The Process of Delivering Psychoeducational Assessment Results

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Final Project

Campus Alberta: Masters of Counselling

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Dedication

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Paul Jerry for his continued consultation and collaboration as I worked to complete my final project. His expertise in the area of psychoeducational assessment and his natural ability to teach difficult concepts with ease helped me to begin to understand the complexity of psychoeducational assessment. I would also like to thank my family for supporting me through the entire four years that it has taken me to complete the Master of Counselling program. Without your support I would not have been able to complete this on my own. I would also especially like to thank my mom Judy, who believed in my ability when I often did not have the confidence to do so myself. Thank you to Shauna Ruygrok, who spent many hours helping me to begin to understand from the perspective of a school psychologist the intricate process involved in the delivery of psychoeducational assessment results. Also, thank you to Brenda Christians for all of her efforts to edit my final project on such tight timelines.
ABSTRACT

This project will attempt to address the fundamental research question: How can school psychologists help educate teachers, support staff, and parents on the interpretation and individual meaning of psychological testing in order for all important stakeholders to work together in promoting and empowering student excellence? The project will include a literature review detailing the benefits of parents, teachers, school administration, and school psychologists creating working alliances based on a systemic approach. Following the literature review will be an educational component for facilitating the school psychologists in teaching others a certain level of basic knowledge and understanding related to the WISC-IV, which is necessary to maximize student assessment information for all important stakeholders who may not have experience with the WISC-IV. Included in the manual will be ideas on how to begin goal setting with students and other team members. Ideas for task-specific goals will also be implemented. The manual will conclude with suggested steps on how to run a successful meeting in order to best meet the needs of children and the community in which they thrive.
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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Alberta Learning (2004, 2006a, 2006b) has developed and compiled a number of resources for teachers and psychologists, but little emphasis has been placed on building a community of focused action and understanding (Alberta Teachers’ Association, 1997, 2002; Alberta’s Commission on Learning, 2003). This project investigates how school psychologists can help educate teachers, support staff, and parents on the interpretation and individual meaning of psychological testing in order for all stakeholders to work together to provide students with optimal learning and program planning.

In order to understand the nature of this concern, it is important to also understand some current issues that schools, teachers, parents, and school psychologists are dealing with. In the face of increasing caseloads among school psychologists and in the wake of increasing classroom sizes, teachers and psychologists are feeling more pressure to maintain accountability in their delivery of psychological and instructional services to students with special needs (Habel & Bernard, 1999). Often batteries of diagnostic assessments are conducted by school psychologists, with teachers readily admitting “many test reports didn’t tell them anything that they didn’t already know” (Jennings, 2001, p. 396). Additionally, due to the complexity of the assessment and the research needed to fully understand assessment results, many important stakeholders such as the student’s teacher and the student’s parents find the delivery of the results difficult to understand and are therefore unsure of how to move forward. “The process of reporting results from psychological tests often results in confused teachers and concerned parents and clients. Additionally, although psychological reports are available to all professional staff within the school, few understand the content of
these reports” (Pupp, 2006, p. 20). Teachers are not referring to these assessments when they are developing Individual Program Plans (IPP) because they themselves do not understand what the results mean for students and their individual learning needs. The unfortunate result is an IPP that is incongruent with the learning needs of the child.

Delivery of Psychoeducational Results

Sattler (2001) stated that there are four pillars of assessment: “(a) norm-referenced tests, (b) interviews, (c) observations, and finally (d) informal assessment procedures” (p. 4). Sattler also described the steps in assessment as including:

- Reviewing referral information; deciding to accept referral; obtaining relevant background information; considering the influence of relevant others; observing the child in several settings; selecting and administering an appropriate test battery;
- interpreting the assessment results; developing intervention strategies and making recommendations; writing a report; meeting with parents, the examinee and other concerned individuals; and following up on recommendations and reevaluations. (p. 21)

Although Sattler (2001) made note of meeting with parents, the examinee, and other concerned individuals, there is no formal literature in his text that describes the process by which psychoeducational results are delivered to all the important stakeholders mentioned above. The Professional Guidelines for Psychologists described by the College of Alberta Psychologists (CAP) “address the need of careful reporting but do not describe the process involved” (Pupp, 2006, p. 12). The knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for the effective delivery of assessment information related to psychological testing are often inconsistent from one psychologist to the next. Pupp went on to say that:
CAP and other psychological organizations do stress the importance of delivering results in a timely fashion, using terms and language the recipient will understand. However, specific details about the process involved and the guidelines to follow are limited and do not provide a concise framework for the practitioner to use. (p. 12)

