation of interventions?; and 3) What aspects of graduate training lead to early career practitioners' competency in and commitment to consultation? Although answers to any of the above questions would help to inform the others, I would like to first focus on Question 1. I believe if we have a greater understanding of why some school psychologists spend more of their time in consultation than others, we will be better poised to investigate what aspects of consultation increase the probability of consultee implementation of interventions and how we might better train students to become effective consultants.

Implications for the Practice of Psychology in the Schools

Inclusive services, Response to Intervention, and supporting families are predicated on the effective use of consultation. A greater understanding of personal and environmental factors that impact school psychologists' use of consultation would be beneficial in two ways. Understanding environmental factors that support the effective use of consultation would assist in our ability to advocate for school organizational factors that lead to more effective services for children and families. Identifying personal factors that increase school psychologists' effective consultation skills would inform our consultation pre-service and in-service training approaches.

References

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Proposal to Investigate Personal and Environmental Factors that Impact School Psychologists'

Use of Consultation

Vision of a Collaborative Multi-site Research Program

Specific Issues and Questions to be Addressed

As stated above the question that I would like to focus on is “What personal and environmental factors lead to school psychologists’ utilization of consultation?” Although recent school legislation and professional best practices have advocated for greater use of consultation, it appears that school psychologists have not increased the percentage of their professional time spent in consultation compared to previous decades. For instance, a 2002 article reported that school psychology practitioners spent approximately 16% of their time in consultation (Bramlett, Murphy, Johnson, Wallingsford, & Hall) as compared to 11-20% of their time in 1992 (Costenbader, Swartz, & Petrix) . Two main reasons have been given by practitioners for limited use of consultation: lack of consultation skills (Guest, 2000) and spending time in other activities, especially assessment (Bramlett, et al.).

School psychology students receive inadequate consultation training, especially supervised field experiences (Anton-LaHart & Rosenfield, 2004; Hazel & Laviolette, 2008; Rosenfield, 2002). However, there appears to be an indirect-service ideology that is also important in explaining a practitioner’s willingness to utilize consultation in his or her practice (Hazel & Laviolette; Meyers, 2002; Salmon, 1993). For this study, personal factors would include ideology, past experiences and training, perceptions of ability, and perception of receptivity. The personal factors could be assessed through a survey or interview.

As well as individual variables, a school psychologist’s case load and the school system’s provision of services have been shown to have an impact on the activities engaged in by a school

psychologist (Curtis, Grier, & Hunley, 2004). Environmental factors to be studied would include case load, school and district pedagogy, school and district climate, consultee characteristics, and client characteristics. Environmental factors could be assessed through record reviews as well as observational checklists. The dependent variable would be time spent in consultation and could be recorded by the participants, as well as validated through observation. The impacts of environmental and personal factors on consultee practice could be modeled with structural equation modeling.

Necessary Context and Participants Required

Ideally this study would be conducted at 4 school districts (selected by geographic diversity, student demographics, and mental health service provision models). Within each district, 15 school psychologists would be recruited to participate (selected as representing a cross-section of practitioners regarding the use of consultation). The estimated requisite number of school psychologist participants would be 60. I envision two research teams, located at universities or institutions in different parts of the country. Each team would be headed by a faculty member who supervises student research assistants. Each team would collect data from two school districts.

Estimate of the Budget Necessary to Accomplish this Research

I have never been responsible for conducting a large-scale investigation, and so am uncertain of estimating the budget. The following budget is for a 12-month time span. Below are expenses to consider and possible costs. Fringe and indirect costs are based on the University of Denver's current standards.

Expenses	Costs
Course Buy-Outs for Primary Investigators (2 investigators x 1 course each x \$3500)	\$7000
Fringe for Adjunct Faculty (7.8%)	\$546

Graduate Assistants (4 assistants x 5 hours per week x 30 weeks x \$15 per hour)	\$9000
Fringe for GA's (1.8%)	\$162
Compensation for Participating School Psychologists (60 psychologists x \$50)	\$3000
Food for meetings (12 meetings x 20 people x \$2 per person)	\$480
Office expenses (copies, phone calls, etc.)	\$250
Subtotal:	\$20,438.00
Indirect costs (64.5%)	\$13,182.50
Total:	\$33,620.50

Relative Advantages and Challenges of a Collaborative Multi-site Research Program

There are advantages and challenges of a multi-site research program, but I believe that the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages. For the advancement of knowledge regarding the practice of school-based consultation, a study which is conducted in various geographical locations by two research teams would provide a richer understanding of individual and contextual variables that impact the practice of school-based consultation. Similarly, having two teams that are collaborating on the research project would enhance the study's design and interpretation of the results. For me, working with another researcher knowledgeable in consultation research and collaborating on a multi-site research project would be a huge learning opportunity. For the involved students, this could be an enriching experience.

Of course, the biggest challenge would be coordination and assurance that the study is being implemented consistently. With technology, distant communication has been greatly enhanced. I would imagine utilizing e-mail, g-docs, and blogs throughout the project. That said, I believe nothing replaces in-person meetings. As travel is expensive, I would expect the teams to meet during national conferences (NASP, APA) that they were all attending.

References

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Use of Consultation

Abstract

The research question for this study is “What personal and environmental factors lead to school psychologists’ utilization of consultation?” Personal factors would include ideology, past experiences, perceptions of ability, and perception of receptivity. Environmental factors would include case load, school and district pedagogy, school and district climate, consultee characteristics, and client characteristics. This proposal is to conduct the study at 4 school districts (selected by geographic diversity, student demographics, and mental health service provision models). Within each district, 15 school psychologists would be studied (selected as representing a cross-section of practitioners regarding the use of consultation). I envision two research teams, each headed by a faculty member who supervises student research assistants. My budget estimate is \$33,620.50 for 12 months. This study, conducted in various geographical locations by two collaborating research teams, would provide a rich understanding of individual and contextual variables that impact the practice of school-based consultation.