EMBRACING BEST PRACTICES WHILE UTILIZING A MULTIDIMENSIONAL, 
DATA-DRIVEN APPROACH IN PROVIDING COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL 
PSYCHOLOGY SERVICES FOR AT-RISK STUDENTS IN HIGH SCHOOL AND 
CONTINUATION SCHOOL SETTINGS

By

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ABSTRACT

EMBRACING BEST PRACTICES WHILE UTILIZING A MULTIDIMENSIONAL, DATA-DRIVEN APPROACH IN PROVIDING COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY SERVICES FOR AT-RISK STUDENTS IN HIGH SCHOOL AND CONTINUATION SCHOOL SETTINGS

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This paper dually represents the culmination of professional experiences and development that occurred over the span of a yearlong internship and serves as an overview of the encompassing roles and responsibilities of a school psychologist. Final products emanating from a yearlong internship are reviewed and used to demonstrate continued growth and capability ascribing to the ten domains set forth by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) as required areas of documented competency for school psychologists. Interwoven throughout all selected products is the emphasis on data-based decision making and the importance of the school psychologist’s role as an integral team player in rendering preventative and intervention services to ensure positive and successful educational trajectories for students.
I would like to thank the faculty members and professors of Humboldt State University, specifically: Emily Sommerman, Lisa Miller, Amy Gordon and Jeff Lough. Your support and expertise have been instrumental in ensuring my success in internship and beyond. Emily Sommerman, your kindness and calm demeanor are qualities that I aspire to embody in my own practice and life. I am greatly appreciative of the incredible amount of knowledge you imparted, particularly regarding mental health etiology, wellbeing, and interventions. You always seemed to say the right thing to help me even when I floundered with finding writing inspiration. Lisa Miller, your thorough supervision in fieldwork prepared me more than I'd ever imagined for my internship and I know that your modeling of essential skills in practicum provided me an excellent framework as I entered into internship. Amy Gordon, your authenticity and willingness to let me explore learning opportunities in practicum is something I will always remember gratefully. The detailed feedback you provided on my reports elevated my abilities and eased my transition into internship. Jeff Lough, thank you for being a strong voice of reason, you helped me to remain balanced while encouraging me to remain thoughtful and curious in my mindset during internship.

I would also like to extend my appreciation to Dani Mesaros and Rebecca Smith. Thank you both for your continual support and guidance in internship. Your incredible knowledge of the field and generosity with your time has shaped me into a more capable
and confident school psychologist. Thank you for holding the space to ask questions without judgment and for modeling how to positively balance life, work and stress.

I would also like to thank Kellie Wall. You are a true and dear friend. The last three years would not have been the same without your emotional support and good natured, but levelheaded approach to life. Your friendship alleviated the growing pains of internship.

To my twin sister Maggie, who “gets” me like no one else. Thank you for being that person who always laughs with me and for being willing to go camping, even when it rained. Our sisterhood has helped me to be stronger and more resilient. I love you.

It is with deep gratitude that I would like to thank Barbara and David Sykes, my mentors and my friends. I am so incredibly lucky to have you both in my life. Thank you for believing in me, even when I did not. Your friendship and guidance have helped me immeasurably and has made my future brighter, while positively changing the course of my life. I will always hold your gifts in my heart and plan on paying it forward.

Finally, to my daughter Evangelina Sky, I dedicate this culminating portfolio project. We have come such a long way together my Evie girl. Through your eyes, I again learned to see the magic that surrounds us in this world. Your insatiable curiosity and compassionate spirit is my inspiration for continuing to expand the boundaries of what I think I can do. I cannot wait for all the adventures we will share together in the future. My love for you is greater than the whole Universe!

Again, a heartfelt thank you to each of you.
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Table 1: Domains of Knowledge and Competence in School Psychology Documented in Each Portfolio Product

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SIGNIFICANCE, OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

This portfolio, consisting of four selected products demonstrates capability in the ten domains delineated by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP, 2010) as required areas of competency for school psychologists and meets the standards specified by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC, 2001). The Humboldt State University (HSU) School Psychology Program offers a rigorous, three-year specialist master’s level program, aligning to NASP and CCTC standards. Two years of academic courses combined with practicum provide a comprehensive education, leading to a yearlong internship with a minimum of 1,200 hours to be completed, where experience is gained in providing school psychology services. Each of the four products contained in this body of work were chosen as they reflect my aptitude and encapsulate a meaningful and essential learning process in becoming a competent school psychologist.

