ASSISTING SUCCESS: UNDERSTANDING AND AMELIORATING THE VARIETY OF COGNITIVE, ACADEMIC, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL CHALLENGES FACED BY STUDENTS OF VARYING AGES AND Backgrounds UTILIZING A PROBLEM-SOLVING, MULTI-DISCIPLINARY TEAM APPROACH ACROSS TEN DOMAINS OF PRACTICE

By

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ASSISTING SUCCESS: UNDERSTANDING AND AMELIORATING THE VARIETY OF COGNITIVE, ACADEMIC, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL CHALLENGES FACED BY STUDENTS OF VARYING AGES AND BACKGROUNDS UTILIZING A PROBLEM-SOLVING, MULTI-DISCIPLINARY TEAM APPROACH ACROSS TEN DOMAINS OF PRACTICE

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Students in public school must overcome a variety of challenges in order to achieve success and realize their full potential. Understanding and ameliorating the wide variety of challenges faced by modern students requires attention to many details and the integration of a variety of facts to paint a comprehensive picture of a student in the context of their individual situations and circumstances. Meeting this goal requires input and collaboration from a multi-disciplinary team, which may include general education teachers, special education teachers, resource specialists, speech pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, school psychologists, mental health service providers, administrators, and families, depending on the services required for individual students to benefit from their education. The following body of work seeks to demonstrate the skills and knowledge required of a school psychologist to effectively recognize and decrease the challenges faced by students today and assist them in achieving their full potential.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My journey to become a school psychologist would not have been possible without the love and support I have received from my family, friends, classmates, professors, supervisors, and colleagues. You have made me who I am, and I am forever grateful. You all have played an integral role in helping my dreams become a reality. Special thanks to Heather Walker, my sister, my roommate, my best friend, and my eternal confidant, I could not have done any of this without you.
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SIGNIFICANCE, OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

This body of work represents my endeavors to become an effective and compassionate school psychologist. Previously, I completed a practice portfolio that prepared me for the work expected from a practicing school psychologist. This work is significant for a number of reasons. School psychology, as a profession, seeks to understand modern students in their individual contexts as a means of assisting them in reaching their full potential, not only academically, but also socially, behaviorally, and as a contributing member of society. The work of a school psychologist also focuses on social justice for all students, seeking to give students equal access to education by closing the achievement gap and providing all students with an opportunity to learn and grow as students and as people. While compiling the various work products that make up this portfolio, special care was taken to ensure that Humboldt State University’s interpretation of each of the ten domains of practice outlined in the National Association of School Psychologists’ (NASP) practice model, integrated with the standards put forth by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC), were fully represented as documentation of my competence as a school psychologist. This practice model represents Humboldt State University’s understanding of both the CTC’s and NASP’s official policies regarding the delivery of school psychological services. These ten domains of practice include 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 and 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. These domains represent the expected scope of practice for a school psychologist. The body of work included in this document demonstrates my competence across these ten domains of practice in order to showcase my understanding of the requirements to be an effective school psychologist.

My internship, carried out as a credentialed employee of a county office of education in Northern California, provided me with many opportunities to hone my skills as a school psychologist. There are 40 school districts within this county, including 31 elementary districts, 3 high school districts, and 6 unified districts. The elementary districts send students to high school or unified districts, while unified districts provide services for K-12 students living within their boundaries. County run special education programs are separated into regions serving students with different challenges. Preschool students are served under the preschool region. Transition students, ages 18 to 22, are served under Region 1. Region 2 serves K-12 students with significant behavioral and emotional challenges. Elementary students with severe handicaps, who are medically fragile, and those with autism are served under Region 3. Middle school and high school students with severe handicaps or those who are medically fragile are served under Region 4. Each region has its own administrators, psychologists, teachers, and classroom sites located on comprehensive school campuses throughout the county. This configuration of county programs allowed me the opportunity to conduct assessments
involving students with a wide variety of challenges and strengths, though I primarily worked with students receiving services under Region 2. I was able to develop fantastic working relationships with many psychologists who possessed a variety of specialized skills. They each served as mentors throughout my internship.

