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ABSTRACT

To determine discrepancies between teacher training for behavioral disorders and the actual competencies needed by practicing teachers of severely behaviorally handicapped (SBH) students, 167 public school administrators, regular educators, special education teachers and supervisors, and university teacher educators responded to a three-part questionnaire. Results indicated that all 27 competencies examined were deemed important to SBH teachers to possess, while several of these competencies, such as assessment, interactional programing, facilitation of students' social skills, assistance for students with medical problems, communication skills for parent/professional interaction, and the ability to mainstream students, may need additional emphasis in training. Ss also indicated that SBH teacher training and certification should be separate from the program for learning disabilities. (Author/CL)

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Teachers of the Behaviorally Disordered

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Teachers of the Behaviorally Disordered:
Discrepancies Between Training and Perceived Needs

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Running head: TEACHERS OF THE BEHAVIORALLY DISORDERED

Author Notes

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Abstract

This study was developed with the intention of determining the discrepancies between teacher training for behavioral disorders and the actual competencies needed by practicing teachers of behaviorally handicapped students. One hundred sixty-seven educators including public school administrators, regular educators, SBH teachers, SBH supervisors, LD teachers, and university teacher educators served as subjects who responded to a three-part questionnaire. Results indicated that all 27 competencies examined in the study were deemed important for the SBH teacher to possess, while several of these competencies, such as assessment, interactional programming, facilitating students' social skills, assisting students with medical problems, communication skills for parent/professional interaction, and the ability to mainstream students, may need additional emphasis in training. Respondents also indicated that SBH teacher training should be a separate preservice program rather than a joint program with learning disabilities, and that certification for the SBH teacher should also be separate.

Teachers of the Behaviorally Disordered:

Discrepancies Between Training and Perceived Needs

Though history has recorded the incidence of children and youth with behavioral disorders from the 1800's, there is a lack of consensus concerning definition, etiology, and educational treatment. Definitions and educational programs vary from state to state, agency to agency, local school to local school. Moreover, teacher training competencies and state certification standards also show a lack of consistency between themselves and across pre-service training programs (Parker, 1982).

The controversy over categorical versus noncategorical training for teachers of the behaviorally disordered has added to the inconsistencies apparent in preservice training. Although higher education programs have typically employed a categorical approach when training special educators at the preservice level, there appears to be a redirected focus toward noncategorical training. This trend could be attributed, in part, to the practice of various states which award noncategorical teacher certification in special education (e.g., certification for the mildly handicapped which includes those traditional categories of educable mentally retarded and/or learning disabled and/or behavior disordered) (Brady, Conroy, & Langford, 1984). This issue is of particular concern in states like Ohio where current certification practices extend one certification for both learning disabilities (LD) and behavior disorders (BD) with no option for single certification, nor specialization in "severe" behavior disorders.

Regardless of the approach used at the preservice level, be it categorical or noncategorical, there remains a need to identify appropriate competencies to be included in such training for teachers of the behaviorally disordered.

Related Research

Training programs for teachers of the severely behaviorally handicapped (SBH) have been described and evaluated in numerous studies. Characteristics of 58 BD teacher training programs were examined in a survey conducted by Fink, Glass, and Guskin (1975). Results of this survey indicated that most programs sampled emphasized behavioral and academic measurement, prescriptive teaching practices, and methods of intervention. De-emphasized in these programs were psychodynamic diagnostic and treatment approaches. Harth (1971) surveyed 64 directors of university programs for teachers of the emotionally disturbed (ED)/behavior disordered. Of those surveyed, results indicated that 55 percent supported training at the undergraduate level. However, 25 percent of those responding were found not to favor ED/BD teacher training at this level.

