UNDERSTANDING CHILDREN’S VARYING NEEDS THROUGH AN ECOLOGICAL LENS WHILE UTILIZING A TEAM APPROACH AND DATA DRIVEN INTERVENTIONS TO ENSURE ACADEMIC SUCCESS AND POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH OUTCOMES FOR ALL CHILDREN IN SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

UNDERSTANDING CHILDREN’S VARYING NEEDS THROUGH AN ECOLOGICAL LENS WHILE UTILIZING A TEAM APPROACH AND DATA DRIVEN INTERVENTIONS TO ENSURE ACADEMIC SUCCESS AND POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH OUTCOMES FOR ALL CHIDLREN IN SCHOOL

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This project represents my training, personal philosophies and a reflection upon keystone cases throughout my internship. Broadly, this project represents my competency and journey to becoming a skilled school psychologist. An ecological framework emphasizes various systems of influence that dynamically interact and affect a person’s ability and personality. By utilizing an ecological framework, while fulfilling the role of a school psychologist, one can create an accurate picture of a student including their strengths and weaknesses. Within a team approach, many individuals who help create a child’s system of influence can work together to meet the needs of a child in an effective way. Throughout my internship, I utilized these key frameworks in order to meet the needs of students. I worked with students whose needs ranged from students with significant behavior and mental health impairments that impede their learning, to a student who despite motivation and willingness to work was struggling to learn how to read. I reflect upon implementing data based interventions within a school system with limited monetary and personnel resources. Recommendations for future training, and recommendations for further experience for myself are included.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my father, Ken Parquette. His financial and emotional support was integral to my being able to complete this project and earn my degree. Thank you Dad, not just for your ongoing support, but also for instilling the values in me that paved the way for me to complete this endeavor. I would also like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Brent Duncan. His ongoing support and willingness to go above and beyond was critical in ensuring my completion of this program. I also would like to thank Jan Paulus, who played a significant role in shaping the school psychologist I have become. I can only strive to continue to grow in hopes that one day I can match her knowledge and expertise in this field. And with deep gratitude, I would like to thank Lisa Miller, my supervisor and my mentor. Lisa helped me transfer from my cozy classroom life at Humboldt State, into the public school arena. I could not have asked for a more experienced, talented, willing, honest, and helpful supervisor. Your help has made such an impact, I am not even sure if I have the adequate words to express all that you have done for me these last few years. Last but not least, I would like to thank my partner, Jonathan Belcher for his enduring encouragement as I traveled down this path. I am grateful he always listened, even though all my psychological jargon and acronyms made it difficult for him to understand, he somehow always remained supportive and empathetic. Although my name is on this degree, I want everyone who touched me and
inspired me along the way to know that I truly believe that I would not have made it through if it were not for them, and for that I am forever grateful.
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SIGNIFICANCE, OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this portfolio is to demonstrate the skills I obtained from my training in the school psychology program, and my competence in all ten domains established by the National Association of School Psychologists as related to the field of school psychology. This product is a reflection based upon specific products completed throughout my internship year, my two years of academic and practicum training at Humboldt State University, as well as personal guiding philosophies about the profession of a school psychologist.

As a school psychologist, our primary objective is to ensure academic success for all students regardless of ability level. A significant portion of my training was learning research that strongly suggests that there are nearly an endless amount of factors that could contribute to academic failure. An ecological framework allows a starting point for appropriate methodology when attempting to understand why a student is struggling. An ecological framework emphasizes that there are multiple systems of influence, ranging from genes to culture, that all interact with each other in complex ways and affect who we are as individuals. An ecological framework allows for the view that each person is a unique and complex individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). By utilizing this framework, as demonstrated in my products, one can assist students in achieving personal success regardless of an array of needs.

Throughout my training, I instilled several philosophies that have guided me through my professional experience. Often times the first step to helping a child is
assessment. Assessment allows the examiner to investigate varying abilities, and discover where a breakdown is occurring. Understanding the child as a complex individual is what drives a comprehensive assessment. One cannot simply rely on one, or even two, measures of assessment. Rather, to encompass and truly appreciate and understand the complexity of a person, one must use many different methodologies to ensure that a comprehensive and accurate view is being obtained.

Secondly, assessment results drive intervention. Throughout assessment, strengths and weaknesses are discovered. A successful intervention will account for, and use, a child’s strengths to help them overcome their weaknesses. Within the constraints of a school environment one must be creative with the design and implementation of interventions to address the identified needs a child exhibits. Taking advantage of research based practices, creating one’s own materials, and being resourceful when utilizing staff members are all ways that I try to implement effective interventions within the constraints of a limited budget. Thirdly, utilizing stringent progress monitoring tools are necessary in determining effectiveness of intervention and making adjustments or revisions accordingly. Another constant focus is checking for generalization. If skills being taught in a small group or one-on-one intervention are not generalizing into the classroom, into the home, and into the community, the intervention is effectively unsuccessful.

Besides philosophies of practice gained through my training, the ten domains of competency reflect training standards set forth as best practices in the field of school psychology. These domains are a constant guideline for effective practice. One must be
able to work in all ten domains effectively in order to meet the needs of students. Along with the ecological framework, these domains are often interrelated and interact with one another in complex ways. As such, many of my products show competence across multiple domains. One cannot often fully meet the needs of a student under one domain alone.

The objective of this portfolio is to demonstrate my competence as a school psychologist by presenting products that resulted from the work I conducted on complexes cases throughout my internship, determining within a team approach what a student needed to succeed, finding an appropriate way to implement a meaningful intervention, and to regularly monitor the progress of that student.

