SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY INTERN PORTFOLIO: COMMUNITY EMPHASIS

By

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Psychology: School Psychology

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ABSTRACT

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This portfolio project is designed to demonstrate competency in the 10 domains of best practice in school psychology, as outlined by Humboldt State University’s School Psychology program. The 10 domains are: Psychological Foundations; Educational Foundations; Legal, Ethical, and Professional Foundations; Data-based Decision Making and Accountability - Assessment/Intervention/Evaluation of Cognitive and Academic Skills; Data-Based Decision Making and Accountability - Assessment & Intervention for Socialization, Emotional, Behavioral, and Life Skills; Consultation and Collaboration; Mental Health, Human Diversity in Development and Learning; Family, School, and Community Collaboration; and Research and Technology. Competency in these domains will be demonstrated within four different products that reflect work done during a year-long internship in the applied practice of school psychology. Emphasis on the role of the school psychologist in family, school, and community collaboration will be present within the different products. Making connections with community service providers and collaboration with multiple stakeholders is recommended as a necessary role of the school psychologist in supporting at-risk students achieve positive outcomes.

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I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the faculty at Humboldt State University that have allowed me to accomplish the knowledge and experience I have gained for this work. I would like to thank Janice M. Mueller for her efforts in bringing me to the school psychology program. A heartfelt thanks to Dr. Brent Duncan and Jan Paulus for their years of passion and dedication in setting the foundation for this program. I want to thank them for seeing the potential in me as a school psychologist and fostering my learning over the years. I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Lisa Miller, who is an inspiration to me for both my education and practice as a school psychologist. Her expertise, guidance and support has been truly invaluable in shaping my experience.

I would also like to thank my site supervisor Robin McClary, who has supported me throughout my internship with personal care and thoughtful teaching. Her example has positively influenced my approach to school psychology. I further acknowledge the professionals I have worked with in my internship who have made this work possible and modeled the collaborative approach highlighted in this work.

Finally, I thank my family and loved ones. I am forever grateful for their support and sacrifices to help me achieve these goals.
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SIGNIFICANCE, OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

School psychologists perform a wide range of services and supports in the school setting. They work as part of a team to make data-based decisions regarding intellectual ability, academic progress, and social, emotional and behavioral functioning of students to improve educational outcomes and mental health. School psychologists provide services directly to students in addition to working with school staff, parents, and the community to provide effective learning environments for children. With multiple stakeholders involved, collaboration must occur in order for interventions to be effective (Sosa & McGrath, 2013). Current economic factors that are heavily influencing education today are the increased poverty rates, and insufficient government funding for special education services that are federally mandated (Mather & Jarosz, 2014; Cohen, Linker & Stutts, 2006). Students living in poverty are almost five times as likely to drop out of school compared to students from high-income families, and are more likely to have disabilities, mental health problems, and face health issues such as malnutrition (Jensen, 2013). The increase in the number of students at risk for adverse outcomes without sufficient funding to support their needs makes collaboration between the public education system, communities, and families evermore salient.

As the work is both heterogeneous and sensitive in nature, the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) outlines standards and principles for best practices in training, ethics, credentialing, and provision of services (Jacob, Decker & Hartshorne, 2011). Humboldt State University’s school psychology program is a NASP
accredited training program, and requires graduates and interns to demonstrate knowledge and competency in 10 domains related to school psychology practice, as listed in Table 1. These domains were chosen based on NASP (2010) standards as well as criteria from the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (2001). This paper is a reflection my portfolio works performed during my school psychology internship year, which are meant to show proficiency in the ten domains. The products themselves are not contained in this paper in order to protect the confidentiality of those involved. The actual products are housed in a secure online system, evaluated by supervisors and professors in the school psychology program. Highlighted throughout the products is a theme of collaboration with the community to support students with high needs.

For my internship I was employed by a district with less than 2,700 students in a rural mountain town in California. The area has a large portion of residents of low socioeconomic status and is also known for a high Hispanic population. I worked between two different elementary school sites, both with approximately 80% of students with socioeconomic disadvantage. One site has 72% Hispanic or Latino students, and includes a two-way immersion program and an inclusive model for specialized academic instruction. The other site has a culture of heavy assessment and pull-out services, in addition to staff that are highly resistant to change. One of my portfolio products describes my work in presenting a new model to this staff for referring students for special education support that is more legally defensible. Facilitating this change required knowledge of educational foundations and legal, ethical and professional foundations of
school psychology. Participation on this Student Study Team proved to enhance my skills in collaboration with school staff and families.

The first product in my internship portfolio involves a psychoeducational assessment of a student who presents severe emotional and behavioral challenges. The assessment includes interviews, observations, record review, norm-referenced tests in cognitive ability, and social-emotional rating scales. The purpose of this assessment was to determine eligibility for special education services and to support the team in making educational decisions for the student. In unfolding the layers of his history, his intellectual and neurological processes and how they relate to his current mental health and educational functioning, I developed competency across several domains. The information I compiled for the report meets requirements for Data-Based Decision-Making and Accountability I – Assessment/Intervention/Evaluation of Cognitive and Academic skills. Abilities in Research and Technology and Mental Health are also present in this product. The assessment was quite complex, and to fully understand the results I had to research information about Reactive Attachment Disorder and how his maladaptive behaviors are related to his history of maltreatment. The assessment and report guided the team of school staff in determining his eligibility for special education services under the criteria for emotional disturbance, as outlined by federal legislation IDEA (Jacob, Decker & Harsthorne, 2011).