Morse, Brun, and Morgan analyzed teacher training programs for educators of the behaviorally disordered and concluded that, "The present review of practice does not suggest that the training in this field is coming together in any mass coalescence. Anything but. Programs are to a considerable extent built around people and diversity is the name of the intellectual game" (1972, p. 242). Kavale and Hirshoren (1979) further pointed out the incompatibility between the public school practice of educating behaviorally disordered students and the university

teacher training programs for preparation of teachers of the behaviorally disordered. They suggested that public school BD programs appeared to be eclectic in their approaches to delivery of service, but that university training programs were generally not eclectic in their approaches. Further, they suggested that teacher education programs provide students with the opportunity to explore elements from a number of theoretical models since teachers of the behaviorally disordered are often expected to implement a number of pragmatic approaches reflecting a variety of models.

Grosenick and Huntze (1980) reported concern that teachers graduating from BD training programs are not equipped to deal appropriately with the SBH child. Results of their study indicated that BD training programs (1) were most often not specifically focused, in whole or in part, on the training of individuals to work with severe behavior disorders, but instead emphasized preparation for work with generic BD students; (2) were not geared toward the provision of services through various delivery environments (e.g., public school, mental health agency, institutional setting); (3) emphasized the elementary child rather than the adolescent; and (4) were staffed by one to three faculty members. They also noted that recipients of public school inservice programs on behavior disorders have become disenchanted with the routine methods of inservice delivery. Furthermore, they reported that requirements of preparation programs leading to certification in behavior disorders typically include: (1) coursework in regular education; (2) an introductory course in behavior disorders; (3) methods courses (materials, programming, diagnosis and evaluation, curriculum, and behavior

management); (4) psychology (general and child or adolescent); (5) theory of behavior disorders; and (6) student teaching (practicum).

Results of studies which have examined programs for the preparation of SBH teachers strongly suggest there may be a mismatch between such programs and public school practices in educating behaviorally disordered students (Kavale & Hirshorer, 1979). Competencies needed by teachers who work with such students may not necessarily be addressed in teacher preparation. Until such competencies are incorporated within programs for training teachers of the behaviorally disordered, discrepancies between training and needs will continue.

The purpose of this study was to measure and compare educators' perceptions of: (a) the importance of selected competencies for teachers of the behaviorally disordered; (b) the degree of formal training received on selected competencies for teachers of the behaviorally disordered; (c) the need for providing separate teacher training for teachers of the behaviorally disordered; and (d) the need for providing separate teacher certification for teachers of the behaviorally disordered.

Method

Sample

A questionnaire was sent in April of 1983 to 300 educators randomly selected from schools and universities in the state of Ohio. This initial random sample included an equal distribution of the following categories of educators: (1) public school administrators; (2) regular educators; (3) teachers of the learning disabled; (4) teachers of the behaviorally disordered; (5) supervisors of

programs for the behaviorally disordered; and (6) university teacher educators in the area of special education. The inclusion of these six groups was for the purpose of gaining both the perceptions of those directly involved in service delivery to behavior disordered students, and those indirectly involved in such service delivery. An inadequate rate of return precipitated the necessity of continuation of random sampling procedures with the above categories of educators. Upon completion of the random sampling, a total of 435 questionnaires had been sent. This yielded a final sample of 170 (39%) respondents of which three were determined to be unuseable. Within this final sample population the number of respondents for each educator category was: public school administrators, 38 returns (61%); regular educators, 16 returns (20%); teachers of the learning disabled, 27 returns (36%); teachers of the behaviorally disordered, 35 returns (52%); supervisors of programs for the behaviorally disordered, 37 returns (56%); and university teacher educators, 17 returns (20%).¹

Questionnaire

The questionnaire² consisted of three major components. The initial component was designed to obtain general demographic information on each subject. The second component consisted of a list of 27 selected items which were representative of those competencies determined as important for teachers of the behaviorally disordered. These competencies were clustered according to the following categories: (a) diagnosis; (b) instruction and materials; (c) socialization techniques and classroom management; and (d) communication skills for teachers. This section of the questionnaire employed a five-point

Likert scale and was designed to gain respondents' perceptions of (a) importance, and (b) training received relative to each of the 27 selected competencies. Respondents were first requested to read the definition for "Severe Behavior Handicapped" (Ohio Department of Special Education, 1982) provided on the questionnaire and then to rate a given competency according to its importance (least important to most important) for an SBH teaching position. All categories of subjects were requested to rate each competency in terms of its importance. Respondents were also requested to rate each competency according to the degree of formal training (no training to in-depth, superior training) they had received. Here, public school administrators and regular educators were given the option of responding. The final section of the instrument was designed to determine educators' opinions regarding (a) separate training programs for teachers of the behaviorally disordered, and (b) separate certification for teachers of the behaviorally disordered. Respondents were requested to answer "yes" or "no" on these final two items.

