

Chapter 1

Supporting Children With High-Intensity Needs Through Interdisciplinary Personnel Preparation

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ABSTRACT

This chapter addresses potential challenges and opportunities of developing innovative programs in interdisciplinary personnel preparation in special education and related services. The mission of this chapter is to advocate for an interdisciplinary personnel preparation model in special education and related services, particularly for serving young children with significant disabilities and their families from high-need communities. First, an interdisciplinary conceptual framework that guides the model is illustrated. Second, the authors demonstrate essential components of the model with evidence and highlight the features of the model. Finally, three program examples of the model are presented to provide evidence-based strategies for serving children with high-intensity needs and their families. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future directions.

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INTRODUCTION

The rationale for interdisciplinary personnel preparation is supported by the literature and practice. In the field of special education, effective team collaboration is an essential feature of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that is well described in the educational literature (Bruder et al., 2019; Dettmer et al., 2009; Friend & Cook, 2010; Snell & Janney, 2005; Stayton, 2015) and early intervention/early childhood special education (EI/ECSE) standards (Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children, 2020), as well as clinical guidelines (Adams et al., 2013). Several studies established empirical support for the role of collaboration in promoting exemplary schools, increased parent involvement, increased student inclusion and mental health support, and improved child outcomes (Frauenholtz et al., 2017; Hunt et al., 2004; McLaughlin, 2002; Sandall et al., 2009; Shannon & Bylsma, 2004). In the field of EI/ECSE, interdisciplinary personnel preparation is especially critical because programs and services for young children with disabilities or developmental delays, by their nature, almost always involve a team representing different disciplines in addition to the child's primary caregivers (DEC Recommended Practices, 2014). The National Research Panel on Preschool Education found comparable results in terms of teacher education effects on young children's development and learning (National Research Council, 2001). Yet, there remains a critical shortage of EI/ECSE personnel qualified to provide services for young children with disabilities and children who experience emotional difficulties.

There is an identified need for individuals who are well prepared in their professions yet who are also uniquely prepared to engage diverse knowledge, skills, and dispositions of professionals through an interdisciplinary lens (Coiro et al, 2016; Pfeiffer et al., 2019; Weiss et al., 2020). Individuals who are educated using an interdisciplinary framework are more likely to incorporate multiple perspectives when developing, implementing, and evaluating potential interventions (Coiro et al, 2016; Pfeiffer et al., 2019). Pfeiffer et al. (2019) demonstrated that interprofessional education leads to interprofessional practice. National survey results found that prior training in collaboration was a predictor of engaging in interprofessional practice during the development and implementation of special education services (Pfeiffer et al., 2019).

Given the needs for interdisciplinary preparation in special education and related services, particularly related to EI/ECSE, in this chapter we discuss and demonstrate an interdisciplinary personnel preparation model that involves multiple disciplines, including special education, social work, physical therapy, speech-language pathology, occupational therapy, and medicine. Three objectives for the interdisciplinary preparation are addressed: (1) To improve the quality of personnel working with young children with high-intensity needs; (2) To increase the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of pre-service professionals in evidence-based strategic interprofessional practices; and (3) To promote cultural humility and cultural competence to better support the diverse needs of children with disabilities and their families.

CHALLENGES

The challenge remains that the individuals on interdisciplinary teams vary in regard to their educational background, clinical experiences, knowledge of the roles and responsibilities of other professionals on the team, and level of confidence in implementing strategies on how to effectively collaborate when providing support to students and families (Jane-Griffiths et al., 2020; Wallace et al., 2020). Despite the

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