In addition to the variety of assessments I was able to complete across regions as a credentialed employee, I had the opportunity to provide mental health services for each student in a Region 2 middle school classroom. These students were all boys in grades 6 through 8. My role was to provide the 120 minutes a month of individual and group counseling outlined in each student’s Individual Education Plan (IEP). The work I completed with these students yielded 2 work products for my portfolio. The first product includes the annual counseling summary that I completed for each student and presented at each annual IEP meeting throughout the school year. These counseling summaries include a brief section regarding the student’s background and strengths, progress toward previous goals, a summary of the services they are currently receiving, behavioral observations and assessment data, and proposed next steps. My counseling summaries have improved tremendously throughout my internship year. Through providing these services and reporting on them during IEP meetings I have established solid counseling skills and am confident in the delivery of and reporting on these services. This work represents my competence in three domains of practice: Psychological Foundations, Data-based Decision Making and Accountability II: Assessment & Intervention for Socialization, Emotional, Behavioral, and Life Skills, and Mental Health. In the domain of Psychological Foundations, this work demonstrates my competence and knowledge of
typical and atypical growth and development, my ability to identify behaviors that are
outside the normative range, my knowledge regarding the role of biological, familial,
school, classroom, and community factors that impact a student’s success in school, and
knowledge of the development and impact of attributes such as positive motivation, locus
of control, self-efficacy, and self-esteem as they influence school learning and behavior.
In the Data-based Decision Making domain, this work product shows evidence of my
skill in the use of appropriate assessment tools, collecting and interpreting data, utilizing
multiple methods for the assessment of social and emotional well being of students,
evidence of observational skills, and evidence of skill in interviewing students, parents,
and teachers. In the Mental Health domain, this work product demonstrates my skill,
knowledge, and competence regarding the effects of familial, community, and
environmental context variables such as poverty, family drug abuse, divorce, etc. and
their impacts on student success, theories of aggression, violence, and bullying, ability to
develop prevention and intervention programs for groups and individuals, and my
competence in conducting counseling to address a wide variety of issues and utilizing a
variety of techniques.

The second work product that developed from my experiences in the delivery of
counseling services revolves around a particular student who struggled with school
refusal behavior. This student struggled with getting out of bed in the morning and his
guardian could not make him get up. On several occasions staff members went to the
parking lot to convince this student to get out of the car, and on one occasion a home visit
was conducted to support his guardian in the attempt to get him to school. There were
many complicated factors in this student’s background that led to his attendance issues, and a number of interventions were attempted to increase his attendance. These interventions included earning highly desired items for attending school, decreasing demands while at school, and providing frequent opportunities for breaks. None of these interventions increased his attendance and a School Attendance Review Board (SARB) notice was sent home. A meeting was held with the student, an administrator, a district representative, the student’s guardian, and myself to discuss his attendance and next steps. This meeting was held in October 2013. The seriousness of the student’s lack of attendance was emphasized and his desire to return to his home district was addressed. It was stressed to this student that he would not be a candidate to return to his home district without showing his ability to function in the smaller and more supportive setting provided by the county program in which he is currently enrolled. The student was also informed that there could be legal ramifications for his guardian if his attendance did not improve. After this meeting, the student’s attendance improved greatly. He was highly motivated by the prospect of returning to his home district. As his attendance improved he was able to access the individual and group counseling services available to him through his placement in a Region 2 classroom. Some of the topics addressed during counseling sessions included identifying appropriate coping strategies for dealing with anxiety, identifying the positive feelings he has when he is able to attend school, and the benefits of attending school. After five months of attendance with minimal excused absences, he began to attend a physical education and elective class at his home district in the afternoons. He still received academic instruction in the county program in the
morning. This student’s transition IEP resulted in a decision that he will return to his home district full time for high school. He will receive academic instruction in a Special Day Class and integrate into general education classes as appropriate. The work I completed with this student reflects my competence in three domains of practice: Legal, Ethical, and Professional Foundations, Consultation and Collaboration, and Family, School, and Community Collaboration. In the Legal, Ethical, and Professional Foundations domain, this work product demonstrates my knowledge and understanding of the delivery of psychological services in public schools, knowledge of legal implications for families facing the Student Attendance Review Board, knowledge of eligibility requirements for special education, and understanding of the legal and ethical use of assessment tools, methods, and procedures. In the Consultation and Collaboration domain, this work product demonstrates my competence, skill, and knowledge in initiating, developing, sustaining, and concluding collaborative relationships with teachers, school staff, and parents as part of provision of services to an individual student, consulting with school and community based specialists for the purpose of obtaining and sharing information, and consulting with parents for the purpose of obtaining and sharing information, developing intervention plans, and supporting parents. In the Family, School, and Community domain, this work product demonstrates my skill and ability in identifying and addressing barriers to family involvement, to advocate for the needs and concerns of parents and families, knowledge of and respect for the strengths, values, beliefs, and vulnerabilities that various cultural, ethnic, linguistic, socioeconomic, and
family type possess and assist schools in supporting families appropriately, and skill in facilitating family assumption of responsibility regarding student learning.