My internship took place in a suburban district, neighboring both large cities and growing rural areas, located in a primarily affluent area, with a resident population slightly over 60,000. In this district, approximately 8% of students are eligible for special education services due to varying disabilities as conceptualized by educational code, and a high number of general and special education students experience clinically significant internalizing symptomology (anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation), with students frequently expressing heightened anxiety in the face of meeting rigorous academic expectations from their families and community.
Throughout the school year, my site placements fluctuated, which provided ample opportunity to develop a sound understanding of the role of the school psychologist. My placements ranged from three different high schools, a continuation school for students aged 18-22, one middle school and several elementary schools where I worked together with other school psychologists to provide comprehensive services. Student enrollment among each of these schools varied greatly, from approximately 170 to over 1,900 enrolled students. Each school housed specific programs serving diverse student needs, such as: Special Day Classes (SDC), self-contained special day classroom for students with severe disabilities (SMD), Independent Living Skills (ILS), Autism and English Language Learner (ELL) classrooms, and varying programs for students with emotional and behavioral disabilities.

My alternating school placements, while initially daunting, provided crucial opportunities in providing school-based services to diverse populations, which is demonstrated in the selected products contained in my portfolio. While these products comprehensively address all ten domains of competency set forth by NASP, in an effort to best serve students and families, my role as a school psychologist intern primarily consisted of assisting students through the provision of mental health services, conducting multidisciplinary psycho-educational evaluations of monolingual and bilingual students in determining special education eligibility and services, collaborating with school staff members and outside agencies, providing “push-in” support in
classrooms, and in implementing Tier I, II and III interventions addressing multiple variables correlated to school failure at an individual to school-wide level.

In order to be successful in these endeavors, I developed strong working relationships and an effective and collaborative communication style with the special education director and program specialists and engaged in consultation with special and general education departments, as well as principals and other school professionals district-wide. Additionally, I relied on data gathering and interpretation to inform student progress and strove to remain cognizant of the comprehensive role of the school psychologist, while adhering to best practices in the aforementioned areas. In doing so, my internship provided rich opportunities to hone my skills in this profession and to develop a deep understanding of the implementation processes and differences amongst the site-based programs available in the district.

The Multifaceted Role of the School Psychologist

School psychologists as described by the National Association of School Psychology “…help children and youth succeed academically, socially, behaviorally, and emotionally” (Harrison & Prus, 2008). In order to achieve this deceivingly simple premise, school psychologists utilize their training in psychology and child development to provide mental health services, such as individual or group counseling, conduct psycho-educational assessments measuring cognitive, processing, academic, social-
emotional and adaptive functioning levels leading to determination of special education eligibility and directly tying indicated interventions to areas of student need.

School psychologists additionally enter into consultation with other school professionals and collaborate in identifying and absolving academic barriers to learning, facilitate and implement interventions, while collecting, aggregating and interpreting data and engaging in continuous progress monitoring to assess effectiveness of services, intervention and/or programs. Further, school psychologists seek to inform and update their practice by engaging in professional development and learning, while melding best practices to the realities of the school psychology profession in the school system. Finally, school psychologists recognize the importance of working from within a team centered approach and enter into collaborative professional relationships with educators, families, and other professionals to establish and cultivate safe and engaging educational environments for all students (Harrison & Prus, 2008). It is in this sense, that school psychologists are uniquely prepared and capable of meeting the widely varying and diverse needs of students.

**Provision of Mental Health Services in the High School Setting**

Mental health and the provision of services aiming to increase student wellbeing proved to be a focal point within my role as a school psychologist intern and is
documented throughout my products. Notably, halfway into the year, I became the sole provider of Educationally Related Mental Health Services (ERMHS) at a school site supporting intervention programs for students identified with emotional disabilities (i.e., Emotional Disturbance under educational code) and behavioral difficulties. Research dictates that a positive sense of wellbeing and mental health is an essential cornerstone for successful educational trajectories for students (Greenberg et al., 2003; Rossen and Cowan, 2015). My experiences in internship cemented my understanding of the importance of supporting students emotionally. I came to understand firsthand that students who do not enjoy a sense of personal wellbeing are at significant risk compared to their same-age peers in experiencing academic difficulties and more negative life outcomes (Suldo, Thalji, & Ferron, 2011; Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg & Walberg, 2004).