Schools typically provide 30 to 45 minutes for debriefs in which the delivery of student psychoeducational assessment results are given to parents and teachers. Sheridan and Kratochwill (1992) suggested that many school psychologists working as consultants have not been trained to debrief results or to work with parents and teachers to determine the best intervention and treatment options for students. Very little research has been done on training school psychologists to work with parents to maximize treatment and intervention adherence in relation to maximizing student potential (Sheridan & Kratochwill). The intention of this project is to begin investigating how effective delivery of psychoeducational test results specifically related to the WISC-IV may be a first step towards an increasing understanding and adherence for teachers who may be creating IPPs and for parents who will be supporting their children’s educational needs outside the classroom.

Structure of Project

This project has three components. First is a literature review detailing the necessity for systems thinking, building strong and effective working alliances, and partnerships among school psychologists, teachers and parents. The intent of this review is to gather information that supports this need and provide evidence supporting the necessity of expanding on the process involved in delivering psychoeducational results among the school psychologist, teacher and parents. The second component will be a manual for school psychologists and teachers to refer to when focusing on the process involved in effectively
delivering psychoeducational assessments, specifically the WISC-IV in order for all
stakeholders to become actively involved in helping the student meet their learning potential.
Concluding this project will be a discussion related to the implications of this suggested
delivery manual.

Professional guidelines for school psychologists were developed by referring to the
Association for Assessment in Counselling and Education (AACE) (2003) document entitled
Responsibilities of Users of Standardized Tests (RUST), and the work of Sattler (2001) and
Pupp (2006). The purpose of these professional guidelines is to provide the school
psychologist with a framework to adhere to when considering how to effectively deliver
assessment results within the school. This project intends to focus heavily on the process
involved in adhering to the professional guidelines for reporting assessment results as
outlined by Pupp.
CHAPTER II

Procedures

Manual Structure

This manual was created based on a need to draw attention to the sensitive process of delivering psychological test results. As a teacher and a novice guidance counsellor, I realized that the delivery of psychoeducational test results such as the WISC-IV involves a very complex interpretation by the school psychologist. The “debrief” and the delivery of assessment results among the school psychologist, teacher, and parents are often difficult to understand. I often felt intimidated because I did not comprehend the terminology or the purpose of the assessment. This lack of understanding made it challenging for me to be successful as a teacher because I admittedly did not know how to plan to best meet a student’s individual learning needs.

Similarly, I have often felt the uneasiness of parents as they sit and wait for the school psychologist to deliver their child’s psychoeducational test results. Often the meeting to debrief the assessment results among the school psychologist, teacher, and parents is less than an hour. In many cases it is the first time that all participants have met. As Pupp (2006) indicated, there is the “potential for a child to have a diagnosis or label attached for a long time” (p. 18) upon leaving these debriefs. Due to the sensitive nature of the information being delivered by the school psychologist, care is needed to ensure that results are delivered in a thoughtful and sensitive manner. I have attended many meetings where parents are expected to walk into a room to find their child’s teacher, guidance counsellor, principal, and the school psychologist waiting for them. The process of walking into a situation such as this is often enough to make even the most educated parent nervous.
Alberta Learning (2004, 2006a, 2006b) has developed and compiled a number of resources for teachers and psychologists to refer to when creating Individual Program Plans (IPP), but little emphasis has been placed on the process involved in building a community of focused action and understanding (Alberta Teachers’ Association, 1997, 2002a; Alberta’s Commission of Learning, 2003) during and immediately following the delivery of assessment results. Recent research and literature reviews by Bratko (2005) and Pupp (2006) have focused on predicting academic outcomes and suggested guidelines for professional practice when delivering psychoeducational assessment results, specifically related to the WISC-IV. This work synthesizes and highlights the importance and the need for focusing on the process involved in the brief delivery of psychoeducational test results for the purpose of understanding by stakeholders (Pupp). After discussing the process involved in an assessment debrief, it was agreed that there is very little for school psychologists to refer to as they deliver their assessment results to parents and teachers (P. Jerry, personal communication, 2007). Further to that conversation with Dr. Jerry was a discussion on how to be sensitive and attuned to the varying degrees of background knowledge and expertise of teachers and parents.

