UTILIZING A COLLABORATIVE, RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION APPROACH TO MEET THE ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL NEEDS OF STUDENTS AND FAMILIES FROM CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS

By

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ABSTRACT

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This portfolio provides evidence of my competency as a school psychologist upon completion of my final internship year in the Humboldt State University (HSU) School Psychology Program. Work products demonstrate skills acquired through formal training and professional experience across 10 domains of practice, which reflect state and national standards. The majority of my portfolio documents my comprehensive service delivery at a K-6th grade, full-service community school in a high-need, urban community. Students are predominately Latino and come from a dual-language background of English and Spanish. Thus, much of my work demonstrates my developing skills in bilingual service delivery and emphasizes culturally competent practices. Finally, work products document my efforts in collaborating with school staff and parents to meet students’ academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs within a Response to Intervention (RtI) framework. Recommendations include an increase in recruitment of culturally and linguistically diverse school psychologists, and continued research on effective educational practices with diverse student populations so that all students may learn and achieve academic success.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When I reflect on the people who supported and guided me through this journey, I am overwhelmed with gratitude. I am deeply appreciative of each professor, supervisor, mentor, peer, and loved one who supported my advancement through this program.

To my professors and supervisors, I am grateful for the knowledge and training you provided and the guidance you offered to develop my skills – you prepared me well to fulfill a dynamic role in an ever-changing field. I extend a special thank you to Dr. Brent Duncan, Dr. Emily Sommerman, Lisa Miller, Nichole Dollarhide, and Marisela Lopez. Thank you for your mentorship, for sharing with me your unique insights and experiences, and inspiring me to go beyond expectations. To my cohort members, you are an incredibly talented and spirited group of young women; I am proud to have taken this journey with you. To my partner, thank for your love and patience when I needed it the most. Finally, to my little family, you instilled in me the work ethic to be successful, and gave me endless love and support to achieve me goals; I hope I made you proud.

A valuable life lesson I learned through this experience is that one can possess the drive and passion to learn and be successful, yet it is the support from people who care that allows you to thrive. I was given such opportunities and will continue to pass on this gift to our next generation of scholars. This is the belief we all share as educators – all children deserve the chance to fulfill their dreams. Thank you all for helping me to reach mine.
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SIGNIFICANCE, OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

This body of work is the culminating project of my final internship year in the Humboldt State University (HSU) School Psychology Program. Work products were carefully selected to display a diverse range of roles, skills, and services, thereby demonstrating my competence as a school psychologist across 10 domains of practice developed by the HSU School Psychology Program. Domains were developed to reflect those set forth by the National Association of School Psychologists (2010) and to address all standards required by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (2001). Furthermore, this portfolio documents my experience as a practicing school psychology intern amidst the rapidly growing population of Latino children in California. I share challenges and successes in the role of the school psychologist as well as the public school system in adapting services and supports to meet the unique cultural, linguistic, and educational needs of students and families.

According to the California Department of Education (2014a), Latino students comprised 53.25% of all student enrollment in the 2013-2014 school year. In addition, of all English Learners in California public schools, 84.24% speak Spanish (California Department of Education, 2014b). As these numbers continue to rise, schools have been required to adapt their curriculum and services in order to develop effective systems of support necessary to meet their needs. Such changes are evident in the elementary school that served as my primary school site during my internship year. This school is a K-6th grade, full-service community school located in a high-need, urban setting. I fulfilled all
responsibilities of a school psychologist while under the supervision of my site supervisor, a Spanish-bilingual school psychologist. According to 2013-2014 enrollment at this school, 91% of students are Latino of predominately Mexican or Central American descent, 71% are considered English Language Learners (ELL) with Spanish as a primary language, and 100% of students are eligible for free and reduced lunch. My responsibilities as the school psychology intern included conducting psychoeducational evaluations for special education services, providing behavior support, individual counseling, and implementing reading interventions. In addition, consultation and collaboration were integral to supporting student learning, at the individual and school-wide levels. The remainder of my internship hours, equaling approximately one school day, was completed at a 6-8th grade middle school serving a diverse student population from various ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. At this site, my role consisted primarily of conducting psychoeducational re-evaluations for special education services with students who presented with complex learning challenges.

