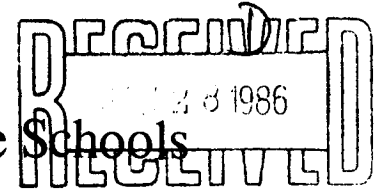


KAPS

Kentucky Association for Psychology in the Schools



Testimony on Counselors Performing Intellectual/Psychological Assessment in Schools

Dr. Robert J. Illback

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1. First, I think it is important to define some terms.
 - a. Intelligence testing refers to the administration and scoring of an individually administered test of intelligence, such as the Wechsler Intelligence Test for Children - Revised.
 - b. Cognitive assessment refers to the selection and appropriate use of a standardized measure of cognitive functioning, including a range of intelligence tests, such as, but not exclusive to, the WISC-R.
 - c. Assessment refers to the process of gathering information, using a variety of methods (appropriate to the needs of the child), to make educational decisions about children. Relevant decisions include classification (diagnosis), placement, individual education program, and pupil progress.

2. Administering and scoring a specific intelligence test is only one part of the larger assessment process.
 - a. The choice of a specific test to administer should depend on the presenting situation.
 - b. The fully trained professional should have a repertoire of intellectual/cognitive instruments to select from, and should make decisions about testing based on a thoroughgoing understanding of the presenting problem situation and relevant literature.
 - c. The area of cognitive assessment is changing rapidly, with the introduction of a number of new, more sophisticated tests (e.g., KABC, Woodcock-Johnson, McCarthy, etc.), which are more heavily dependent on the professional's understanding of complex psychometric, theoretical, ethical, conceptual, and practical issues.

3. A problem exists in many districts at present in that intelligence tests are being administered inappropriately, in rote fashion, and/or in isolation.
 - a. Minimally trained practitioners tend to administer the WISC-R without regard to the complex issues which surround problem situations. Typically, the WISC-R is the only test which examiners with minimal training have been exposed to. In some situations, outmoded and/or technically inadequate tests are still being used.

b. Problems in administration and interpretation exacerbate problems in the assessment/decision-making process, because the database is unreliable or insufficiently understood.

c. There is a significant problem in Kentucky pertaining to the misidentification of handicapped children. For example, Kentucky has one of the highest percentages of children classified as educable mentally handicapped (EMH) in the nation, based on Office of Civil Rights figures.

d. Increasingly, minority group over-representation in classes for the mentally handicapped has emerged as an issue in Kentucky.

e. There is therefore a need for sophisticated psychological assessment personnel in the schools. In this context, the term sophisticated implies that an integrated assessment should occur, which incorporates cognitive data with behavioral observations, adaptive behavior assessment, educational data, and other required components of the evaluation. Fundamentally, the assessment should lead to a coherent and appropriate intervention plan.

4. Regarding the issue about which personnel should be authorized to conduct intellectual/cognitive evaluations, there are two underlying issues:

a. From what body of knowledge do these procedures derive?

1. Within any definition, the tests we are speaking of are clearly psychological in nature, as they are derived from systematic psychology.

2. Virtually the entire literature on the administration and proper interpretation of these tests is found in the school and clinical psychology literature, to which counselors are not systematically exposed. Within this literature, the complex psychometric, theoretical, conceptual, ethical, and practical issues surrounding individual psychological assessment are delineated.

3. Counselor training and literature focuses (appropriately) primarily on group testing and measurement, especially in the areas of pupil achievement and vocational/career aptitude.

4. Most counselor educators do not have specific training as psychologists. In some of the counselor training programs, there has been a problem of the instructor never having been trained in assessment and/or never having performed this activity in a school or clinical setting.

b. What is the body of knowledge to which intellectual/cognitive assessment most naturally relates?

1. Here again, systematic psychology is the most applicable body of knowledge.

2. Specifically, bodies of knowledge to include developmental

psychology, child psychopathology, child clinical psychology, psychological assessment principles and procedures, legal and ethical issues, psychological consultation, learning theory and behavior therapy, and psychoeducational intervention, to name the major areas.

3. The above represent the major areas reflected in the school psychology certification guidelines.

5. A related issue has to do with the proper role and function of school counselors.

a. School counselors have historically played a critical role in education in Kentucky, and they will continue to be important instructional leaders.

b. Unfortunately, due to the underdevelopment of other role groups, counselors have often been saddled with responsibilities that were clearly not within their proper purview. For example, counselors often complain they they are in effect forced to serve as assistant principal, by virtue of acquiring administrative responsibilities.

c. "Intelligence testing" is one of those add-on responsibilities which fell to the counselor, and for which they were inadequately prepared. Many counselors are resentful of being put in a position of performing this role.

d. The more appropriate role for the school counselor relates to the extensive training they receive in pupil counseling, to include individual and group work in developmental guidance, problem-oriented counseling, teacher consultation, parent conferencing, case and pupil record management, and the many other responsibilities which are appropriate within a comprehensive guidance program.

e. My district (Fort Knox) has a comprehensive guidance program which I direct. When I arrived, we moved to a model in which the school psychologist performed assessment functions, allowing counselors to perform the activities for which they were trained. This has resulted in a vastly improved assessment and decision-making process, which the counselors remain involved with as case managers. Significantly, it has also vastly improved the district-wide guidance program, as attested to by recent KDE Accreditation and Merit Rating reports.

f. In nearly every state in the nation, including each state on Kentucky's borders, school psychologists conduct intellectual/cognitive assessments for the purposes of determining eligibility for special education. Counselors nationwide have effectively served children through the activities listed above in (d).

6. In considering certification guidelines for the educational diagnostician, the Council on Teacher Education and Certification endorsed the rationales which have been described herein in deciding to phase out the school psychometrist certificate.

7. Our present situation in which counselors perform this role is a remnant of Kentucky's unique history and development. Decisions made about this issue will have a significant impact on the quality of services offered to children for years to come.

Recommendations

1. KAPS recommends that the administration and interpretation of individual psychological tests in school settings be limited to certified school psychologists and school psychometrists. These individuals, by virtue of their extensive training in this field and having passed a KDE examination, should be defined as qualified examiners.

2. We are not advocating that counselors currently serving in this capacity in school districts, whose employment may depend on this role, be discontinued. Certainly we would agree that provisions should be made for these individuals to allow them to retain their positions, while at the same time upgrading their skills.

3. We are advocating that Kentucky begin to set standards for the future in the area of psychoeducational assessment, particularly with respect to determining eligibility for special and remedial education. We are not alone in identifying this as a major problem, as witness recent articles in the Courier-Journal, the recent establishment of an Ad Hoc Committee to study problems in the identification of handicapped pupils by the State Board of Education, and the most recent report of the State Advisory Panel for Exceptional Children.

4. Thank you for the opportunity to testify at this hearing.