Results

A total of 167 useable questionnaires provided the data for this study. Of this total, 21 percent were public school administrators, 10 percent were regular educators, 16 percent were teachers of the learning disabled, 21 percent were teachers of the behaviorally disordered, 22 percent were supervisors of programs for the behaviorally disordered, and 10 percent were university teacher educators in the area of special education.

Demographic characteristics of the educators in this study

represented all levels of current education position from elementary through secondary through university. While 27 percent of the respondents indicated their current level of position encompassed all grades K-12, there were 40 percent whose primary responsibilities were at the K-8 level, 20 percent at the 6-12 level, and 10 percent at the university level. Approximately 81 percent of the respondents had five or more years of teaching experience with the largest number having 5-10 years of teaching experience (38%). Age ranges of participants were nearly equally distributed between 22-35 years (48%) and 36-43+ (50%). The majority of respondents indicated no practicum experience in working with the SBH population (64%) nor did they complete a student teaching experience/internship in this area (80%).

Data from the second component of the questionnaire was used to determine the perceived importance and degree of training for each of the 27 competencies. The initial analysis of these data consisted of a tabulation of frequencies and percentage frequencies for each level of response given on the five-point Likert scale. Relative to the perceived importance of each of the 27 listed competencies, respondents (N=165-167) indicated a high degree of agreement that all competencies were "somewhat important" to "important" (range=84% to 99% with a mean percentage frequency of 96.91%). In terms of perceived training received on each of the 27 selected competencies (noting that 20%

(public school administrators and regular educators) elected the "no response" option on this section), respondents (N=131-135) indicated a lesser degree of agreement as denoted by the wide range (range=33% to 75% with a mean percentage frequency of 58%) who indicated adequate to

superior training. Data from section three of the questionnaire was utilized to determine educators' opinions of the need for separation of training and certification for teachers of the severely behaviorally handicapped. Seventy-seven percent of the respondents (N=157) indicated the need for separating SBH and LD preservice training. A similar response (76%) was found among respondents (N=162) as to separation of SBH and LD certification.

The second level of analysis involved computing the mean responses for levels of importance and training on each of the 27 SBH teacher competencies. These mean responses were used to provide a rank ordered listing of the competencies according to importance (see Table 1) and degree of training (see Table 2). The range of means for the

Insert Table 1 and Table 2 about here

competencies relative to their perceived importance (4.86 to 3.51) indicates that all respondents placed a value of "somewhat important" to "most important" on all competencies. The range of means for competencies relative to their perceived training (4.02 to 2.34) indicates that those individuals who responded to this section evaluated their training as "an introduction" to "above average" on each of the competencies.

A third analysis of the data was computed using chi square to determine if there were any significant differences between educator categories as to their levels of responses on each of the 27 selected

SBH teacher competencies. No significant differences were found possibly due to the limited numbers found in certain cells of the chi square computation. The six educator categories were then reduced to the two collapsed categories of direct service delivery personnel (SBH teachers, SBH supervisors, and LD teachers) and indirect service delivery personnel (public school administrators, regular educators, and university teacher educators). In addition, the response categories for the five-point Likert scale were reduced to two collapsed categorical responses thus making the categorical response choices on the scale for importance: (1) not important, and least important; and, (2) somewhat important, important, and most important. In a similar manner, the response categories for the five-point Likert scale were reduced to two collapsed categorical responses thus making the categorical response choices on the scale for training: (1) no training, and an introduction; and, (2) adequate training, above average training, and in-depth, superior training. These modifications allowed for the computation of two-way chi square tests of association to determine statistical independence of direct service delivery personnel and indirect service delivery personnel ratings on each of the 27 competencies for importance and training.

