

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 partnership models 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 psychologist's repertoire (Sheridan & Gutkin, 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, Salmon, & Rotto, 1989; Sheridan, 1992; Sheridan, Eagle, 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:
 - 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?
 - What is the relationship between perceived barriers and generalization of CBC strategies, partnership practices, and attitudes toward home-school partnerships?
 - Is there a relationship between generalization of CBC strategies, partnership practices, and attitudes toward home-school partnerships and (a) case outcomes; (b) consultant effectiveness ratings; and (c) CBC integrity levels demonstrated during training?

METHODS

Participants:

- 49 school psychologists who completed competency-based CBC training 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.

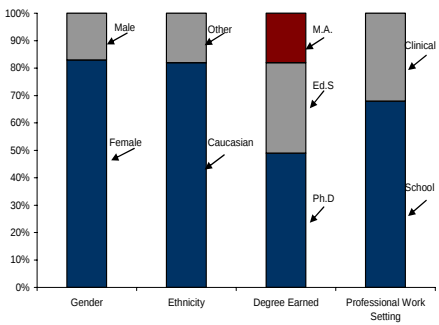
Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Variable	Mean	Range
Age	34.8	22 - 60
Years of Professional Experience	4.6	0 - 9
Semesters of CBC Training	3.7	1 - 10

Figure 1

Participant Demographic Information



Predictor Variables:

- Child Outcomes:** Permanent products and direct observation of behavior were collected and effect sizes were computed using a "no assumptions approach" (Busk & Serlin, 1992).
- Satisfaction with Consultant and CBC Services:** Consultants' subjective perceptions were assessed with the Consultant Evaluation Form (CEF; Erchul, 1987) following completion of CBC services.
- Integrity of the CBC Process:** Upon completion of CBC training, integrity of CBC was assessed via checklists coded by trained independent raters (Sheridan et al., 2001).

Outcome Measure:

- Consultant Follow Up Survey:
 - 42-items rated on a 6-point Likert scale
 - 4 broad areas:
 - CBC strategies
 - Partnership practices
 - Attitudes toward home-school partnerships
 - Barriers to home-school partnerships

Table 2

Survey Description

Broad area	Number of items	Example	Source
Use of CBC strategies	9	I have worked with parents and teachers together to identify an individual student's specific behavioral or academic concern in clear and concise terms.	Sheridan, Kratochwill, & Bergan, 1996
Partnership practices	7	I have fostered a working relationship between parents and teachers.	Sheridan, Kratochwill, & Bergan, 1996
Partnering attitudes	12	[I believe] parents can help teachers to be more effective in teaching.	Berla, Garlington, & Henderson, 1993; Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Connard, Novik, & Nissani, 1996
Barriers to home-school partnerships	13	Inflexible work schedule [hinders my ability to implement CBC].	Gettinger & Guetschow, 1998

Analysis:

- Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations were computed to answer the research questions.

RESULTS

Table 3

Self-reported Generalization of CBC Training and Barriers to Implementation

Broad area	Mean	Range	SD
CBC strategies	3.47	1.00 - 5.67	1.18
Partnership practices	4.29	1.00 - 5.71	.99
Partnering attitudes	5.40	4.00 - 6.00	.45
Barriers	2.53	1.69 - 3.85	.65

Note. All items rated on a 6-point Likert Scale with 6 = Almost Always or Totally Agree and a 1 = Almost Never or Totally Disagree.

Table 4

Correlation between Barriers and Self-Reported Generalization of CBC Training

Broad area	Barriers
CBC strategies	-.325*
Partnership practices	-.200
Partnering attitudes	.011

*p < .05, one-tailed.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics for Most and Least Reported Barriers

Item description	Mean	Range	SD
Time constraints	5.25	3.00 - 6.00	.93
Inflexible work schedule	4.46	1.00 - 6.00	1.20
Child care difficulties	3.04	1.00 - 6.00	1.35
I do not understand parent and/or teacher needs	1.57	1.00 - 5.00	.88
I am not interested	1.50	1.00 - 3.00	.79
I never thought to ask	1.46	1.00 - 3.00	.64

Note. All items reflect a 6-point Likert Scale with a 6 = Totally Agree and a 1 = Totally Disagree.

- No statistically significant relationships were found between outcomes obtained during CBC training (i.e., 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 practices.
- CBC consultants reportedly:
 - use CBC strategies *some of the time*;
 - agree to using partnership practices;
 - mostly agree that home-school partnerships are important;
 - mostly agree that "time constraints" and "inflexible work schedule" make it difficult to partner between home and school; and
 - 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.
- Replication with a larger sample size is necessary to capture significant relationships between training and practice.
- A factor analysis of the Consultant Follow Up Survey was not possible due to the small sample size. 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 mixed-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.