

# Present and Future Needs for Personnel to Prepare Teachers of the Behaviorally Disordered

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## ABSTRACT

*The goal of this study was to assess the need for teacher educators to prepare teachers for the area of behavioral disorders. The data collection instrument was a 17-item questionnaire sent to 128 institutions of higher education; a total of 102 (80%) responded. The data show there is a short-fall of qualified personnel to fill the needs of institutions of higher education for faculty in the area of behavioral disorders.*

Services to students with behavioral disorders (BD) or serious emotional disturbance (SED) have experienced a steady growth in recent years. This growth in services to students with BD is clear in data published in the *Twelfth Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Education of the Handicapped Act* (U.S. Department of Education, 1990).

Since the passage of Public Law 94-142, services to students with BD have increased from .54% to about .99% of the schoolaged population. This represents an increase of about 37% in the number of students served. The largest increases were in the years immediately following the implementation of the Education of the Handicapped Act. Increases in service level, however, have occurred each year. According to the *Twelfth Annual Report*, the current need for teachers for students with SED is 4,388. Only the need for teachers of students with learning disabilities (LD) significantly exceeds the need for teachers of students with SED. The need for cross-categorical teachers slightly exceeds the need for teachers of students with SED. Of course, the cross-categorical category includes students with behavioral disorders.

The prevalence of students with behavioral disorders last reported by the U.S. Department of Education was 1.2 to 2%. According to some recent research (Institute of Medicine, 1989; Kazdin, 1989), a more realistic prevalence estimate is probably between 6 and 10%. Since the service level is only about 1%, there is potential for additional growth in services. Such growth would increase the demand for teachers of the emotionally disturbed. There is also a renewed emphasis on service to students with SED in the reauthorization in 1990 of PL 94-142 (PL 100-476). Thus, continued growth in services and need for classroom teachers are likely.

The continued expansion of services to this underidentified population (Center & Eden, 1990; Center & Obringer, 1989; Long, 1983) will require the training of more teachers for the behaviorally disordered. In addition to expansion, there is a continuing need for teachers to replace those leaving the field. Behavioral disorders has one of the highest teacher attrition rates in education. Attrition studies (Hill & Parker, 1983; Lawrenson & McKinnon, 1982; Seery, 1990) find attrition rates of 30 to 50% over a 3-year period for teachers of students with BD. Some states, such as Georgia, are using emergency certification procedures to meet the demand for teachers for students with BD (Georgia State Department of Education, 1988). Given the apparent need for teachers, there follows the question, are there enough faculty in the area of behavioral disorders to prepare these teachers?

Smith and Lovett (1987) report a projected attrition rate for existing special education faculty of 10% per year due to retirement, and that this rate should accelerate after 1993. Center and Kaufman (1990) surveyed all institutions of higher education (IHEs) advertising positions for teachers of the behaviorally disordered in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* during a 3-year period. They report a faculty attrition rate of 18.5% due to retirement.

Further, these authors found 28% of faculty in the area of behavioral disorders to be between 50 and 60 years of age. Thus, a significant portion of the faculty in this area in IHEs will reach retirement age during this decade.

There are 256 BD teacher education programs in the United States (National Information Center for Children and Youth with Handicaps, 1987). Assuming at least one BD faculty member for each program, there are a minimum of 256 BD teacher educators employed by IHEs. A 10% attrition rate suggests a replacement need of about 26 new faculty per year. This figure does not reflect attrition due to early retirement, death, illness, or for various personal reasons such as low pay (Smith & Lovett, 1987) or job dissatisfaction (Prehm, 1984; Zabel, Smith, & White, 1984).

Smith and Lovett also report that 48% of full professors say they would take early retirement if it were available. There is now a trend in many IHEs to offer early retirement programs, so attrition due to retirement could exceed the 10% estimate. The replacement need of about 26 also fails to reflect positions that may become available due to program expansion. It is reasonable to project that there will soon be a potential need to fill more than 26 faculty positions in behavioral disorders per year.

Smith and Lovett (1987) also report data that show major doctoral granting institutions are graduating fewer than 100 special education doctorates per year. The Office of Educational Research and Improvement (1990) reports that only eight doctoral degrees were awarded in emotional disturbance during the period 1984-1985 to 1988-1989. These data suggest an average output of approximately two graduates per year. Such a limited supply of new personnel is not enough to meet the need estimate of 26 BD faculty per year.