My first product is an initial psycho-educational evaluation report of a student diagnosed with social anxiety disorder who struggled significantly at school. This case morphed into a one-on-one counseling case conceptualization, which I incorporated into a second product, demonstrating impact over time. These products illustrate my role in providing individual counseling services and explores the process of finding, modifying and implementing a research-based curriculum addressing social anxiety, in order to best serve this student, while using data to record the progress that occurred. In doing so, this product exemplifies my knowledge in utilizing data-based decision making in interpreting social-emotional data and in engaging in family, school and community
collaboration in an effort to provide wraparound services for this student. Over time, the impact that occurred in this case highlights my efforts in consultation and collaboration with staff members, in the provision of mental health services, and in my ability to use my knowledge of sound research practices and technology to effectively provide efficacious and research-based mental health services.

**Embracing Best Practices in Bilingual Assessment**

While the provision of mental health services is essential, school psychologists additionally conduct assessments to pinpoint educational concerns that are unrelated to mental health concerns. In any evaluation, the purpose of psycho-educational assessment is to garner data and information that aids in determining eligibility for special education services and to tie indicated intervention directly to areas of need. Evaluators of bilingual student assessments are uniquely tasked with the aforementioned purpose, while also required to further inquire into a bilingual student’s language proficiencies, in both the native and acquired languages, in order to accurately identify the presence of a learning disability, and to rule out language acquisition difficulties as the underlying cause of academic struggles.

My third product, a multidisciplinary initial psycho-educational report, explores the evaluation process of a bilingual tenth grade student referred for special education assessment due to significant academic concerns. This product represents the steps
required to conduct a fair psycho-educational assessment that uncovers useful
information directly aiding in determining eligibility for special education and in
conceptualizing subsequent intervention and services.

As a monolingual speaker, I recognized that I was limited in some respects, in my
ability to understand if the student’s academic struggles were related to a learning
disability, or alternatively, if the student possessed language acquisition issues that
created the observed academic difficulties. In delving into the available research on best
practices of bilingual or English Language Learner (ELL) assessment, it became clear
that school psychologists must embrace and remain knowledgeable of best practice
assessment tools and interpretation of assessment data to effectively address a suspected
learning disability. To do so, school psychologists seek to understand the linguistic
development of students and how this may influence assessment findings and the
resulting cognitive profile of bilingual students (Flanagan and Ortiz, 2013).

According to Flanagan and Ortiz (2013) utilization of the Cultural-Language
Interpretive Matrix (C-LIM), is one such method that is particularly useful in parsing out
language acquisition levels from true cognitive abilities students may possess. Secondly,
using assessment tools that can be administered in both English and a native language are
essential in further understanding students’ linguistic development. With this in mind, I
utilized the Cultural-Language Interpretive Matrix in the context of the Cattell-Horn
Carroll (CHC) Theory to develop a deeper understanding of the student’s underlying
cognitive processes and overall cognitive profile, where test results that assessed higher
level cultural knowledge and language ability were compared to test scores requiring very little language ability. Additionally, tests heavily loaded with cultural knowledge and higher order language skill were administered in English and Spanish (the student’s native language) with the aid of a translator, to parse out language acquisition levels of both languages and to determine the level of language proficiency the student presented with in her native and acquired languages. Throughout the evaluation process, I carefully analyzed the pattern of strengths and weaknesses this student demonstrated in tests that were heavily loaded with cultural knowledge. Through careful synthesis of assessment data, I was able to deliberate with confidence, the student’s pattern of normative and personal strengths and weaknesses in her underlying cognitive processes, while noting that reasoning with language, was a personal strength. By following these steps, I was able to identify a cognitive profile suggesting the presence of a learning disability and ruling out language acquisition as a primary cause of academic difficulties.

A statement released by the Indiana Association of School Principals (2014) notes, “…assessment of English Learners is a complex process involving the collection of information from several sources and in multiple languages. The multi-disciplinary team needs to be knowledgeable of best practices… and utilize all gathered information to make equitable… decisions” (p. 2). I strove to accomplish this in the product at hand, and worked diligently in administering accurate assessments, interpreting those results with the student’s cultural background in mind, and in synthesizing and aggregating cognitive results with processing, academic, social-emotional and dynamic-based
assessment results. This product demonstrates my abilities in understanding the legal, ethical and professional boundaries of the profession, in making data-based decisions regarding cognitive and processing assessment data and in understanding the diversity in human development and learning.