Given the high number of English Language Learners (ELL) and Spanish-speaking parents at my primary school site, the majority of services I provided were in Spanish. Thus, my skills in bilingual service delivery developed significantly during the school year. Of all the knowledge and training I received through my HSU coursework and practica experience, this is the area that I developed the most in my internship year. As a result, I firmly believe that completing an internship with a supervising bilingual school psychologist is essential to prepare for future bilingual service delivery. My supervisor provided me with valuable insights into the complexities of dual-language
backgrounds, skill development with literacy instruction in primary and secondary languages, and best practices in conducting appropriate and ethical assessments for bilingual children. Such knowledge can only be acquired through years of experience in the field.

Upon beginning my internship, I had a developing knowledge base of culturally competent practices acquired through my HSU coursework. Through site supervision and experience, I was then able to build upon this skillset. At the elementary school, I found that these skills were easily applied as a culturally responsive school environment was already established that created a foundation for positive school-family relationships. Most notable is the language support that is offered to parents who are predominately Spanish–speaking. The majority of the school staff is bilingual and meetings are held primarily in Spanish. In addition, the elementary school offers an alternative education program for students in grades K-3 whose native language is Spanish. The Transitional Bilingual Education program (TBE) consists of academic instruction primarily in Spanish with lessons to develop skills in English. In mid-3rd grade, curriculum and materials transition to English only. TBE is just one program available for ELL students, while others include dual-language and Structured English Immersion (SEI). Developing instructional programs and curriculum that best meet the educational and language needs of ELL students has been given increasing focus in order to support student learning. A meta-analysis conducted by Cheung and Slavin (2012) indicated across several studies that English reading skills of Spanish-dominant students developed equally well in later grades after participating in TBE programs as with Structured English Immersion (SEI),
where instruction is primarily in English. Thus, academic instruction in student’s primary language allows for increased access to learning as students develop academic language and skills in English, and result in reading outcomes comparable to their monolingual (English) peers.

Given that the vast majority of students at the elementary school were from a dual-language background and many participated in the TBE program, English language proficiency was a critical factor when assessing for a possible learning disability. Thus, when conducting psychoeducational evaluations, I set forth considerable effort in determining whether such factors as developing English language skills, limited experience with academic instruction in a secondary language, experience with instruction in both languages, or an underlying learning disability impacted academic skill development. Factors to consider include primary language, language of the household, language(s) used in social settings, language(s) of instruction, and response to intervention supports, among others (Ortiz, 2004). Product 3 of my portfolio consists of an initial comprehensive psychoeducational evaluation for a Spanish-bilingual student in the 2nd grade. This student was enrolled in the TBE program with academic instruction in Spanish, yet received additional reading support four times per week in English. In addition, she had a history of speech and language needs. Thus, when determining if she met eligibility for academic support as a student with a Specific Learning Disability (SLD), I considered the impact of all of these factors on her capacity to make academic progress. At the Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting, I shared the assessment results in Spanish with her mother and explained eligibility for special
education services. Working with parents and providing them with explanations as to their child’s skill levels and needs in Spanish is a critical component of bilingual service delivery. This is a skill that I have needed to practice and seek considerable guidance from my site supervisor in order to hone to a level of proficiency. Again, I believe that only an experienced bilingual school psychologist can provide insights into the most effective way to share such complex information with parents that is accurate and understandable.

Another challenge that exists when conducting Spanish-bilingual assessments is the limited availability and quality of assessment tools. When conducting assessments for monolingual (English) children from mainstream cultural backgrounds, school psychologists have the opportunity to select from an array of measures based on the presenting needs of the student, reliability and validity of the tests, and norming populations. Given the rising numbers of Spanish-bilingual students who may require appropriate assessments in their native/primary language, NASP published an article this year outlining the various challenges that school psychologists confront when selecting tests with sound psychometric properties for their intended use (Carlson, 2015). Such factors include the impact of the student’s country of origin on culturally-loaded tests, lack of separate population norms for Spanish tests translated from English, and the variable quality of translated test items, among others. In addition, this challenge is further compounded in school districts with an already limited availability of tests due to budget constraints, proportion of ELL students, as well as the number of school
psychologists who possess the necessary language proficiency required to administer these tools.

