Educational Psychologists and therapeutic intervention: Promoting positive mental health

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Educational Psychology in the UK

• 2500 EPs in the UK\(^1\)
• All applied psychologists with a degree in psychology and post graduate qualifications (now doctorate)
• Trained at 10 universities – slightly different emphasis in training
• Based in local authorities and work with a ‘patch’ of schools – responding to different local political agendas

Mental health in the UK

• Economic reasons for addressing mental health in adults (Layard)
• CAMHS – take referrals, but not enough to meet demand (Stallard)
• Schools have an important role (Tier 1 & host of initiatives designed to be preventative)
EP contribution

EPs work with schools and parents in a number of ways:

- Individual casework
- Consultation
- Group work
- Whole school approaches
- Multi-agency working
The Research Questions

• What therapeutic interventions do EPs use?
• How do they use them in practice?
• What are the barriers and enablers to EPs engaging in therapeutic practice?
Methodology

- Online questionnaire distributed to all UK Educational Psychology Services and via professional forum and bulletin
- Questions derived from literature and the findings of previous small scale doctoral research projects
- Open and closed questions
- 455 responses received to online (75%) and paper (25%) versions of the questionnaire
- www.epsandtherapy.co.uk
Definition of therapy

For the purposes of the research, the following definitions were provided.

• Therapy – ‘The treatment of mental or psychological disorders by psychological means’ (Oxford English Dictionary, 2010)

• Therapeutic work may involve the direct intervention of a psychologist with an individual child or a group of children. Equally it is applicable to the wider role of supporting others who work with children on a daily basis (MacKay and Greig, 2007).
Do you use therapeutic interventions as part of your current professional practice?

Number of EPs using therapeutic interventions as part of their current practice

- Yes: 92%
- No: 8%
How have you used therapeutic intervention?

Percentage of EPs using therapeutic intervention in different contexts

- Individual direct therapeutic intervention: 90%
- As part of assessment: 75%
- Consultation: 65%
- Working through others: 60%
- Group work: 55%
- Systemic work (e.g., training): 50%
- Other: 5%
What therapeutic intervention(s) have you used during the last two years?
Key facilitators

1. Access to training (e.g. “The amount of work done in this area by individual EPs varies considerably, depending on the training they have received”)

2. Service culture offers flexibility in the model of working

3. Personal interest in therapeutic intervention

4. Schools valuing therapeutic intervention and their relationship with the EP
Key barriers

1. Limitations of service time allocation model/service capacity (e.g. “The service does not operate a time allocation model, and so EPs have the flexibility to target more intensive support where needed”)

2. Other priorities identified via stakeholders

3. Lack of training

4. Lack of practice
Themes from the qualitative data

What are therapeutic interventions?
- Approaches/practice
- Definition of therapeutic intervention

Role of the Educational Psychologist
- Changing context of EP role
- Multiagency working
- Role of EP in relation to therapeutic intervention

Service context
- Contracting/organising therapeutic work
- Opportunities to practise
- Specialist work with vulnerable groups
- Supervision
- Time/resources
- Training
Finally...

- Part 2 of the study has involved 4 site visits, data is being analysed to look in more detail as to how EP services can become more involved in therapeutic work.

Discussion

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