



The Influences of Social Psychological Variables on the Referral and Assessment of School Children




Do social judgments influence referral and evaluation?

- Teachers' reason for referrals are likely to be confirmed.
- Psychologists tend to choose assessment instruments consistent with the reason for referral.
- Depending on the district, 75-95% of students referred ultimately received some sort of special education service.




The role of Attribution Theory in referral and evaluation


- When deciding if students have the capability to achieve adequately or behave appropriately, teachers ask themselves...
- 1. How unusual is the student's behavior compared to others?
- 2. How consistently does the student behave this way?
- 3. Do other teachers perceive similar performance or behavior?

 **The role of Attribution Theory in referral and evaluation**


- Teachers tend to attribute the student's academic or behavioral problems to internal causes.
- Yet, the referrals they make tend to be vague and lacking substantiating data.

 **The role of Attribution Theory in referral and evaluation**


- Teachers show a self-serving bias.
- When students are successful, teachers tend to attribute the students' success to their own teaching efforts.
- When students fail, teachers tend to attribute it to the students' lack of ability or effort.

 **The role of Attribution Theory in referral and evaluation**


- Once teachers make such attributional judgments, they are hard to change and they influence teacher behavior.
- High achievers receive more positive and supportive feedback than low achievers.
- This further suppresses the low achievers' performance and confirms the teacher's expectations.

 **The role of Attribution Theory in referral and evaluation**

- Yoshida, Lopez, Friedman & Matalon (1991).
- Teachers asked to nominate 9 students: 3 they judged to be average, 3 they judged to be low achieving, and 3 in need of special education.
- Regardless of the teachers' rating, all students were on task <50% of the time.

 **The role of Attribution Theory in referral and evaluation**

- Students identified as in need of special education were actually on task at higher rates than the average learners.
- Student revealed sufficient evidence that quality of instruction was an important factor in explaining low performance.
- Literature reveals considerable variation in the ways teachers teach—an external cause for low performance.

 **The role of Attribution Theory in referral and evaluation**

- School psychologists are advised to ask Kelley's questions when considering alternative causes for reasons for referral:
- How unusual is the student's behavior? (consensus)
- How consistent do students demonstrate the problem? (consistency)
- Do other professionals perceive the same problems? (distinctiveness)

Social Psychological factors in test selection

- Tests should be chosen carefully with consideration for the needs of ethnic/cultural, handicapped and minority groups.
- Considerable efforts have been made to minimize test bias in modern tests, but entirely bias-free tests are impossible.

Social Psychological factors in administration and scoring of tests

- Being an interpersonal situation, the testing situation is subject to the effects of expectancy, similarity of examiner-student, and familiarity.
- Expectancy can lead to the self-fulfilling prophecy.
- When a psychologist has some pretest information, expectancies form.

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Social Psychological factors in administration and scoring of tests

- Pretest information about whether a student was bright or below average affected psychologists' scoring of test responses, especially when the responses were ambiguous.
- Because of the standardized nature of intelligence tests, expectancy effects are minimized.
- Psychologists need to be cognizant of their tendency to attribute more positive social and personality characteristics to attractive children.

Social Psychological factors in administration and scoring of tests

- Examiner familiarity with the examinee may lessen test anxiety or the threat of the situation and optimize performance.
- Handicapped and minority children scored higher when tested by a familiar examiner.

Social Psychological factors in administration and scoring of tests

- No consistent evidence that examiner's race elicits different performance from examinees.
- Sometimes the examiner's race enhanced performance while other times it suppressed performance.
- Minority and handicapped children affected to a greater extent.

Social Psychological factors in administration and scoring of tests

- High stress affected the test performance of African American examinees when tested by a Caucasian examiner.
- Likelihood of bias increases when the examinee's language differs from the examiner's.
- Likelihood for misinterpretation increases due to dialectical differences, or different social and cultural backgrounds is often overlooked.

Social Psychological factors in administration and scoring of tests

- The test situation can pose a threat to the examinee's self-esteem and affect performance.
- Examinees' attitude about themselves and their perception of the importance of the test was significantly correlated to achievement scores (Karmos & Karmos, 1984).

Social Psychological factors in interpretation & use of test results.

- Labeling children has detrimental effects.
- A special education label lowers teacher expectations and may cause them to behave in ways that fulfill those low expectancies.
- When a child is labeled erroneously, the ramifications are even more adverse.

Social Psychological factors in interpretation & use of test results.

- Inexperienced psychologists may use test scores in a rigid manner and fail to take into consideration other factors, especially when little other information was sought or available.
- There is a disproportionate number of racial and language minority students in special education.

Social Psychological factors in Multidisciplinary Teams

- Although intuitively, it seems like a good idea to make group decisions based on different perspectives, there is lack of strong evidence for the superiority of team decisions.
- School psychologists contribute the most to discussion, and parents and teachers the least.
- Parents & teachers are the ones with the information that will put test scores in the appropriate context.

Social Psychological factors in Multidisciplinary Teams

- Power is not distributed equitably among team members.
- Psychologists use their expert power to influence decisions.
- It is important for psychologists and other team members to be aware of power differences and make efforts to redistribute power.



Social Psychological factors in Multidisciplinary Teams

- Overall, there is little administrative support for team-building activities.
- School psychologists must provide leadership in developing functional team relationships.
