

Preparing School Psychologists to Support the Inclusion of Neurodiverse Learners

Lori B. Vincent & Julie Q. Morrison

University of Cincinnati

Lori.Vincent@uc.edu; Julie.Morrison@uc.edu

Introduction

- School psychologists are in the unique position to influence policies and practices around inclusion (Farrell, 2004)
- Only 7% of students with significant cognitive disabilities are included in general education classrooms (Kleinert et al., 2015)
- Although school psychology training programs provide training in areas that support inclusion, school psychology faculty with expertise in educating students with significant cognitive disabilities identified several areas for growth in the preparation of school psychologists

Competencies for School Psychologists to Support Inclusion

- Understand limitations of cognitive assessments and ways these have been used to justify unnecessarily restrictive school environments
- Use of strengths-based approach to assessment
- Consultation to support inclusive practices
- Quality instruction and evidence-based academic interventions to support all learners in general education classroom
- Inclusion of special education in students in universal intervention planning
- Ensure access to alternative and augmentative communication devices in all settings
- Coordination of care and collaboration with families
- Evaluate equity of placement decisions
- Knowledge and advocacy of legal and ethical practices

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Areas for Improvements and Advancement in Graduate Preparation

Assessment: Applied Behavior Analysis

- Training in functional behavior assessment
- Appropriate behavior supports based on assessments

Consultation and Interdisciplinary Collaboration

- Practicum experience targeting consulting with special and general education teachers specifically with diverse learners such as students with significant cognitive disabilities

Designing, Selecting, and Evaluating Interventions

- Direct experience with development and implementation of interventions for students with significant cognitive disabilities

School-Wide Practices to Promote Successful Inclusion

- Evaluating school-wide practices for inclusion of all learners
- Opportunities to advocate for neurodiverse students in school settings

Promoting Equitable Practices through Inclusion

- Identifying personal and system level biases of neurodiverse students, especially those with significant disabilities

Legal Basis for inclusion

- Mastery of FAPE and LRE
- Practice articulating these laws and advocating for students based on legal obligations

References

- Farrell, P. (2004). School psychologists: Making inclusion a reality for all. *School Psychology International*, 25(1), 5-19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0143034304041500>
- Kleinert, H., Towles-Reeves, E., Quenemoen, R., Thurlow, M., Fluegge, L., Weseman, L., & Kerbel, A. (2015). Where students with the most significant cognitive disabilities are taught: Implications for general curriculum access. *Exceptional Children*, 81(3), 312-328. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0014402914563697>