SUPPORTING THE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOLCHILDREN
WITH AN EMPHASIS ON ESTABLISHING HELPING RELATIONSHIPS

By

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Abstract

SUPPORTING THE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOLCHILDREN WITH AN EMPHASIS ON ESTABLISHING HELPING RELATIONSHIPS

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This reflection paper serves to examine my work as a school psychologist intern enrolled in Humboldt State University’s School Psychology Program. Four work products were selected to create a portfolio that demonstrates my competence, skills, and knowledge to work as a full-fledged school psychologist. My work throughout this project and internship aligns with the ten domains of school psychology in accordance with accreditation standards developed by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP, 2010) and the California Commission of Teacher Credentialing (CCTC, 2001). More specifically, this project demonstrates the use of a comprehensive skill set to support the varying needs of students in a rural district in California, documenting efforts that aim to promote successful student outcomes academically, emotionally, socially, and behaviorally. Special emphasis on building and establishing relationships with students, parents, school staff, and other stakeholders is emphasized throughout this work.
Acknowledgements

Thank you to everyone who helped me along this adventure known as my school psychology training.

Thanks to Lisa Miller, my internship university supervisor, for sharing her knowledge and experience with me. Lisa’s endless hours of hard work in supporting the continuation of this program are not overlooked and are greatly appreciated. I would also like to thank my undergraduate mentor, Dr. Jason Immekus. My academic study of school psychology began with you before I entered this program. Thank you for believing in me, taking me under your wing, and providing me with a head start on my professional training. Thanks to Dr. Peter Stoll, my field work university supervisor, for having provided me a space to self-reflect and to share my struggles and successes. I am grateful for your warm presence and caring nature. Thank you, Dr. Emily Sommerman, my Committee Chair, for being a source of understanding and kindness and providing me the most helpful support to finish this project these last few months. I would also like to thank my cohort members who inspire me to be better than myself. I have no doubt that each of you will continue to use your own unique strengths to do great things throughout your careers and in life.

Lastly, gratitude must also be extended to my family for always being there for me. There are no words that adequately express how much your love and support has meant to me.
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Significance, Objectives, and Methodology

Over the course of my training toward becoming a school psychologist, I have learned that relationships are critical for efforts that aim to promote successful student outcomes. As one of my professors, Dr. Emily Sommerman, brilliantly stated, “Relationships are currency for school psychologists” to engage in meaningful and impactful practice. Alongside the use of research-based practices, relationships are the cornerstone for effective delivery of services.

Relationships within the scope of school psychology in regard to both direct service and consultation have been termed helping relationships (McGivern, Ray-Subramanian & Auster, 2008). While there are many factors that influence helping relationships, several “helper factors” and “helper strategies” have been identified from the research literature that promote effective relationships (McGivern, Ray-Subramanian & Auster, 2008; Norcross, 2002). Helper factors include personal attributes, such as warmth, genuineness, and trustworthiness. Helper strategies include empathy, positive regard (i.e., acceptance of others as individuals), self-disclosure, and feedback. This is important to consider in light of the research on positive adult relationships and its significant impact on resilience in children (see Doll, Zucker, & Brehm, 2004).

Furthermore, establishing helping relationships with parents, school staff, and other stakeholders is also imperative for shaping positive student outcomes. School psychologists conduct much of their work in teams, and as the African proverb rings true, “It takes a village to raise a child.”
According to the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) (2014), school psychologists advance student success through a variety of roles within a cultural sensitive framework. These roles include assessing student academic, behavioral, and social emotional needs and determining appropriate supports, promoting a positive school climate, and supporting family-school partnerships.

Ten domains within school psychology have been developed that align with the accreditation standards set forth by NASP (2010) and the California Commission of Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) (2001). These domains cover a range of competencies within Humboldt State University’s School Psychology Program. These domains are: (1) Psychological Foundations; (2) Educational Foundations; (3) Legal, Ethical, and Professional Foundations; (4) Data-based Decision Making and Accountability I – Assessment/Intervention/Evaluation of Cognitive and Academic Skills; (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; and (10) Research and Technology.

In this past school year, I have been working as a school psychologist intern in a rural district in California. The work I have been engaged in encompasses the ten domains of school psychology previously mentioned. During my internship, I have been primarily working at two elementary schools. One of the schools serves approximately 360 students enrolled in grades K-5. Almost half of the students are White (46%). This school also serves students who are Hispanic (22%), Asian (15%), American Indian or
Alaska Native (8%), Black or African American (1%), and Filipino (.8%).

Approximately 79% of students are considered economically disadvantaged. The other school serves approximately 250 students in grades K-8. Most of the students are Hispanic (52%). This school also serves students who are White (31%), American Indian or Alaska Native (13%), Black or African American (.8%) and Asian (.8%). Many of the students are English Language Learners (35%) and approximately 81% of students are considered economically disadvantaged.

As previously stated, establishing and maintaining relationships with students, parents, staff, and other stakeholders has been an important aspect in conducting my work as a school psychologist intern. In my portfolio I have compiled four work products that not only demonstrate my focus on relationships, but that also demonstrate competency within the ten domains of school psychology. In order to maintain confidentiality of the students and families whom I have worked with this past year, the products themselves are not included in this paper. Instead, only a brief description of each product is provided below. (See Table 1 on page 7 for a complete list of the four work products and their corresponding domains.)