My products highlight my competence in each domain while utilizing a team approach and an ecological framework during my internship in an elementary school in a rural town. In the product entitled Multidisciplinary Psychoeducational Report, I show an understanding of typical psychological development along with educational expectations for a kindergarten student. This particular student presented as a fairly complex case. As with many students with complex needs such as this particular kindergarten student, she also required a functional behavior assessment. Throughout the work related to the completion of both products, I sought out community resources, worked within a team-based approach including working with outside community professionals as well as staff members within the school site. Furthermore, diligent data collection of a variety of behaviors was collected. The end result included a Behavior Intervention Plan.
The product entitled, Development of a Behavior Intervention Plan is the creation of a behavior intervention plan for another young student. This particular student was displaying physical aggression with high frequency and high intensity toward her teachers. The product highlights the importance of teamwork, because the behavior plan was created through consultation with input from her teachers, who had the task of implementing the plan in the classroom setting. Research has shown that various relationship factors between participants within a team affect outcomes for the target student (McGivern, Ray-Subramanian & Auster, 2008). A key goal in the development of the behavior plan was ensuring that the child’s needs were met, while also taking care that the plan was feasible for a teacher to implement while teaching an entire class of students. Fairly regular consultation occurred, to ensure that teachers were implementing the plan with fidelity and to problem solve and create new strategies regarding any new concerns that arose with the plan. Furthermore, diligent progress monitoring of data was collected to ensure the plan was effective. Through careful data analysis, the team was often able to pinpoint areas of the plan that could be modified to meet the changing needs of the student.

The Second Step product highlights the importance of Tier I universal curriculum delivery. The program itself involves social-emotional learning, and teaches all children the skills they need to cope with life’s many challenges, solve problems, and advocate for themselves. Through the teaching of skills to all children, we hope to prevent later problems that may arise for these students as they grow. Mental health and academics go
hand in hand, and one often affects another. By supporting children’s positive mental health outcomes, we hope to see an increase in positive academic experiences.

The Reading Intervention product highlights the importance of understanding a student’s current level of knowledge, creating an individualized evidence-based intervention, and conducting consistent progress monitoring to measure outcomes. Burns, VanDerHeyden, and Boice (2008) note five key aspects to a successful intervention. Successful intervention consists of: correctly targeting goals based upon student’s needs, explicit instruction regarding those goals, an appropriate level of challenge for the child, high opportunities for student response, and corrective feedback. With this particular student, the intervention began with learning letter names and letter sounds. As a first-grade student, this child was significantly below grade-level in the area of reading. Creating the intervention required the use of evidence-based practices such as utilizing rote memorization and an understanding of basic foundational skills of reading such as phonological awareness. Throughout the process of working with this child, changes in the intervention were made based on the child’s progress and mastery of goals, as well as adjustments that were made due to the student’s own personality. For example, timing data was no longer collected after it became apparent the child was rushing through her work, more concerned about speed than skill. Lastly, working with teachers and parents was critical in determining that this child was in fact generalizing skills learned in the reading intervention out into the classroom and at home.
Table 1: Domains of Knowledge and Competence in School Psychology Documented in Each Portfolio Product

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<th>Portfolio Product Title</th>
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<td>3. Development of a Behavior Intervention Plan</td>
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<td>4. Reading Intervention</td>
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<td>5. Second Step – Research and Implementation</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, Research and Technology. An “X” in the column indicates domains of knowledge and competence in school psychology documented in that portfolio product.
In conclusion, through my training, personal philosophies, and internship experience I have demonstrated skill in all ten domains of competency for a school psychologist. My training focused on a broader view of the role of a school psychologist, as opposed to the traditional test-and-place model that has dominated the field in previous years. My personal philosophy centers from an ecological framework and teamwork is evidenced in my product reflections. The importance of understanding varying systems of influences, working within a team, creating an evidenced-based intervention, and diligent progress monitoring, has led to improved academic and mental health outcomes for students.

As new research emerges, federal and state laws evolve, and cultural changes occur, ongoing research and diligence is imperative for continued best practices within this field. Due to the fluidity of mental health and educational delivery systems, professional development is key.

The role of a school psychologist is adaptable. As such, training programs are tasked to continue delivering training in current best practices. Even still, a strong emphasis must be placed on the delivery of services within a school setting, which is where actual practice occurs. Learning about appropriate permission forms, understanding of how to reach out to community resources, and the necessary paperwork inherent within this profession are essential areas to support the success of prospective school psychologist. Schools are variable and each school may have its own set of
procedures. However, legal mandates remain consistent for every public school. Learning what the law requires, and common practices to adhere to those laws, are daily tasks in this profession. Future students will benefit from vigilant attention to the understanding of school psychologists’ responsibilities in this area.

At this point in training, my skills are continually evolving. I would like to gain experience with in-service training of staff. Teachers and paraprofessionals play a key role in a child’s system of influences. According to the ecological framework, by teaching skills to teachers and other professionals we are likely to witness positive outcomes for children. Specifically, there is a clear need for teachers and paraprofessionals to learn more skills on how to communicate effectively to children who are often defiant or otherwise noncompliant. The more skills our educators possess, the higher the likelihood of academic success for their students. Throughout my internship, I have often consulted with overwhelmed teachers who feel that they do not possess the tools to effectively teach students with complex needs in their classrooms. Often times, I am called to a classroom because a child has left the room and is refusing to return. By educating teachers and other relevant staff, we can hopefully see a decrease in such instances. I have yet had an opportunity to deliver such training to a group of educators, but would like to have the opportunity.

In conclusion, through my training, personal philosophies and professional experience I have gained competency in all ten domains of practice. Continual professional development, emphasis on school based delivery in training, and increased
personal experience in the area of in-service training are three key areas I recommend for
the field in general, and for myself, personally.
REFERENCES

