

Welcome to our first column of *Getting Schooled* for 2014. Our theme for this year will be on the role of consultation and its importance in providing effective school psychology services. In our first column, Drs. Johnson and Crawford outline the foundational underpinning of a consultative framework of practice, highlighting the differences between a school psychology consultation model and an assessment model. They also articulate the integral role of consultation within our province's re-conceptualization of education. We hope this article provides our readers insight into how consultation works. We look forward to providing more information in this area throughout 2014, specifically related to various models of consultation (e.g., Bergan and Kratochwil's Behavioural Consultation model, Rosenfield's Instructional Consultation model, and Erchul and Marten's Integrated Consultation model), as well as practical applications of these models within the school psychology context.

School Psychology Services: Starting with Consultation

By: R. Coranne Johnson, PhD. R. Psych. and Shawn Crawford, PhD. R. Psych.

Since 2008, the Alberta education system has undergone significant changes as a result of multiple initiatives including *Inspiring Education*, *Setting the Direction*, and *Speaking Out*. The Alberta government has systematically gathered information and articulated the re-conceptualization of the education framework in our province. Within the *Inspiring Action* discussion paper (Alberta Education, 2010), the government outlined their intent to develop policy "... to ensure that each and every child has the opportunity to maximize their potential..." (Forward, Minister Hancock). Specifically, the paper delineated key premises in inclusive education: collaboration amongst educators, parents and psychologists; enhanced assessment strategies to measure growth; a continuum of supports and services that ensures that all students have their needs met. These premises focus on adults working together to develop and provide student programming that results in optimal learning.

School psychologists possess a unique combination of expertise in assessment techniques, evidence-based interventions, and preventative programming that are essential in an inclusive education system (PAA, 2010). Our profession has an opportunity to provide service to students, their families and educators through the process of collecting data to determine the problem, then plan and support implementation of responsive programming. If school psychologists adopt a broader service model that enables us to use the scope of our skills to meet the needs of ALL students, we will have a pivotal role in Alberta schools (Johnson & Crawford, 2012; PAA, 2010).

To this end, the National Association of School Psychology (NASP, 2010) has developed a Model of Comprehensive and Integrated School Psychology Services to define excellence in school psychology practice. Within this model, NASP identified Consultation and Collaboration as an **integrated component** of all school psychology services. Consultation entails collaborating with

the adults (educators and parents) to identify problems, creating solutions and measuring progress.

Consultative Framework

Many school psychologists use consultation skills in their work, but do not utilize consultation as a school psychology service that permeates all other services – both direct and indirect. Consultation is “a method of providing **preventative** oriented psychological and educational **services** in which consultants and consultees form cooperative **partnerships** and engage in a reciprocal, systematic **problem-solving** process guided by ecobehavioural principles. The goal is to **enhance and empower consultee systems** thereby promoting students’ wellbeing and performance.” (P.626, Zins & Erchul, 2002). The bolded concepts in this consultative framework need to be examined further to grasp the breadth and depth of this method of service provision.

Proactive Practice

School psychologists who work in a Model of Comprehensive and Integrated School Psychology Services (NASP, 2010) do not have to wait for children to fall behind enough to meet the criteria for a diagnosis. School psychologists engage with learning teams when students are at-risk of developing significant deficits in school, working collaboratively with educators and parents to remediate presenting problems – academic, social and/or behavioural. Furthermore, school psychologists work to influence system change in schools, school districts and provincial initiatives by identifying common challenges and analysing the underlying causes, then advocating for preventative frameworks (eg. Response to Intervention) and programs (eg. Kindergarten Phonological Screening). Prevention is key: broad system reform and timely individual service prior to academic failure and/or the presentation of significant behaviours (NASP, 2010; Zins & Erchul, 2002).

Service Framework

Typically in an assessment model the outcome of our work was a product – a psycho-educational assessment report – our ability to help a student was narrowly focused on a diagnosis and special education funding (PAA, 2010). Fundamental to working in a consultative framework is the understanding that school psychologists’ work in a broader role – providing both direct and indirect service (Johnson & Crawford, 2012; NASP, 2010; PAA, 2010; Zins & Erchul, 2002). School psychologists can continue to work with students (e.g. assessment, counselling) and additionally help students by collaborating with educators and parents to build individual and systematic capacity that results in long-term effective student support. Specifically, school psychologists actively participate in the planning and implementation of interventions and programming, coach educators and parents on the application of strategies, and troubleshoot barriers. As a result, consumers of school psychology services are more varied, and include students, educators, parents, and school systems.

Shared Responsibility

Pivotal to consultation is the partnerships within the learning team. Team members: educators, parents and school psychologists are valued for their divergent expertise, and it is recognized that each individual has unique perspectives and strengths, thus a distinct role and responsibilities. There is a non-hierarchical relationship that is voluntary with a common focus – the wellbeing of a student (NASP, 2010; PAA, 2010; Zins & Erchul, 2002). The learning team works together to understand the problems, clarify the goals, then design and implement solutions. There is a foundational commitment by all team members to assume shared responsibility for the effectiveness of the plan and engage in continued participation. As such, this process is action-oriented, designed to facilitate learning and change practices.

Creating Solutions

A consultative framework is based on a systematic problem-solving process that integrates the collective input of all team members. Within this process, the school psychologist provides structure and guidance to facilitate problem identification, intervention development and implementation. This process is often cyclical as next steps are clarified and progress is evaluated. Throughout the process, the school psychologist provides information on evidence-based interventions and assists with fidelity of strategy implementation. A fundamental priority is to identify and modify environmental factors, thus utilizing universal strategies that will benefit all students (NASP, 2010; Zins & Erchul, 2002).

Building Capacity

The outcome of school psychologists providing services through a consultative framework is the enhancement of learning teams' capabilities (NASP, 2010; PAA, 2010; Zins & Erchul, 2002). Essentially, our goal is for both educators and parents to become more proactive and responsive to evolving student needs. Through the collaborative partnerships in which school psychologists share their expertise, educators and parents are able to incorporate into their personal knowledge the evidence-based strategies used, thus enhancing their capacity and empowering them to move forward. In a consultative framework, a school psychologist builds the capacity of those that they work with, in a sense attempting to work their way out of a job. Yet it is important to note, the demand for school psychology services increases in this model as educators value the timely support as classroom demands increase (Mayer & Johnson, 2013)

Conclusion

In a Comprehensive and Integrated School Psychology Services Model, the ultimate goal is that all students are provided with an educational environment that enables them to achieve their potential (NASP, 2010). Within the evolving educational landscape in Alberta and throughout North America, instructional practices are focusing more on continual student progress. As a result, support services to schools need to be responsive to inclusive education goals. Therefore, the job description for school psychologists must evolve beyond the completion of a designated number of assessments per year into a more complex and varied service delivery that results in a broader educational impact. Below, Zins and Erchul (2002) have articulated the practical application of this conceptual shift:

“All school psychology services to children and schools are best provided through a consultative framework. That is, virtually all requests for assistance in dealing with a

problem should begin with consultation. Thus, services such as psychoeducational assessment and counseling are viewed as components of problem clarification or as interventions developed through consultation to solve the problem.”

p. 631

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