Of the students served under IDEA part B, between six and seven percent are students with an emotional disturbance (Department of Education, 2014). The likelihood of these students receiving suspensions and expulsions more than 10 days a year is more
than double compared to other students with disabilities. They are almost twice as likely to be removed to an alternative education setting for drugs, weapons, or serious bodily injury, or to drop out of school (Department of Education, 2014). In order to effectively support students with emotional and behavioral difficulties and develop strategies to prevent these adverse outcomes, a comprehensive model of collaboration is needed. For these students with complex needs, county mental health providers organize “wraparound services”, made up of the students’ family as well as other community agencies involved in services or care for the student and family. As part of this particular student’s wraparound service team, I collaborated with the student’s mental health therapist, case manager, parent, and wraparound service provider regarding his learning and progress toward goals of the intervention. The school psychologists in the school district also participate in a monthly Child Parent Resource Team meeting, whose members include professionals from agencies such as Child Protective Services, Foster Services, Mental Health, and other local agencies supporting youth. Students with high needs and involvement with one or more of the agencies in attendance are referred and interventions and treatment are discussed. My involvement included updates on the aforementioned student’s school functioning and progress toward goals of school-based interventions. School psychologists have a critical role in this collaborative approach, as they are highly trained in understanding characteristics of students with emotional, behavioral and academic struggles and are familiar with services that both the schools and the community agencies provide (Cohen, Linker & Stutts, 2006).
With the same student, I implemented a school-based intervention for emotional regulation titled Zones of Regulation (Kuypers, 2011). The curriculum teaches children how to identify emotions, where they fall in terms of regulatory state, and how behaviors make others feel. It also helps children identify triggers for dysregulation and teaches tools to help them return to a more regulated state. I conducted in-depth data collection and analysis of his problem behaviors for a Functional Behavior Analysis to assist the team in creating a behavior intervention plan, but also to gather information for goals and modification of the Zones curriculum. During the intervention, I continued to keep frequency data on his problem behaviors as well as track his emotional states throughout each day. This work is encompassed in the third product in this portfolio with impact analysis, and covers the domains of Psychological Foundations, Data-Based Decision-Making II- Assessment & Intervention for Socialization, Emotional, Behavioral, and Life Skills and also the domain of Family, School and Community Collaboration.

In my growing partnerships with community service providers, I connected a local outreach program that teaches at-risk children to ski or snowboard at minimal cost. I performed a school-wide screening of children who meet criteria for “at-risk” such as low-income family, single parent household, academic or social concerns, etc. The screening consisted of a referral form sent out to teachers. I then recruited children who were eligible by meeting with them and connecting with their families. I helped set up a registration night at the school, collected paperwork, and chaperoned during the lessons. Over the two-month period of learning new skills, the program also incorporated character strengths such as building integrity and compassion into every lesson. In
understanding risk factors of these students, I demonstrate my knowledge in the domain of Psychological Foundations. I had the opportunity to recruit and develop positive relationships with a diverse group of students, all of whom had different learning styles. I connected with Spanish-speaking families through an interpreter and helped develop positive home-school relationships. I worked hand-in-hand with the outreach program to increase the self-efficacy of students and to provide positive adult support for them. Competence in understanding Human Diversity in Development and Learning and developing Family, School and Community Collaboration were all present within this product.

I entered this position with foundational knowledge in the domains and prior experience with behavioral and educational data collection and support. I have developed new skills and improved my proficiency in all 10 domains. I have developed a strong connection with the community and have realized the importance of family, school and community collaboration in the role of the school psychologist. These skills prove my competence as a school psychologist and will support my future endeavors in practice.
Table 1: Domains of Knowledge and Competence in School Psychology Documented in Each Portfolio Product

1. Psychological Foundations  
2. Educational Foundations  
3. Legal, Ethical and Professional Foundations  
5. Data-based Decision Making and Accountability II – Assessment & Intervention for Socialization, Emotional, Behavioral, and Life Skills  
6. Consultation and Collaboration  
7. Mental Health  
8. Human Diversity in Development and Learning  
9. Family, School and Community Collaboration  
10. Research and Technology

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<th>Portfolio Product Title</th>
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CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout my internship year in school psychology, knowledge and competency in the 10 domains of practice were demonstrated. The four products in this portfolio showcase proficiency in best practice as a school psychologist required by Humboldt State University. The portfolio highlights work with high populations of students of poverty and with students who present high social-emotional and behavioral challenges.

Awareness of the risk factors for students of low socioeconomic status as well as dropout rates for students of emotional disturbance calls for a support system that encompasses the home, school, and community environments. The school psychologist has knowledge and training of these risk factors as well as treatment plans for students and families. They also have direct access to students in need. Seeking additional supports within the community and collaboration with different stakeholders is an essential part of providing comprehensive treatment across environments for these populations of students, and is a vital role of the school psychologist. As a result of my internship year, much growth has been made in the experience of working with families, school faculty, community agencies and mental health workers to better assist students with high poverty rates and mental health concerns. Acting as a bridge between the school and community is more than just a skill for a school psychologist. It is a necessity in providing the well-rounded support that these students need to be successful.
REFERENCES


United States Department of Education. (2014). OSEP’s 36th annual report to congress on the implementation of the individuals with disabilities education act [2014].