


Chapter 19

Collaborative Preparation in Equity-Based Practices to Support Minoritized Students With High-Intensity Needs

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the development and implementation of a currently running, interdisciplinary program between school psychology and special education within a Hispanic-serving institution. Due to critical shortages of school psychologists and special educators across the country, novel practices in interdisciplinary collaborative training may aid in recruitment and retention efforts while enhancing service delivery for racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse (RELD) students with high intensity needs. The chapter highlights approaches and components including (1) focus on an equity-based and integrated framework for personnel preparation, (2) recruitment and retention activities to attract diverse scholars, (3) planning and delivery of shared collaborative coursework and field experiences, (4) reflection of the lessons learned, and (5) recommendations to other preparation programs in providing interdisciplinary training and support to RELD personnel.

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INTRODUCTION

The critical shortage of school psychologists and special educators across the nation has been a long-standing issue, along with the need to diversify the professions. Students who receive special education services make up approximately 15% of the total public-school population (NCES, 2022). The shift in demographics in the United States (U.S.) is also evident in the overall school age population of public-school students with disabilities from 2000–2020. In 2000, approximately 63% were White, 20% Black and 14% were Hispanic; whereas, in 2020 47% were White, 18% were Black and 26% were Hispanic (NCES, 2022). The change in demographics has significantly impacted the public-school population. Personnel working with students with disabilities are often not credentialed (e.g., teaching special education with a degree in business; not passing state department of education subject area [special education] test) to teach them. They also do not have the necessary advanced skills and in-depth knowledge to implement practices (e.g., application of evidence-based or high leverage practices [HLPs]) that result in positive outcomes for students with disabilities with the most complex educational needs (McLeskey et al., 2019) such as those provided through an advanced degree, and are not representative of the change in US demographics (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2020) that is found in large urban settings. The divergence between the cultural and linguistic characteristics of special education personnel and the school-age children they serve continues to grow. Demographics from a national survey (Goforth et al., 2021) indicate significant underrepresentation of racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse (RELD) school psychologists in the workforce: 86% are White, 4% are Black/African American, and 8% are Hispanic/Latinx which differs sharply from the student population (Irwin et al., 2021). This is similar to the demographics of classroom teachers: 79% are White, 7% are Black/African American, and 9% are Hispanic/Latinx (NCES, 2020). In fact, as Scott et al. (2022) point out, RELD students with disabilities can complete an entire public school career without having an educator from an RELD background. As research has documented the academic, social, and emotional benefits of a more diverse teacher workforce on this population (Redding, 2019), attracting a diverse workforce is pivotal for optimal student outcomes.

Of similar importance is a workforce that is well-prepared to professionally collaborate. School psychologists traditionally collaborate with educators, parents, and other professionals to create safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments for students with disabilities by providing services in assessment, intervention, and consultation. Special educators are responsible for designing and implementing instructional supports to students with disabilities while also providing accommodations and interventions to assist student learning. However, many educators may have limited knowledge and understanding of the specific roles of school psychologists other than assessment-related activities (Gilman & Medway, 2007). It is essential that these respective disciplines cultivate a collaborative relationship by sharing common values and perspectives, as well as leveraging their expertise to foster learning and positive behavior of students with disabilities (Margison & Shore, 2009). Engaging in interdisciplinary collaboration is also an essential part of the professional socialization process early on in their training. Welcoming opportunities and acknowledging adaptations for graduate training can greatly enhance curricular and cultural understanding, while providing an integrated approach to training and service delivery (Pham et al., 2021).

Interdisciplinary or interprofessional collaboration is not new in education or healthcare (e.g., Hinshaw & DeLeon 1995; Margison & Shore, 2009). Interdisciplinary collaborative training in graduate school may be a purposeful way to promote equity-based practices by (a) increasing understanding of one

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