This manual is intended to help school psychologists consider the actual process involved in delivering psychoeducational assessment results. The goal is to have all stakeholders engage in an active understanding of the assessment so that a facilitative team can mobilize to act and work for constructive change based on the student’s learning needs. This project will discuss the concepts of systems thinking and creating working alliances and partnerships followed by a manual with suggestions and strategies for making a debriefing meaningful and successful for all stakeholders.
The manual will focus heavily on the process involved in delivering assessment results within the 45-minute debrief that occurs among the school psychologist, teachers, and parents. Included in the manual is a section for the school psychologist to refer to when planning to debrief with parents and teachers. There will also be a section for the school psychologist and teacher to refer to as they consider how to best meet the learning needs of the student. Concluding the manual will be a chapter on the potential implications and impact of this project. This section will also include future implications and suggestions for further research.

Sources of Information

This literature review includes research relating to systemic approaches to learning involving teachers, parents, school psychologists, and community action. Developing solid working alliances, partnerships, and special considerations for parents were also explored. Resources from Alberta Learning and Alberta Education (2006) were included, as these sources are most relevant to the writer of this project. The Association for Assessment in Counselling Education (AACE) (2003) documentation and Sattler’s (2001) Assessment of Children were key resources and are recommended to any school-based psychologist for review. Bratko’s (2005) Handbook to Facilitate the Utilization of Psychological Assessment for Secondary Students within Alberta and Pupp’s (2006) Guidelines for Reporting Assessment Results were also reviewed. The implications of this research helped to synthesize and strengthen the direction of this project. Personal communications (P. Jerry, personal communication, 2006) focused on helping parents understand the implications of assessment were also utilized.
Further research was also conducted using electronic research databases. Specific search engines included PsychInfo, ERIC Library, Psychology and Behavioural Science. Search terms used included: working alliance; group process; reporting assessment results; student-parent conferences; families, parents, teachers; collaboration; collaborative leadership; community action in schools; special education; student, family, and community partnerships; assessment of children; WISC-IV; WISC-IV interpretation; WISC-IV report writing; “assessment of children; psychological testing; Alberta Learning; Alberta Learning policies for special education; and professional guidelines for assessment delivery.

Textbooks and secondary resources were borrowed from the MacKimmie and the Doucette libraries at the University of Calgary. Other secondary resources reviewed included Alberta Learning and Alberta Education texts borrowed from the Professional Learning Centre of the Calgary Board of Education. Information sources from Alberta Learning were also borrowed from the professional library in the school in which I am currently employed.

Building partnerships and creating collaboration between all stakeholders involved in students’ lives is a vast topic. The research in this project indicates that there is a lack of literature and research highlighting the actual process involved in delivering psychoeducational assessment results to parent and teachers for the purpose of understanding and program planning. School psychologists need to pay careful attention to the method involved in delivering sensitive information to parents and teachers. This process involves working hard to develop a strong working alliance between stakeholders. The implications of this alliance predict the success of individual program planning for the student. Guidelines provided by Pupp (2006) related to reporting assessment results provide a framework for delivery.
Equally important to this framework of delivery is the intricate process by which the results are delivered. The WISC-IV requires a registered psychologist to be the professional conducting, interpreting and presenting the findings of the assessment. Therefore, the main target group for the handbook will be the school psychologist. The focus on the process of delivery in this project is intended for professionals who will lead the debriefing of assessment results, which in most cases is the school psychologist.

Terminology

It is important to note that throughout the project, the general term “parent” is used. However, in the face of the changing family unit, this word can mean many things. For the purpose of this project, “parent” or “parents” will refer to any family member who has a vested interest in a child’s education.

Due to program planning, the school encourages the guidance counsellor or teacher to be involved in the delivery of psychoeducational assessments. Throughout most of the project, the term “teacher” will be used. However, this term may represent a student’s primary teacher, a resource teacher, a guidance counsellor, or a school administrator.