Results of the two-way chi square analyses revealed only one significant association between educator category and importance of competencies. Proportionately more indirect service delivery personnel considered the ability to utilize results and interpretations from perceptual assessments to be unimportant, $\chi^2(1, N = 166) = 11.11$, $p < .001$. Results of the two-way chi square analyses revealed several

significant associations between educator category and degree of training for competencies. Proportionally more direct service delivery personnel considered their training in the use of adaptive behavior rating scales to be inadequate, $\chi^2(1, N = 134) = 7.52$, $p < .01$; proportionally more direct service delivery personnel considered their training in the construction, administration, and interpretation of the results of teacher-made tests to be inadequate, $\chi^2(1, N = 135) = 5.503$, $p < .02$. Similarly, proportionally more direct service personnel considered their training in the use of observational techniques in the classroom ($\chi^2(1, N = 135) = 3.816$, $p < .05$), ability to utilize results and interpretation reported from individual psychological tests ($\chi^2(1, N = 135) = 4.49$, $p < .03$), ability to utilize the results and interpretation reported from perceptual assessments ($\chi^2(1, N = 135) = 4.874$, $p < .03$), ability to utilize the results and interpretation reported from projective tests ($\chi^2(1, N = 131) = 5.447$, $p < .02$), ability to implement various interactional programming ($\chi^2(1, N = 135) = 10.372$, $p < .001$), ability to assist students with medical problems ($\chi^2(1, N = 134) = 4.558$, $p < .03$), ability to develop and facilitate students' social skills ($\chi^2(1, N = 134) = 9.129$, $p < .003$), ability to communicate effectively with parents/guardians ($\chi^2(1, N = 133) = 6.037$, $p < .01$), ability to communicate effectively with community resource personnel ($\chi^2(1, N = 133) = 10.133$, $p < .002$), ability to apply the major principles of school law to various areas ($\chi^2(1, N = 133) = 6.313$, $p < .01$), and the ability to mainstream students into the regular classroom ($\chi^2(1, N = 132) = 5.762$, $p < .02$) to be inadequate or at an introductory level.

Summary and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to compile questionnaire information on educators' perceptions of the importance of 27 selected SBH teacher competencies and the degree to which educators receive training in these competencies. Additionally, information was compiled on educators' views concerning the need to separate SBH teacher training and certification from LD teacher training and certification.

The final sample population (N=167) represented a return rate of 39 percent of the total population (N=435) to whom questionnaires were sent. Descriptive analysis of the data revealed that according to frequency, percentage frequency and mean score for each of the selected competencies, nearly all respondents considered all 27 competencies to have a value of "important" to "most important." Further, nearly all respondents considered that they had been provided training at "an introduction" level to an "in-depth, superior" level on all 27 selected SBH teacher competencies. The degree of high agreement relative to the importance of the selected competencies may be due, in part, to the selection of the specific competencies, i.e., the competencies were selected as a result of an extensive review of the literature on SBH teacher competencies as well as results from a preliminary study on SBH teacher competencies conducted by the investigators of the present study. The results of this study tend to affirm the inclusion of these 27 selected competencies in SBH preservice teacher training. It is not to be implied, however, that these 27 competencies are all inclusive, but rather that they should be considered for inclusion in all SBH preservice teacher training programs. The descriptive analysis

of the degree of perceived training would imply that teacher training programs attended by the respondents in this study did address nearly all of the 27 competencies to some degree (i.e., from "an introduction" level to "an in-depth, superior" level).