To support student learning, for the past five years the elementary school has implemented a Response to Intervention (RtI) system. RtI is a multi-tiered approach for providing students with early intervening supports to address academic, social-emotional, and behavioral needs. Prior to scheduling a Student Study Team (SST) meeting with parents to discuss concerns or make formal referrals for intensive services (i.e. mental health, psychoeducational assessment), teachers are expected to meet with their grade level representative, implement interventions, and monitor progress. When a student exhibits needs that require more immediate intervention, an SST meeting is held to discuss concerns and provide supports. Product 4 documents my role as a team member in facilitating a collaborative, RtI approach to develop a positive, safe, and supportive learning environment for a child and his peers. Academic and counseling supports were provided, and I developed a behavior intervention plan that reinforced positive behavior in the classroom. After 8 weeks of intervention with comprehensive supports in place, the student displayed an increase in time-on-task and was achieving grade level progress in all academic areas, according to data collection and teacher report.

Another component of the RtI system is called the CARE team. This is comprised of the Principal, Resource Specialist (RSP), School Psychologist, Speech Language Pathologist (SLP), Intervention Specialist, School Counselor, and lower (grades K-3) and upper grade level representatives (grades 4-6). CARE meetings occur monthly to discuss all students of concern (academic, social-emotional, and behavioral). Service providers
and school personnel collaborate on supports, while maintaining student and family confidentiality, and determine which students or families require more intense supports or are in need of referral services. In addition, updates are shared with regards to programs, trainings, and new district mandates. My role as the school psychologist on this team was to facilitate positive collaboration, assist in identifying risk and protective factors which may be impacting learning and development, recommend interventions, and to be a resource for Response to Intervention (RtI). Early in the school year, I met with the Principal and the Intervention Specialist to share with them components of a successful RtI system. This information was then integrated into the existing RtI framework. Available school and community programs were organized into each tier, new interventions were monitored for an appropriate length of time, and RtI became a common language in the school.

For students with significant processing deficits, general education supports may not meet the intensity of their learning needs so that academic skills develop at a rate far lower than their typically-developing peers (Joseph, 2007). Such was the case for the child who is discussed in Product 5 of my portfolio. This student comes from a dual-language background so that developing English language skills in early school years likely impacted acquisition of reading skills in English. However, language was not the primary factor affecting academic progress. Results of the psychoeducational evaluation for this three-year review for special education services revealed a significant processing deficit in phonological awareness. According to a meta-analysis conducted by the National Reading Panel (Ehri et al., 2001), phonemic awareness is a primary skill for
acquisition of reading skills. Thus, while this student displayed age appropriate cognitive ability as 10-year-old 4th grader, he was reading at the Kindergarten level. He was, in essence, a “non-reader”. Thus, he required intensive, individual, direct reading instruction in order to build decoding skills. Materials from the Lindamood-Bell Seeing Stars program (Bell, 2013) were available at the elementary school, a program in which I had received specialized training and experience over the past 5 years. This program specifically targets both phonological (sound awareness) and orthographic (visual awareness/memory) processing skills. Across 8 week of bi-weekly intervention using the Seeing Stars program, the student developed decoding skills (i.e. letter-sound identification, vowel and consonant digraphs), improved oral reading fluency (5 to 10 words correct per minute), and a moderate increase was gained in phoneme segmentation skills, a specific phonological awareness skill.

Serving students with exceptional learning needs, dual-language skills, and trauma experiences create incredible challenges for school psychologists. In order to provide compassionate and effective services and supports, specialized knowledge and skills are required, as well as emotional resilience to continue this work when faced with seemingly insurmountable challenges. In my internship school district, students and families experience a range of chronic and acute trauma including poverty, community and domestic violence, and tragic loss. There is a strong system of support among the school psychologists in my internship district, which I believe is created by the shared understanding of the challenges we each face in our practice serving students and families from high-need communities. To support one another, consultation among
practitioners in the district is a common and expected practice. In addition, school psychologists frequently disseminate valuable information regarding available community resources at staff meetings, via email, and public postings in the shared offices. Information that I have shared with families include how to access free vision exams and glasses for their children, apply for regional center support, and access mental health services through Medi-Cal. One particular case entailed locating counseling services for a family in crisis. After a chain of phone calls between agencies, I located a program that met their specific needs. Mental health services were targeted to support families of young children who have experienced physical abuse, at no cost, and sessions were provided in Spanish. Assisting families who may lack the organizational or English skills necessary to navigate the system is a common role for school psychologists serving high-need communities. We facilitate access and connect families with needed supports.