The term “debrief” is also used throughout this project. The debrief is the actual meeting at which the assessment results are delivered.

The school resource team often includes one or more school-related professionals who comprise a learning team. In the manual, this learning team will be referred to as the “Student Resource Group (SRG).”

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CHAPTER III
Theoretical Foundations: Assessment, Systems Thinking, Working Alliances, and Partnerships

Testing and Assessment

When a parent or teacher notices a child struggling with learning it is helpful for a discussion to take place between the teacher and parent to determine the best course of action for promoting student excellence. This course of action starts with assessment, which may take various forms. It is the process of gathering information in order to make informed decisions on program planning (Sattler, 2001; Zimmerman, Casey, & Franks, 2001). Alberta Learning (2003) suggested that parents discuss potential informal methods for identifying any potential learning challenges with teachers to determine the steps needed. These steps include: (a) having a teacher and/or parent discuss learning challenges with the child, (b) observing the child in the class, (c) examining class work, (d) conducting informal assessment inventories, and (e) implementing screening methods.

After completing the above steps, a teacher may decide to discuss a formal request for specialized services and/or a referral option for a specialized assessment. This type of assessment is “more encompassing and involves several clinical tools, such as formal and informal tests, observations and interviews; the focus is not only on the collecting data, but also on the clinical skills to interpret the data and synthesize the results” (Sattler, 2001, p. 21). According to Zimmerman and colleagues (2001), psychoeducational evaluations serve three purposes. The first is to assess a student’s academic ability and progress. The second is to determine whether a student may have a learning disability or meet the criteria for certain clinical disorders and diagnosis that may be impeding their potential for academic success.
Finally, the third purpose is to complete a thorough assessment to develop a comprehensive understanding of a student’s strengths and weaknesses in order to effectively plan for the student’s individual program needs. Program planning involves implementing strategies and interventions to minimize the reason for the initial referral (Flanagan & Kaufman, 2004).

Similarly, Alberta Learning (2003) suggested that there are three reasons for assessment: (a) to find out if a child has a special learning need, (b) to identify strengths and needs, and finally, (c) to identify appropriate programming and services that will meet a child’s individual needs” (p. 6). Assessment is defined by Alberta Learning (2003) “as a process of collecting insight and information through formal and informal measures across a number of differing domains to determine the most effective and appropriate program planning for student success. Assessment may be used to describe a child’s current level of functioning and involves qualified professionals conducting, interpreting, and providing recommendations for individual program planning (Alberta Learning, 2003).

*Brief Description of the WISC-IV*

The most common clinical assessment used to assess cognitive ability in children is the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children - Fourth Edition (WISC-IV) (Wechsler, 2003). It is a norm-referenced clinical assessment, which means that the assessment is standardized, but it is used to assess a clearly defined group. Scores from a norm-referenced assessment are then scaled and reflect a score that is ranked within a distinct group considered the group norm (Sattler, 2001). A full description of this tool is beyond the scope of this project. However, a very brief description is needed in order to determine an effective framework for the delivery of assessment results so that all stakeholders will benefit from the information.
The WISC-IV is defined by Alberta Learning as an individualized or standardized assessment geared towards assessing a number of areas such as educational performance for the purposes of providing effective program planning. Informed consent from parents must occur before the school psychologist can administer any specialized assessment such as the WISC-IV. Alberta Learning (2003) emphasizes the importance of informed consent and includes a policy of informing parents of any assessment that will occur and the nature and the purpose of the assessment. For effective program planning, teachers should understand why they are requesting services from the school psychologist. It is equally as important that parents have a “clear understanding of the activity that they are granting consent for” (Alberta Learning, p. 5).