I also had the opportunity to develop and implement a reading intervention for a fourth grade student struggling to read. This student was reading at a first grade level at the beginning of the school year. I assessed him using the Test of Word Reading Efficiency, second edition (TOWRE-2) three times throughout the year to track his progress. For the first part of the year we worked on sight words, blending sounds, and playing word games. This went well from October through December. In January this student began refusing to participate in the intervention. The second assessment utilizing the TOWRE-2 showed no progress in his word reading efficiency, so the decision was made to begin a whole-language reading curriculum. This resulted in an intervention group that was attended by another student in his class, which helped to normalize the intervention, and it held his attention for up to 45 minutes. Though both students participating in the intervention group were actively engaged and encouraged each other throughout the delivery of the curriculum, a third assessment using the TOWRE-2 indicated that this student’s word reading efficiency did not improve despite intensive intervention. It is suspected that this student may have an unidentified processing deficit and he has been referred for neurological testing. This product demonstrates my knowledge, competency, and proficiency in the domains of Educational Foundations, Data Based Decision Making and Accountability 1: Assessment/Intervention/Evaluation of Cognitive and Academic Skills, and Human Diversity in Development and Learning. In the domain of Educational Foundations, this work shows my knowledge regarding the
assessment of student progress, my understanding of the diversity of classroom learning environments and instructional interventions, and my understanding of the roles and responsibilities of school staff members. In the domain of Data Based Decision Making and Accountability 1, this work demonstrates my ability to utilize assessment tools, my skill in record review and observation, my skill in administering, scoring, and interpreting individual tests that measure academic development, my skill in using data to measure student progress for the purpose of designing interventions in scholastic domains, and my skill in synthesizing data from multiple sources into a cohesive picture of the student. In the domain of Human Diversity in Development and Learning, this work represents my knowledge and understanding of typical and atypical growth, the effects of medical conditions and pharmacological interventions on learning and behavior, and various risk and protective factors that influence a student’s academic development.

The final product included in my portfolio is a presentation developed by two esteemed colleagues and myself to be utilized in the delivery of training to the teaching assistants employed by Region 2. Our topic was “Anxiety: Manifestations in the Classroom.” Our training focused on externalizing behaviors that may be driven by internal anxiety and strategies that can help ease that anxiety in the classroom. We also dedicated a portion of the training to discussion of the teaching assistant’s stress and anxiety and coping strategies they utilize to maintain their own mental health while working with a challenging population. This product demonstrates my knowledge and competence in the domain of Human Diversity in Development and Learning. The presentation describes the difference between typical and atypical anxiety in students and
what it could look like in the classroom. It also describes how biological and
environmental factors may influence the development of anxiety. The presentation also
discusses different anxiety disorders in children and provides suggestions for dealing
with anxiety in the classroom in a positive way. Another component of this training was
to address the stress and anxiety levels of the teaching assistants themselves and ways
that their own stress levels can impact the way they handle situations that arise in the
classroom. We supported the teaching assistants in identifying how their own
experiences, attitudes, values, and biases influence their reactions to student behavior.
This product also demonstrates my knowledge and competence in the domain of
Research and Technology. The compilation of this presentation required research, which
was completed online. It required the use of both hardware and software. While
presenting the training to our audience, a smart television was utilized, which connects to
a computer via Wi-Fi. This was new technology for my colleagues and myself and using
it helped us all to develop a new skill involving developing technology. Surveys
completed by the training participants also provided data, which all counselors collected
and I then attempted to interpret and report in a meaningful way.

These products represent the extensive counseling experience provided by my
county office of education employment during my internship year. Domains of practice
demonstrated by each portfolio product are indicated in table 1.
Table 1: Domains of Knowledge and Competence in School Psychology Documented in Each Portfolio Product

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<td>3. Reading Intervention</td>
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<td>4. Teaching Assistant Training</td>
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Note: 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; 10=Research and Technology. An “X” in the column indicates domains of knowledge and competence in school psychology documented in that portfolio product.
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Serving as a credentialed employee in a Northern California county office of education has provided the final step in my extensive training to become an effective and compassionate school psychologist. This experience has contributed greatly to enhancing my skills in a variety of areas including conducting assessments, providing mental health services, consulting and collaborating with teachers, parents, and other professionals, and designing and coordinating the implementation of academic interventions. I am confident in my abilities to perform the duties of a competent school psychologist while being aware of the importance of continued professional growth and enthusiastic about the prospect of constantly learning and improving my practice.

Several recommendations have developed out of my internship experiences. I have been very lucky to have many opportunities to attend workshops and seminars throughout my internship year that have contributed greatly to my professional development. This emphasis on the importance of professional development would be an asset to any school district. For districts with fewer resources I would suggest training from within, utilizing the knowledge and expertise of existing personnel to invest in the professional development of district staff. I have also had the good fortune to be involved in a team process that involved regular meetings with colleagues to discuss cases and get advice from other professionals. This team approach helped staff to feel supported and created an atmosphere that allowed and encouraged collaboration. These two things together, an emphasis on professional development and a culture of collaboration, helped
to make me feel valued as an employee and contributed to an overall positive morale in the workplace that made it possible to focus on the overarching goal of helping children achieve success at school. I will make every effort throughout my career to foster these attitudes and viewpoints in any district in which I work.