Based on the rank ordered perceived importance of competencies according to mean response, it would appear that among those ranking in the top ten competencies that there are more competencies (8) which fall into categorical competency clusters related to "instruction and materials" and "socialization and classroom management techniques." Based on the rank ordered perceived degree of training on these competencies, it appears that seven competencies from among those ranking as the ten highest for importance also were ranked by respondents as being in the top ten competencies in which they perceived a higher degree of training. While it may appear that teacher training programs are addressing the needs identified in these 27 selected competencies, the degree to which they provide training in each of these areas must be further investigated. It should be noted here that while the competency to "develop and facilitate students' social skills" ranked sixth in importance according to mean response, this competency was ranked seventeenth according to the mean response on perceived training. This is one competency which may need to be further expanded in teacher training programs through more instruction.

The analyses directed toward determining the statistical independence of direct service delivery personnel (SBH teachers, SBH supervisors, and LD teachers) and indirect service delivery personnel (public school administrators, regular educators, and university teacher educators)

ratings on the 27 selected competencies for both importance and training revealed several important findings. It was found that a statistically significant proportion of indirect service delivery personnel considered the ability to utilize results and interpretation from perceptual assessments to be unimportant. This may be due, in part, to the perception of indirect service delivery personnel that such assessments have little direct relationship with the population of children and youth typically identified as SBH. On the other hand, direct service delivery personnel may have rated this competency as important in that such assessments are often a part of the identification and diagnostic procedure employed with all children and youth being evaluated for handicapping conditions. Because these assessment results often appear in a report of the psychoeducational evaluation, the direct service delivery personnel may believe that it is necessary to understand and utilize such information even though such assessment information may not have a direct bearing on the education of the SBH population.

Moreover, a statistically significant proportion of direct service delivery personnel were found to have rated 13 of the 27 competencies in terms of training (including those competencies dealing with training in the use of adaptive behavior rating scales, teacher-made tests, observational techniques, individual psychological tests, perceptual assessments, projective tests, interactional programming, and those dealing with assisting students with medical problems, facilitating students' social skills, communicating with parents/guardians, communicating with community resource personnel, applying the principles of school law, and mainstreaming students in regular classrooms) as

inadequate ("no training" or "an introduction"). Two possible explanations can be offered here for such findings, particularly in light of the high degree of importance attached to these competencies and the over-all high rating received by these competencies for training.

First, it might be suggested that the direct service delivery personnel are more aware of the need to be trained in these competencies when working with the SBH population. Further, it may be clearer to these respondents that while they may have had some introduction to training in these 13 competencies, there is a need for additional training in, and emphasis on, these 13 competencies in teacher training programs. In other words, due to the importance of these competencies in working with the SBH population, any minimal amount of training received falls in comparison to the everyday need for greater skills in these areas, highlighting the awareness that direct service delivery personnel have toward these competencies.

An alternative explanation, though related to the one offered above, might be that the direct service delivery personnel find these competencies of great necessity but perceive their training programs to have devoted less attention to these competencies than was necessary. In other words, they may, in fact, be faulting their training programs and indicating an area of improvement for teacher training for teachers of the SBH population.

Turning attention now toward the third component of the questionnaire, a final item of information gained through this study indicated that 76% to 77% of the respondents felt the need to separate SBH teacher training and certification from LD teacher training and certification.

While this may seem to support a desire on the part of educators to move in the direction of categorical training and certification for SBH teachers, states such as Ohio where noncategorical certification is awarded in the area of LD/BD will need to conduct further investigations to determine the efficacy of such a suggested modification. Can present programs of teacher training for the LD/BD teacher be modified and improved to accommodate those skills presently not receiving the amount of emphasis necessary for the SBH teacher? Or, should teachers of the SBH population be trained separately, and certified separately, from teachers of the learning disabled?

The resolution of the issues and concerns highlighted in this study will be necessary before teacher training for teachers of the SBH population can claim adequacy. In addition, these issues and concerns will need to be further examined if states are to make informed and appropriate decisions with regard to categorical versus noncategorical teacher training for special educators.