The WISC-IV was revised from the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children - Third Edition and includes additional sub-tests that give school psychologists insight into specific cognitive domains (Wechsler, 2003). This assessment is specifically geared towards determining a child’s intellectual ability (P. Jerry, personal communication, 2006). As noted by Jerry:

Ability refers to a child’s natural aptitude or acquired proficiency in a given area (often expressed as an intelligence quotient). This is in contrast to achievement, which refers to the quantity and quality of a child’s work (often expressed in a grade level). (p. 1)

Included in the WISC-IV are composite measures for testing a child’s global intelligence (Baron, 2005). Global intelligence was conceptualized by Wechsler as “the aggregate or global capacity of the individual to act to act purposefully, act rationally and to deal effectively with his environment” (as cited in Flanagan & Kaufman, 2004, p. 8). The
WISC-IV includes four areas: (a) Verbal Comprehension Index (VCI), (b) Perceptual Reasoning Index (PRI), (c) Working Memory Index (WMI), and (d) Processing Speed Index (PSI) (Baron; Wechsler & Saklofske, 2003). Within each of these index measures are subtests that are intended to elicit specific information related to cognitive functioning in domains (Wechsler, 2003). For example:

VCI includes verbal abilities utilizing reasoning, comprehension, and conceptualization, and the PRI is composed of sub-tests that measure nonverbal and visual problem solving ability. The WMI is composed of sub-tests measuring attention, concentration, working memory, and the PSI is composed of subtests measuring the speed of mental and graphomotor processing. (Wechsler & Saklofske, 2003, p. 6)

All four areas comprise and represent the full-scale IQ score (FSIQ), or general intellectual functioning. According to Weiss, Saklofske, Prifitera, and Holdnack (2006), the FSIQ is “the most reliable score obtained on the WISC-IV and is traditionally the first score to be considered in the interpretation of a student’s profile” (p. 92). Weiss and colleagues deviated from this tradition and suggested that the FSIQ be reported in the final section of the psychological report, with the justification that an FSIQ should not be delivered unless the corresponding percentile rank, confidence interval, and ability range have been explained and reported. This becomes a challenge for school psychologists to explain to teachers and parents for the purpose of understanding.

A percentile rank is a student’s score in relation to the scores of other students of the same age (Weiss et al., 2006). Percentile rank is a point in a distribution of scores based on a standardized group. A student who ranks in the 20th percentile performed as high or 20%
higher than other students in the same age group, or 80% of students performed higher than this particular student. For the purposes of understanding, Jerry (personal communication, 2007) stated that:

A person’s given score is actually their true score (T) and some error variance (E). The obtained score therefore equals the true score plus error variance. The error variance is the range of scores within which we would expect the person’s true score to lie.

The obtained score accounts for situations in which testing circumstances or individual circumstances may not be optimal, such as the assessment processing causing someone to experience a certain level of anxiety that they may not experience on a daily basis. Weiss and colleagues (2006) cautioned that although percentile rank may be an easy way to determine where a student falls in relation to other students’ scores, “percentile rank does not account for equal intervals” and that “raw scores often cluster around the median which is the 50th percentile” (p. 74). This means that a raw score of 1 or 2 may present large discrepancies in percentile rank if not converted to another scale (Sattler, 2001).

A confidence interval reflects a student’s true ability. It is a band or range of scores centered on the student’s actual score in which the true score is likely to be positioned (Sattler, 2001; Weiss et al., 2006, p. 75). According to Jerry (personal communication, 2007):

The expression of closeness to a student’s best performance is the error variance, expressed as a confidence interval. This confidence interval is the most likely range where a student will fall when re-tested, and it is also the most likely range in which the student’s true score will fall, taking into account the many variations that may affect a student’s performance. Some examples of these variations are the light
quality in the room, room temperature, a student’s level of test and performance anxiety, and the quality of sleep the night before. These variations might impact someone’s performance ability and are accounted for through a confidence interval.

Weiss and colleagues (2006) recommended that reports of a student’s FSIQ always be accompanied by a confidence interval to ensure that teachers and parents are aware that there may be a range in which a student’s true score may lie. The only way that 100% accuracy can be assured is to include the entire distribution of a student’s scores (Sattler, 2001). This would be cumbersome and it would be almost impossible for every student to be assessed in this manner because scores would have to be produced to reflect every possible administration to find exactly where this particular administration would lie among the distribution of scores. “Therefore administrators of the WISC-IV use the ratio expression that indicates 95 times out of 100 administrations the student will produce a FSIQ of X within this range. This score becomes the confidence interval” (Jerry, personal communication, 2008). The accompanying WISC-IV scoring manual facilitates the administrator in measuring that interval based on the distribution of scores found in the back of the WISC-IV scoring manual, which represents an estimation of a normal curve.