This apparent short-fall is further aggravated by the likelihood that not all of these graduates will choose to go into teacher education. Bowne and Schuster (1986) report that only 27% of new Ph.D. graduates in arts and sciences choose careers in higher education. A similar statistic for special education is not available. The authors' experience at Georgia State University with special education graduates closely approximates the findings for arts and sciences. In the past 15 years, about 20% of GSU's Ph.D. graduates in behavioral disorders took positions in IHEs. It is not surprising that IHEs have trouble finding faculty to fill positions in the area of behavioral disorders (Smith, Pierce, & Keyes, 1988).

Faculty members specializing in the area of behavioral disorders at IHEs need an empirical database for making decisions about leadership preparation programs. A database is also needed to document grant proposals asking for funds to support leadership preparation in behavioral disorders. Thomas and Sutherland (1987) emphasize the importance of empirical documentation of need in grant proposals applying for federal funds. The present study sought data to evaluate the need for personnel preparation at the leadership level in behavioral disorders. The study surveyed IHEs to get current information concerning personnel needs. The questions the survey tried to answer include the following:

1. Is there a need for faculty with behavioral disorders backgrounds to train teachers to work with students with behavioral problems?
2. If there is a need, what is the basis for this need?
3. Is the quality of the current applicant pool satisfactory?
4. Are there enough minority and female personnel available to fill faculty positions?

## METHOD

The first step toward answering the above questions was to construct a questionnaire. (A copy of this questionnaire and a summary of responses to it are available from the authors.) The questionnaire consisted of 17 questions seeking information about success in faculty recruitment, satisfaction with the applicant pool, and the skills desired. The survey also asked whether a position was cross-categorical and about the sex and the racial heritage of the applicants. The study took its sample from the most recent edition of the *National Directory of Special Education Personnel Preparation Programs* (National Information Center for Children and Youth with Handicaps, 1987). The sample was random and included one-half of the 256 colleges and universities offering teacher preparation programs in behavioral disorders. The survey instrument was mailed to the department chairperson in each IHE in the sample.

## RESULTS

Of the 128 institutions contacted, 102 (80%) responded. [Both counts and percentages are not being shown hereinafter; since the number responding is close to 100, counts and percentages would be approximately the same.] Of these 102 IHEs that responded, 83% indicated they had BD teacher education programs. Further, 37% said they expected to hire at least one BD faculty member within the next 5 years, and 5 expected to hire more than one faculty member within the next 5 years. Of the respondents, 46% hired or tried to hire someone within the past 5 years. Among those recently seeking a faculty member, 84% said they found a suitable faculty member. The average number of applicants was 14.1, and the average search took 8.1 months.

Referring to the open positions, 27% were open due to program expansion and 73% were replacement positions. Of the replacement positions, 41% were open due to retirements, 51% were due to faculty turnover, and 8% were due to death or illness. The study also found that 40% of existing faculty are age 50 or above and 20% of these faculty are age 60 or above.

The most sought after skill in applicants was teaching. Writing, research, grant, and service skills were all rated as important but less important than teaching skills. Other skills cited as important included classroom teaching experience, advising, supervision, teaming, and program development.

For those IHEs seeking a cross-categorical faculty member, the most sought after area of additional expertise was learning disabilities followed by mental retardation. A few respondents were also seeking someone with additional expertise in gifted or speech and language. Other areas cited by respondents included early childhood special education, juvenile justice, chronically ill, and educational technology.

Respondents who filled their open position were very satisfied with the skills of the individual they employed. This satisfaction is reflected by the mean rating of 4.5 on a quality rating scale. However, respondents rated their applicant pool an average of 3.3 on the quality rating scale. In addition, 24% of the respondents reported an inadequate number of female applicants, and 85% reported an inadequate number of minority applicants. Of the faculty members hired, the majority (74%) were hired as assistant professors. The average age of the employed individuals was 37.4 years. Of the faculty members employed, 69% were female and only 9% were from minority groups.

Of the respondents, 9% said they offered a doctoral degree in BD or SED. These institutions on average reported a total of 3.4 doctoral graduates each during the past 5 years. About half of these graduates took college teaching positions in BD. On average, these 8 institutions projected a total of 12 doctoral graduates each during the next 5 years.

## DISCUSSION

The first question was: Is there a need for faculty with behavioral disorders backgrounds to train teachers to work with students with behavioral problems? Of the respondents, 46% had sought one or more BD faculty members during the past 5 years; 16% did not find a suitable faculty member. These results show a short fall of behavioral disorders faculty during the 5-year period covered by this study.

