Understanding Consultation for students with ASD Through Conversations With Stakeholders

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COMPASS, or the Collaborative Model for Promoting Competence and Success, is an evidence-based intervention for improving student educational outcomes. As part of a larger project, we are seeking to create a valid, and locally adapted and evidence-based implementation training package for COMPASS considering training fidelity, validity, and reliability.

Little is known about building an evidence-based training package, but we believe this study addresses a significant research-to-practice gap that addresses the lack of educational strategies for children with ASD that are based on evidence (<10%). The direct relationship between the quality of consultation and student outcomes makes this project significant and timely.

The goals of this project were to identify perceptions of stakeholders regarding:

- Factors that are helpful and unhelpful for good consultation and consultants as well as good training of consultants
- Past experiences with consultants and with consultation (e.g., appropriateness, acceptability, and content with previously experienced consultant training)
- How to best fit COMPASS training into the local context
- Barriers for sustaining training

**Guiding Questions**

1. What makes a good consultant?
2. What is unhelpful in consulting?
3. What are your experiences in training in consulting or in autism?
4. What are the elements of good training in consultation or in autism?

**Sample Focus Group Questions**

- To analyze our data we recorded, transcribed, and entered our interviews into qualitative data analysis software (MAXQDA) for analysis.
- Initially, three team members read transcripts to identify possible themes (open coding) using qualitative thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013).
- An iterative, consensus-building process was used to review and identify emergent themes related to the main topic areas that were then developed into codes.

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<th>CODE</th>
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<td>Good consulting Teacher/Consultant Alliance, Building on Strengths; Teacher/student focused; Modeling; Practical for Teachers; Ongoing Engagement; Coaching/Teacher Empowerment; Consistent</td>
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**Stakeholder Perspectives**

**Good Consulting**

“…As a teacher it was always very useful if they gave me strategies that I could actually, in real life, I could use and knowing that I have other students also, you know things that aren’t just pie in the sky, that they were things I could really do…” - Teacher

**Attitudes toward consulting process**

“…Well they need to buy into that the evidence-based practices are something that’s gonna make their life better and that you might have to spend more time and energy on the front end in order to see the long-term pull….I struggle with convincing folks that in order to change the student’s behavior you have to change your behavior first. That can threaten some people...And that relationship building helps with that.” - School-based Consultant

**Aspects of good training for consulting**

“…We have to start where the audience is at. If [the trainer is] using too many rigid, huge words, or whatever, that the the audience can’t relate to. Sometimes that makes it very challenging if you’re trying to train people and [the trainer is] just way over your head.” - Administrator

**Recommended training delivery**

“I think to look at each child’s IEP to make sure at that 4-6 week point that all the points on that IEP are being met. Because that is a continual problem that I have had for my son. Over and over.” - Parent

**Evaluating consulting outcomes**

“…I want a lot of feedback on how the training went and how we can improve the training going forward.” - Parent

**Completed Actions From Stakeholder Recommendations**

Identification of barriers, expectations, and current intervention practices were used to build a consultation training package that was sensitive to local concerns and contexts, while also preserving integrity of the EBP.

Example Recommendations From Stakeholders

- Got feedback from pilot participants on how to best integrate the consultant training into the state’s autism manual
- Completed a pilot cohort of trainers to work on timing understanding the barriers to consultants attending in-person training days
- Considered the timing of the training as based on feedback from the focus groups
- In training plan, we included frequent opportunities for practice and short lectures to keep attention of participants
- Intentional use of words “coaching” and “consulting”

We conducted a promising pilot administration of our training package with N = 3 school-based consultants. Preliminary evidence demonstrates consultants were able to implement COMPASS with good fidelity. Consultants received high satisfaction from parents and teachers.

For a full list of references, please contact Abigail Love, amlove2@uky.edu.