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Intervention-based school psychology services: Training for child-level accountability; preparing for program-level accountability

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Abstract

This research evaluated the outcomes of a school psychology training practicum by replicating intervention-based service delivery procedures established in prior research. The key components include describing a service delivery model, teaching the model, deriving practice guidelines that fit the model, supporting trainees in carrying out the steps, and evaluating the outcomes. Procedures to determine outcomes were based on single-case design facets including accountability design (A–B), visual analysis of graphic data, and social validity ratings. Meta-analysis techniques included calculation of effect sizes and percent of nonoverlapping data (PND). Goal attainment scaling (GAS) also was used to summarize outcomes. The analyses indicated that the interventions led to positive changes for most children. For example, the median effect size was 1.42 across cases. Social validity evidence showed that consumers judged the outcomes positively. Achieving ideal baseline and technical adequacy checks (e.g., observer agreement, intervention adherence) represented challenges for many consultations. The contributions of the study include describing methods for child- and program-level accountability in training and areas for improvement including further supporting the completion of technical checks for intervention services.

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Whether in training or practice, school-based professionals can no longer ignore the need to systematically evaluate and demonstrate the value of their services (e.g., Borich & Nance, 1987; Franklin & Duley, 2000; Stoner & Green, 1992). In school psychology, the charge to professionals has been made clear: “school psychologists...evaluate the outcomes of...service delivery” (NASP, 2000a, p. 40). Many sources provide descriptions of the intervention side of reform (e.g., O’Shaughnessy, Lane, Gresham, & Beebe-Frankenberger, 2003; Reschly, Tilly, & Grimes, 1999; Witt, Daly, & Noell, 2000). However, the systematic evaluation of intervention efforts may be lacking in schools even as it is evolving in importance (Reschly & Ysseldyke, 2002). We found surprisingly little in the education literature addressing intervention-based service delivery outcomes that includes strong evidence of child- or program-level accountability achieved using single-case methods for wide scale use beyond survey studies of accountability practices (cf., Kratochwill, Elliott, & Busse, 1995; Sheridan, 1992). We report a replication of the Barnett, Daly et al. (1999) results for school psychology trainees in a field practicum that addresses two facets of accountability: using accountability methods for intervention services and using the data from outcomes for program-level accountability in meeting training objectives. Replication studies under natural training conditions are an intermediate step to sustained intervention-based practice.

The current climate of high-stake accountability stresses the demonstration of efficacy of general classes of educational intervention activities including school psychological services (Schulte, Villwock, Whichard, & Stallings, 2001). Intervention-based practices are emphasized in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Amendments of 1997 and 1999 Regulations (e.g., Barnett, Bell et al., 1999; Horner & Sugai, 2000). The No Child Left Behind Act (PL 107–110, 2001) adds significance to intervention-related accountability systems in education including science-based evidence for interventions and continuous progress monitoring for outcome determination. Looking to the future, ‘response to intervention’ is one of the important science-based premises that may be used for developing services for children and making special education eligibility decisions (OSERS, 2002). Response to intervention uses the quality of student responses to research-based interventions as the basis for determining needed services and eligibility. Basic accountability methods from single-case designs may be used for organizing response to intervention data for decision making (Barnett, Daly, Jones, & Lentz, *in press*).

If accountability practices that describe service outcomes are to become more common in educational settings, they must be an integral part of training programs and taught to a level of professional fluency (e.g., Binder, 1996). Within the literature on training programs, only three published reports were found that include data on child outcomes directly related to school psychology training procedures (Barnett, Daly et al., 1999; Kratochwill et al., 1995; Sheridan, 1992). Barnett, Daly et al. (1999) described outcomes associated with the customary practicum course that did not contain extra training supports or evaluation methods required by research or demonstration projects.

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