Scores will range across all four index scores depending on the individual being assessed. This variation can give the school psychologist, teacher, and parent valuable insight into any areas that may coincide with some of the real world challenges the child may be facing. The school psychologist will interpret any discrepancies using a systematic approach based on research to determine whether a child may have a learning disability (Jerry, 2005; Wechsler, 2003; Wechsler & Saklofske, 2003). Jerry (2005) stated that “a standard practice in diagnosing learning disabilities involves looking for a split between Verbal
Comprehension and Perceptual Reasoning Index scores” (p. 2). The school psychologist should be aware of whether a scaled score is significantly different before making any interpretations of assessment results (Wechsler & Saklofske). Jerry (personal communication, 2007) also noted that “according to Canadian Norms for the WISC-IV if there is a discrepancy of 12 or more IQ points the difference is considered significant and therefore may indicate a learning disability in either of the domains” (p. 2). A common inconsistency is a Verbal score lower than a Perceptual score, meaning that a student may not have the same level of verbal abilities as nonverbal abilities (P. Jerry, personal communication, 2007). A score that is not as common but equally important occurs when a Perceptual score is lower than a Verbal score, meaning that nonverbal skills are lower than the student’s verbal abilities.

It is widely accepted that intelligence cannot be measured by one single measurement; therefore, sub-tests are chosen by the examiner to gain specific information in relation to a child’s ability and achievement, which in turn increases the assessment’s validity (Wechsler, 2003) and insight into specific areas of cognitive functioning. Wechsler also emphasized that intelligence is influenced by many other factors other than cognitive domains. He noted that “planning, and goal awareness, enthusiasm, field dependence and independence, impulsiveness, anxiety and persistence” (Wechsler, p. 3) are all factors to be considered in the interpretation, reporting and delivery of assessment results.

Understanding the Implications of the WISC-IV

Thinking in systems involves “collaborative leaders viewing their world as the complex interaction of systems” (Rubin, 2002, p. 84). Assessment involves a number of stages and interactions, including receiving the referral, exploring relevant contextual
information, observing the student, interpreting, writing a report, and delivering the results of assessment (Sattler, 2001). Planned action implemented by all stakeholders is an important component of promoting student success. Thus, focusing on the delivery of assessment results is a very important component of planned action. Epstein (2006) discussed research relating to the importance of education on partnerships and stated that “students learn more and succeed at higher levels when home, school and community work together to understand and support students’ learning and development” (p. 87).

Often a parent may feel overwhelmed and intimidated when asked to meet with the school psychologist and teachers to discuss psychoeducational test results. Thus, it is extremely important that supportive structures are put in place to accommodate and encourage systemic thinking and collaboration. Geffken, Keeley, Kellison, Storch, and Rodrigue (2006) stated that:

Intuitively it is important to not only focus on ways to which engage the identified client when delivering treatment recommendations but also address the context of the entire family and other community members who share involvement in their child’s life. Including evaluations of the family’s power structure, communication styles, alliances, conflicts, support, and level of family distress and disorder may assist the psychologist in acknowledging family strengths and risk factors prior to treatment onset and enable him or her to address these issues up front so as to reduce the likelihood of non-adherence to recommendations. (p. 503)

Alberta Learning (2002) stated that, in order for student success to occur, “supportive structures are necessary to organize a systemic process for collaborative program planning” (p. 7). Collins (2002) pointed to the importance of “building collaborative relationships from
the very beginning of the planning process” (p. 68). The first meeting involving parents, teachers, and the school psychologist is therefore crucial in setting the stage for future student success.

Research supports that collaboration of professionals and parent involvement increases student success (Alberta Learning, 2002). Likewise, Bond et al. (2001), in their discussion of health promotion in schools, emphasized how a systems approach is a necessary component for building capacity for system-level change in schools. By making change on a system level, Bond and colleagues suggested that health-promoting interventions are more successful as they become rooted within the context of the learning community. Students, parents, teachers, and psychologists working as a team can promote the collaboration necessary to maximize student learning potential.