The role of the school psychologist in dynamic and depends on the needs of the students, families, school, and community. Our primary role it to create safe and positive learning environments to support learning and academic achievement. Within a school day, we may shift between several roles from providing mental health interventions to consultation with multiple service providers, while also having the skills to quickly adapt and respond to individual and school crises. In addition, we continually update our practices according to state and national standards, legal changes, as well as adopt the most recent evidence-based practices to ensure we provide quality services to support all students and families. Thus, this portfolio provides evidence of my competency as a school psychologist in providing comprehensive, culturally competent services.
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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<tr>
<th>Portfolio Product Title</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Comprehensive Triennial Evaluation for a Student with Complex Learning Needs</td>
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<td>2. Triennial Psychoeducational Reports for Students with Adaptive Skill Delays</td>
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<td>3. Initial Bilingual Psychoeducational Evaluation</td>
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<td>4. Successful Collaboration at the Tier II Level: Behavioral Support</td>
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<td>5. Reading Intervention with a 4th Grade Student: A Case Study</td>
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CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This culminating project reflects skills and knowledge I have acquired through
formal training through Humboldt State University (HSU) coursework and professional
experience gained during practicums and my internship year. Work products demonstrate
skills across 10 domains developed by the HSU School Psychology Program, thus
providing evidence of my competency in providing comprehensive school psychological
services. In addition, several products document unique challenges and successes I
experienced in serving a predominately Latino, English Language Learner (ELL)
population in a high-need, urban community in California.

While I applied much what I learned through coursework about culturally
competence services and legal and ethical practices when serving diverse student
populations, I acquired a significant amount of knowledge though my internship duties
and supervision with my district supervisor, a Spanish-bilingual school psychologist. My
experiences in serving this population and skills that I developed during the school year
deepened my understanding of the critical importance for more practitioners from diverse
cultural and linguistic backgrounds, as well as those who can provide Spanish-bilingual
school psychological services. Latinos remain one of the fastest growing populations in
California, surpassing white non-Hispanics last year as the largest ethnic group in the
state (Brown, 2014). Thus, there is a heightened need for school psychologists who
possess the relevant skills and knowledge to effectively serve this population.

Currently, there remains a vastly disproportionate number of practitioners from
diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. In 2010, nearly 90% of practicing school psychologists identified themselves as “Caucasian” (Castillo, Curtis, & Gelley, 2010). Thus, my recommendation for the current state of the field of school psychology is that training programs in California and other states with growing numbers of diverse student populations must actively recruit applicants who may diversify the field. The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) is currently advocating for this endeavor. NASP issued a position statement in 2009 urging universities and school districts to employ strategies for both recruiting and hiring applicants from diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds (NASP, 2009). In addition, training on assessment of ELL students should be given particular consideration in school psychology programs to ensure new practitioners acquire the foundational skills needed to serve this growing demographic.

While the field of school psychology must expand to meet the needs of ELL students, so must the curriculum, program options, evidence-based interventions, and assessment tools. Thus, continued and vigorous research is needed to ensure we are providing all students with effective educational practices necessary to attain academic achievement. As a new practitioner joining the field, I will continue to seek professional development opportunities and utilize available resources. Such practices are essential so that I may possess the most current information needed to provide quality, comprehensive, and culturally competent school psychological services to all students and families. As a school psychologist providing Spanish-bilingual services, I will continue to expand my knowledge of bilingualism and academic skill development, and
develop my professional language ability in Spanish that is needed to provide translation and interpretation services related to special education and student supports. In addition, as an ongoing legal and ethical responsibility, I will remain current with new resources, research, and laws pertaining to ELL students. Finally, reading instruction and assessment is a passion of mine that I will continue to explore and hone my skills in order to implement effective practices at the individual and school-wide levels.

Given the achievement gap that remains evident among student groups, there also exists a personal and ethical obligation to provide additional support and encouragement to Latino, African American, and Native American youth. Within my role as a school psychologist, as well as my personal obligation to children from diverse backgrounds, my hope is to serve as a mentor, role-model, and advocate within the school system to provide all students with supports they need to maximize their potential and attain academic success.
REFERENCES


