

An interpretive exploration of beliefs and values related to professional practice in educational psychology

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Abstract

In 2006 a new training route for Educational Psychologists (EPs) was introduced, which extended the entry criteria to applicants from a range of professional backgrounds. The related literature indicates that this was a contentious issue. The aim of the current study is to explore the relationship between the role of the EP and professional background using an interpretive methodology. Twelve participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview format. The participants were four EPs, four primary Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs), three secondary SENCOs and a Portage Worker. The aim of the study is also to establish what skills and qualities the participants perceive to be necessary to be an effective and credible practitioner. Following analysis of the interview data, a number of themes emerged. In terms of desirable EP attributes, the participants' responses fell into three broad categories, interpersonal skills, psychological skills and other qualities. The participants perceived the EP role as either expert or collaborative, although some expressed a degree of uncertainty about the nature of the role. All of the participants alluded to a link between experience and credibility, although the nature of desirable experience varied between personal and professional experience. Participants who viewed the role of the EP within an expert model favoured teaching experience over other forms of pre-training experience. The second stage of this study is set in the context of the recent changes to the initial training of Educational Psychologists (EPs). The broad aim of the study is to explore beliefs that are held in relation to the relationship between the role of the EP and professional background. In particular, stage two aims to explore the participants' belief systems in greater depth. It was therefore deemed that Personal Construct Psychology (PCP) would provide an appropriate psychological framework to inform the design of the study and interpretation of the data. Six of the twelve participants who were interviewed at stage one of this study participated in follow-up interviews using a self-characterisation technique. Their responses were ladderised in order to elicit superordinate constructs, until an end point was agreed upon between participant and researcher, which are referred to as 'core constructs'. The data were clustered in relation to the themes arising from stage one, resulting in six clusters, collaboration, motivation and applying psychology being ranked as most important for EPs. The use of PCP as a

theoretical framework has provided a psychological perspective from which to address beliefs regarding the professional background of EPs.