**Effective Partnerships**

A partnership is an agreement between two or more parties working together to meet similar goals, agreeing to share the work and risks involved and a willingness to accept the results of the work (Hiebert, 2004). Epstein (2006) highlighted emerging themes throughout her research and case studies that indicate that “a strong-family relationship with the school is vital to success in education” (p. 108). When students, parents, teachers, and community work together “a caring community forms around the students and begins its work” (Epstein et al., 2002, p. 7). Hiebert emphasized the importance of people coming together and sharing all of the above characteristics in order for a partnership to be meaningful and action-oriented. The skill and knowledge of the facilitator and, in this scenario, the skills of the psychologist delivering the assessment results, are paramount in making a partnership between teachers, parents, and school psychologist work.
Working with Parents

Viewing parents as important members of the larger system interacting to meet the needs of their child’s learning is a paramount component of maximizing a systemic approach that promotes successful student learning. A parent’s participation in a child’s academic life has been proven to have benefits not only for the child, but for the teachers as well (Ramirez, Lepage, Kratochwill, & Duffy, 1998; Sheridan & Kratochwill, 1992). A review of literature emphasized that benefits include increased academic functioning and performance, increased self-esteem, increased socio-emotional functioning, and generally a more positive attitude towards school (Baum, 2003; Constantino, 2003; Epstein et al., 2002, 2006; McDermot, 2008; Rubin, 2002; Sheridan & Kratochwill, 1995; Winn-Tutwiler, 2005). Also noteworthy is research highlighted by Sheridan and Kratochwill that indicated the positive influence that parent involvement has on teachers, which includes teachers becoming more skillful in their teaching approach, more willing to diversify their teaching methods, and more willing to spend individual time with students. Parents give psychologists tremendous insight, which is extremely valuable as school psychologists consider suggested interventions.

Alberta Education (2006a) emphasized that by encouraging parent involvement we are inviting parents to provide information that is specific to their child and necessary in order to best determine the individual needs of the student. The following information is highlighted by Alberta Education as extremely helpful: (a) a child’s strengths, (b) family history, (c) medical history, (d) dreams and hopes of the child and the parent in relation to their child, and (e) support mechanisms in place and/or the possibility of support accessibility.
Helping parents to understand their role in understanding psychoeducational assessment will facilitate action at home. Alberta Education stated that:

Parents need to understand the importance of informed consent. To make informed decisions parents need to consider: (a) purpose of assessment, (b) the nature of assessment, (c) intended use of the results and (d) who has access to the results. (p. 2)

Switzer (1985) stated that “if parents have a low level of understanding of the diagnosis, irrespective of family dynamics, there was likely to be a poor fit between parental expectations and the child’s potential and low acceptance of the treatment plan” (p. 151).

When psychoeducational test results are delivered, school psychologists need to consider how to best address the parents. Geffken et al. (2006) indicated that:

Factors influencing adherence are various and can include multiple demographic factors (e.g., ethnicity, single parent status, and parent’s education), the child’s developmental level, child and parental beliefs, financial concerns, quality of therapeutic relationship, quality of family relationship, or time and transportation constraints. (p. 501)

Increasing knowledge and the parent’s ability to process psychoeducational test results will increase the parent’s ability and motivation to support the child. A parent’s knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to psychoeducational testing may also influence the success of treatment adherence and support.

Creating successful partnerships means helping parents and teachers become more aware of their child and student as a learner (Epstein et al., 2002). When a child has been assessed, parents’ and teachers’ understanding of the learning profile presented by the school psychologists helps all parties be more aware of how they can support and encourage
relevant and meaningful learning. “Actions by parents to encourage learning at home reinforces and supplements teachers’ efforts” (Baum, 2003, p. 37). Baum also noted that teachers are more invested in student learning if they feel that parents are invested in their children’s learning. This bidirectional partnership is created when there is clear communication. Epstein and colleagues stressed the importance of two-way communication and reiterated the importance of each party being fully aware of the intent and expectations of others. This highlights that school psychologists and teachers need to be effective communicators and use language free of educational jargon so that all important stakeholders are clear of the purpose and intent behind psychoeducational assessment. Without effective two-way communication and guidance from teachers and the school psychologists, parents may “be ill equipped to ask the appropriate questions to garner responses that provide answers they seek” (Constantino, 2003, p. 7).