**Re-Envisioning the Special Education Referral Process Through Bolstering General Education Support Systems**

Provision of intervention services to address academic, social-emotional and behavioral areas of need are common services offered within a school setting to support students in reaching their potential. Upah and Tilly (2002) define a school-based intervention as “a set of procedures and strategies designed to improve student performance with the intent of reducing the student’s problem” (p. 483). Upah and Tilly further expand this definition by suggesting that intervention “can and should” be implanted in both general education and special education settings (p. 483); however, school psychologists may be overlooked as experts in providing key services aligning to Tier I and II preventative and intervention services to general education students, in order to prevent school failure and in developing a consistent and effective referral process for special education assessment (Goldman, 2003).

Within a multidimensional model, utilizing interventions at a Tier II level can be particularly effective in mediating special education referrals by providing additional support to students, monitoring progress, and moving forward with special education assessment if all available supports and appropriate interventions have been exhausted.
and demonstrate minimal student progress. When general education supports are lacking, or interventions fail to be implemented with fidelity, an influx in special education referrals for students, not necessarily possessing learning disabilities, but rather requiring additional academic support, may be the ending result.

Such is the case seen in my final impact product, occurring at a high school experiencing a disparate referral rate significantly higher in comparison to other high schools in the district. Historically, an impacted referral process had been noted as an issue at this particular school site and in order to combat this concern, past and current school psychologists organize, implement and facilitate an academic-based intervention for students requiring more individualized, extensive support and direct skills teaching (e.g., organizational and study skills).

This fourth product, demonstrating impact over time, is a program evaluation of a general education intervention that I co-facilitated and implemented targeting freshman youth at-risk for failing multiple core classes. Within the program evaluation, a description of the process of developing and implementing a Tier II general education intervention serving students at-risk for academic failure is described, where stakeholder buy-in across teachers, students and administration faculty is addressed. In analyzing baseline data, midpoint and post data confirmed that this intervention directly impacted the referral process for special education assessment and significantly lowered the false positive referral rate (students assessed that do not meet eligibility criteria for learning disabilities in special education), by significantly lowering the percentage of students
referred for assessment and increasing the rate of identification of a disability of those referred students. Students in this intervention showed significant academic success and increased autonomy in homework completion, studying and passing of core academic classes. Upon aggregating data from multiple sources over time, this intervention further highlighted the need for increased immersion of school psychologists within the general education setting in providing preventative or early intervention services within my district. This product exemplifies my understanding of the foundations of education and curriculum and the various roles of general and special education teachers and administrative staff in our school system.

While the aforementioned products are withheld from this paper to protect the confidentiality of students and their families, they are solely accessible by HSU School Psychology Program committee members and supervisors. The described four products completed in internship are outlined on Table 1 which serves as a visual representation of products completed in internship and how they satisfy the ten domain requirement for NASP accreditation.
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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<td>1. Psycho-educational Report: An Evaluation of a Bilingual Student</td>
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<td>2. Initial Psycho-Educational Report (Emotional Disturbance)</td>
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<td>3. Individual Counseling Case Conceptualization</td>
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<td>4. General Education Intervention Program Evaluation</td>
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CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Internship represents the conclusion of a highly rigorous academic program and is the last step in becoming a credentialed school psychologist. My portfolio, consisting of four products described in detail above, signify the culmination of experiences in internship and are used to illustrate professional growth and adherence to the ten domains set forth by the National Association of School Psychology (NASP, 2010) and incorporate the required standards endorsed by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC, 2001). This paper is therefore used to provide an overlay of the meaningful themes immersed in the four products created in internship and describes how these products are demonstrative of my capabilities in providing comprehensive school psychology services.

While selected products may seem dissimilar at first glance, each product showcases the multifaceted roles school psychologists play and must embrace in order to best serve students and their families. By collecting and aggregating data, we can demonstrate both areas of need and student progress. These products all rely on the collection and accurate interpretation of data across multiple raters and settings, while aligning to best practices in their respective domains. Utilizing data-driven approaches, particularly within a multidimensional framework of conceptualizing services and interventions, will aid in informing student progress, improve service provision and adheres to best practice aligning to NASP standards.
While entering into the professional domain as a school psychologist is a highly momentous event, it is critical to understand the nuanced roles school psychologists undertake, and to remain open to continual professional development in these areas. Internship allowed me to become aware of the range of perceptions of the role of the school psychologist between districts and statewide. Now, nearing the completion of a yearlong internship consisting of over 1,300 hours, I am tremendously grateful for the guided professional experiences encountered within my district, and for the opportunities to solidify my professional identity. I very much look forward to future development and growth as a school psychologist and as an active team player and advocate for all students in our schools and communities.
REFERENCES