My first product is a psycho-educational report that was a part of a multicultural student’s triennial evaluation. It is the result of utilizing multiple assessment methods to obtain a picture of the student’s current cognitive, academic, and social-emotional functioning to determine the student’s special education eligibility and services. Specifically, this meant reviewing records and background information; making classroom observations; interviewing the student, parent, and teachers; administering and
interpreting social, emotional and behavioral assessment tools; and synthesizing all of the information collected to form a cohesive picture of the student. This student was an English Language Learner. The primary language spoken at home was Spanish. He was born and raised in the United States; however, his parents had emigrated from Mexico. I made sure to include culturally sensitive tools for this assessment. I also took the opportunity to communicate in Spanish with the mother of the student in order to collect information needed for the assessment and to answer any questions or concerns. I was able to re-connect the mother with the Regional Center and invite a representative to the IEP (Individualized Education Plan) meeting. As a team, we worked together to address the needs of this student.

My second product is a classwide intervention targeting whole-class behavioral concerns. The consultee was a teacher who was struggling with classroom management. I consulted with the classroom teacher and used a class-wide survey as a pre-test measure to get a better understanding of the variables contributing to, and impeding, the teacher’s ability to effectively manage his class. Throughout our conversations, the teacher and I engaged in collaborative problem solving in order to improve the social and learning environment of his classroom. We created a list of strategies that he could implement that were “doable” for the classroom teacher. I listened to him, encouraged a collaborative relationship, and assisted him in implementing various strategies. Compared to the pre-test results, the results of the post-test indicated improvements in student behavior as a result of our work together.
My third product is a math intervention designed to increase the multiplication fluency of three fourth grade students. Interviews were conducted with each student, their teacher, and their parents. Data was collected prior to and during the intervention to determine goals for each student and to evaluate progress. The intervention was designed after searching for and evaluating the research on math multiplication fluency. Specifically, this intervention was a replication of a study conducted by Skarr and colleagues (2014), which increased the multiplication fluency of three students in the elementary grades. I used computers and all essential software and hardware needed to develop the materials for this intervention. Social validity was established during the development phase of this intervention by determining the intervention outcome (i.e., multiplication fluency) as an important skill, as reported by the classroom teacher based on the fourth grade math curriculum. While the intervention is ongoing, current results suggest that the intervention is producing positive outcomes for all students.

My fourth product is an individual counseling intervention for a third grade student. She was referred by the IEP team regarding concerns in self-regulation. Prior to starting our first session, I interviewed both the teacher and parent and conducted observations to get better understanding of their concerns. I also began building rapport and establishing a positive relationship with this student. The counseling intervention involved meeting weekly with this student to help her better identify and recognize her emotional state. This intervention included evidence-based practices including visual supports and self-management. A plan for generalization was also developed by
incorporating strategies and tools learned during counseling sessions into the classroom as the school year progressed.

I provided this direct service in order for this student to access her special education. As such, we went through the appropriate legal channels to provide this service for this student. The IEP team met during the student’s annual IEP meeting to discuss her overall progress, and the identified need of this student to improve her self-regulation was turned into an IEP goal. The IEP team agreed to include counseling as a service in order for her to make progress on this goal.
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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<td>1. Triennial Assessment for a Culturally Diverse Student</td>
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<td>2. Whole-class Intervention to Promote a Positive Learning Environment</td>
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<td>3. Math Intervention to Increase Multiplication Fluency</td>
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<td>4. Individual Counseling Intervention to Support Self-Regulation Skills</td>
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Conclusions and Recommendations

School psychologists provide direct and indirect services to promote successful outcomes for children and youth. During a yearlong internship, I compiled a portfolio of work samples that demonstrate my skills, knowledge, and competence within the ten domains of school psychology in order to fulfill graduation requirements as part of Humboldt State University’s School Psychology Program. My work was conducted alongside students, families, school staff, and others. Subsequently, relationships played an important role throughout my internship.

Based on my experience, I offer the following recommendations to establish and maintain positive relationships within the schools. My first recommendation is to encourage culturally sensitive practice. In our multicultural world, increasing our knowledge and awareness of our own culture, and the cultures of others, may help families to overcome barriers that hinder them from becoming active participants in their children’s education. This is an important consideration when building relationships with an increasingly diverse population.

Secondly, developing a strengths-based lens is not only important in creating positive relationships with parents, but also for creating individualized interventions. For the parents of struggling students, they are attending school meetings under less than favorable circumstances. They may be unaware of the problem-solving process, concerned for their child, and feel outnumbered by school staff during a meeting.
Developing a strengths-based approach may help to alleviate some parent discomfort, develop creative individualized interventions, and strengthen a family-school partnership.

Lastly, utilize counseling skills, both verbally (e.g., active listening, reflection of feelings, summarizing, paraphrasing) and nonverbally (e.g., culturally appropriate body language, vocal quality, visual/eye contact). My training at Humboldt State University has shown me that once a school psychologist steps foot on a school campus that, in a way, everyone on that campus is the school psychologist’s client. We indirectly assist students by supporting those who regularly work directly with students. The skills learned in both counseling and consultation classes permeate much of what a school psychologist does in a school. These skills are essential for building and maintaining helping relationships.
References