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Footnotes

¹It should be noted that the procedure employed for mailing questionnaires to four groups of the population (regular educators, teachers of the behaviorally disordered, teachers of the learning disabled, and university teacher educators) may have interfered with obtaining a higher rate of return in each of these groups. Because no state-wide list of educators and addresses from which to draw the random sample was available with respect to each of these groups, the investigators randomly sampled public school administrators, SBH supervisors, and chairs of teacher training programs in special education who were instructed to select a member of their staff to complete the survey. The need for this intermediary source of transmittal may have lessened the commitment of return by the respondent, or the intended respondent may have never received the questionnaire.

²The questionnaire employed in the present study was the result of an intensive pilot study involving both a survey and interviews. The original questionnaire, based on an extensive review of the literature, was modified for clarity as well as content following the comments offered by 35 northwest Ohio SBH teachers who participated in the pilot study.

Table 1

Rank Order of Mean of Perceived Importance for Each Competency Item

Competency item	Perceived importance \bar{X}
Ability to:	
maintain order in classroom using behavioral intervention strategies	4.86
individualize instruction to meet needs of students	4.80
enhance students' self-concepts	4.75
communicate effectively with parents/guardians	4.75
motivate student achievement	4.68
develop and facilitate students' social skills	4.66
utilize observational techniques in the classroom	4.64
develop Individual Education Plans (I.E.P.)	4.63
construct behavioral performance objectives	4.57
evaluate individual student progress according to I.E.P.	4.53
communicate effectively with colleagues, specialists, principals, school personnel	4.53
utilize stress management techniques for personal health	4.46

Teachers of the Behaviorally Disordered



Table 1, Continued

Competency item	Perceived importance \bar{X}
communicate effectively with community resource personnel	4.44
implement effective restraining/self-defense measures in coping with violent outbursts	4.43
locate and utilize appropriate materials in teaching	4.42
mainstream students into regular classroom	4.41
provide instruction leading to higher level cognitive skills	4.19
construct, administer, interpret results of teacher-made tests	4.15
utilize adaptive behavior rating scales	4.07
apply the major principles of school law to various areas	4.07
utilize diagnostic tests for academic planning	4.05
implement various interactional programming	4.05
utilize achievement tests for academic planning	4.04
utilize the results/interpretation reported from individual psychological tests	3.90
utilize results/interpretation reported from perceptual assessments	3.74
utilize results/interpretation reported from projective tests	3.62
assist students with medical problems	3.51

Note. N = 165-167.

Teachers of the Behaviorally Disordered

Table 2

Rank Order of Mean of Perceived Training for Each Competency Item

Competency item	Perceived training \bar{x}
Ability to:	
construct behavioral performance objectives	4.02
individualize instruction to meet needs of students	3.93
develop Individual Education Plans (I.E.P.)	3.86
maintain order in classroom using behavioral intervention strategies	3.76
locate and utilize appropriate materials in teaching	3.65
utilize observational techniques in the classroom	3.62
evaluate individual student progress according to I.E.P.	3.58
motivate student achievement	3.54
utilize diagnostic tests for academic planning	3.53
construct, administer, interpret results of teacher-made tests	3.53
enhance students' self-concepts	3.49
communicate effectively with parents/guardians	3.48

Teachers of the Behaviorally Disordered

Table 2, Continued

Competency item	Perceived training \bar{X}
utilize achievement tests for academic planning	3.44
mainstream students into regular classroom	3.36
communicate effectively with colleagues, specialists, principals, school personnel	3.27
provide instruction leading to higher level cognitive skills	3.26
develop and facilitate students' social skills	3.24
utilize results/interpretation reported from individual psychological tests	3.10
implement various interactional programming	2.99
communicate effectively with community resource personnel	2.92
utilize results/interpretation reported from perceptual assessments	2.86
apply the major principles of school law to various areas	2.85
utilize adaptive behavior rating scales	2.79
utilize stress management techniques for personal health	2.59
assist students with medical problems	2.51
implement effective restraining/self-defense measures in coping with violent outbursts	2.49
utilize results/interpretation reported from perceptual assessments	2.34

Note. N = 131-135.