The second question was: If there is a need for faculty, what is the basis for the need? Of the open positions, 73% were replacement positions. There were three reasons given for replacing faculty — turnover (51%), retirement (41%), and death/illness (8%). Retirement combined with death/illness accounts for almost 50% of the replacement positions. This suggests an average replacement need of about 10% per year for the 5-year period covered. This estimate is consistent with the findings of Smith and Lovett (1987) reported earlier. Thus, the estimated need for replacement faculty in the area of behavioral disorders should continue at about 26 per year. The present study also supports Smith and Lovett's prediction that retirements would accelerate after 1993. About 40% of the faculty in departments responding to this survey were above the age of 50. Therefore, a large number of these faculty members will reach retirement age in the 1990s.

Of the open positions, 27% were due to program expansion. This figure supports Smith and Lovett's finding that special education teacher preparation programs are increasing by

an average of 1.2% per year. Expansion of teacher preparation programs in the area is BD is especially likely due to the recent legislative emphasis on SED.

Findings in the present study suggest a need for BD faculty expanding at about 2.5% per year. A 2.5% expansion estimate adds another 6.5 faculty per year due to program expansion. Thus, there is a potential need for 32 new faculty members per year. When compared to a supply of about 5.4 BD doctoral graduates per year (27 per 5-year period), there is a significant short fall.

Institutions of higher education project on average a total of 12 graduates per institution during the next 5 years. There is some question about the accuracy of this projection. The projection is for about 3.5 times as many graduates in the next 5 years as reported for the previous 5-year period. Past performance is usually a good indication of future performance. In either case, the output is below the need estimate for BD faculty. The short fall is even more serious considering that only about 58% of new doctoral graduates in behavioral disorders take positions in IHEs.

The third question was: Is the quality of the applicant pool satisfactory? The respondents' mean rating of the quality of the applicant pool was 3.3 on a 5-point scale. The respondents perceive the quality of the applicant pool as good but not outstanding.

The fourth question was: Are there enough minority and female personnel available to fill faculty positions? Of the respondents, 76% said there are enough female applicants. Further, 69% of faculty members hired by the respondents are female. Of the respondents, 85% said that there are not enough applicants from minority groups. Further, only 9% of the faculty members hired are from minority groups. This finding suggests that probably too little is being done to recruit and prepare minorities for careers in higher education.

One explanation for a lack of success in recruiting minority students is competition with other fields such as business, law, and medicine. Another possibility is that minority students are completing preparation programs but not choosing careers in higher education. In either case, teacher education is failing in a recruitment competition with other potential professions or employers.

In conclusion, the supply of graduates is short of the need and few of those graduating choose careers in higher education. Therefore, behavioral disorders preparation programs need to concentrate on attracting more students into doctoral programs, particularly minority students.

Institutions of higher education can directly promote teacher education as a career in three ways. First, they can try to establish a teacher education identity for their doctoral program. This effort should begin with the description of the program to prospective students and continue during preparation. Second, they can make teacher education a selection criterion. That is, applicants who have teacher education as a career goal would get special consideration. Finally, behavioral disorders preparation programs can promote teacher education as a career with doctoral students through mentor programs.

Minority recruitment is difficult for many IHEs. In the short term, IHEs can focus on recruiting from identifiable pools of minority students. Minority students who check education as an interest area on the Graduate Record Exam is one such pool. They can also put greater emphasis on face-to-face recruiting at IHEs with large minority enrollments. Finally, recruiting efforts can focus on minority teachers in public school systems.

For IHEs to recruit more doctoral students they need to offer more financial aid. Doctoral study is a long and expensive process that usually requires students to give up full-time positions. Further, students entering doctoral programs are older and often have family obligations. Older students cannot commit to doctoral studies without adequate financial support. The typical level of support through assistantships is not adequate to meet the financial needs of doctoral students.

Institutions of higher education also need to deal with problems such as low pay that deter students from careers in teacher education. These same problems contribute to professors taking early retirement and leaving teaching for other careers. Teacher education programs must strive to make faculty positions more attractive and financially competitive.

In the long term, IHEs must concentrate on activities that will increase the available pool of minority teachers. This means making a greater effort to promote teaching as a career

with minority high school and college students (Franklin & James, 1990). Only by increasing the number of minority teachers can the pool of potential minority BD graduate students and teacher educators expand.

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