A structured framework for meeting with parents to deliver the results of a WISC-IV needs to be collaborative and focused on parent-teacher problem-solving. When considering how school psychologists can deal most effectively with parents and teachers, Sheridan and Kratochwill (1992) stated:

Parent-teacher consultation is defined as a systemic, indirect form of service delivery, in which parents and teachers are joined to work together to address academic, social, or behavioural needs of an individual for whom both parties bear some responsibility. It is designed to engage parents and teachers in a collaborative problem-solving process with the assistance of a consultant, wherein interconnections between home and school systems are considered critically important. Therefore an expanded contextual base in assessment and intervention, the cross-setting influences on a
child’s behaviour, and the reciprocities within and between systems is central. (pp. 122-123)

Hiebert (2000) stated that “if action planning initiatives are going to be seen as relevant by clients, they have to be based on client input, and they have to be involved in the entire program development process” (p. 2). Forming effective partnerships with school and parents creates a solid base for group interaction and program planning. In *Standards for Special Education, Amended 2004*, Alberta Education (2006a) clearly indicated that “schools must invite meaningful involvement of parents in planning, problem solving and decision making related to their child’s special education programming” (p. 1). They also noted that parents should be considered as experts in relation to their child. Therefore, it is obvious that parents along with other professionals invested in the student become an integral component in creating a system and partnership for action after the delivery of the WISC-IV assessment results.

**Collaboration and Partnerships between School and Home**

Collaboration can mean many different things to stakeholders (Hiebert, 2000); thus, it is important to define collaboration within context. Alberta Learning (2002) highlighted the importance of collaborating with parents, teachers, and support staff to meet the diverse needs of students with learning disabilities because “no single individual has all the knowledge and expertise required to understand and meet the complex learning needs of students with learning disabilities” (p. 5). Collectively, a school resource team involving the teachers, school psychologist, and the parents can work together to achieve more (Hiebert 2000; Ramirez et al., 1998; Sheridan & Kratochwill, 1992).
When considering parents, teachers, and school psychologists, all members are valuable in their knowledge and expertise related to working with children. All of these important stakeholders value the student, whom they are coming together to support. Hiebert (2000) suggested that in order for these important stakeholders to be collaborating partners they must all feel as though they are contributing and receiving something of value. For this to occur, Hiebert indicated that all stakeholders must be in “substantial agreement of some core set of common values” (p. 2). Values guide the processing that occurs in a group working towards a common goal (Prilletensky, 2001). Alberta Education (2006a) stated that:

All parents have hopes and dreams for their child. Their priorities for their child’s learning may differ from those of the classroom teacher. It is important that the parents’ perspectives are recognized and understood, and that all viewpoints are considered so that the learning team works collaboratively to make the most appropriate programming decisions for individual students. (p. 3)

Recognizing and acknowledging a parent’s hopes and dreams for the child will help identify some of the common values within the group. Parents, along with supporting professionals, must have a chance to feel heard in order for values to be identified. These values will help establish a “desired state of affairs” (Prilletensky, 2001, p. 751) within the collaborating team that is deciding the programming needs for students assessed using the WISC-IV (Weschler, 2003).
CHAPTER IV
Delivery of the Psychoeducational Results

Alberta Learning (2006a, 2006b) promoted a problem-solving approach when planning for academic success. Collaborative team members begin with “identifying and clarifying the problem” (Alberta Learning, 2006a, p. 6). This identification may take place with the initial referral or request for services of a student who is experiencing difficulties. Through the delivery of psychoeducational assessment results, there is often further identification and clarification of the problem. The intent of collaboration between teacher, parent, and school psychologist is to generate solutions that can be evaluated, thereby creating a plan for action.

After a formal assessment has been completed and formulated into a written report, the school psychologist must be prepared to meet with parents and teachers to deliver the assessment results. It is helpful if the school psychologist has developed a set of knowledge, skills and attitudes that will facilitate effective delivery in order to form a solid partnership (Hiebert, 2000; Ramirez et al., 1998; Sheridan & Kratochwill, 1992). Although the school psychologist may initiate the meeting in order to deliver assessment results, the collaboration of the team is what will determine any future action plans. Bond and colleagues discussed the importance of building capacity for system-level change in schools and stated that building problem-solving capacity ensures sustainable change, but that it is also important to establish and prioritize the problems worth solving.

*Special Considerations: Parent Involvement*

As parents begin to acknowledge and accept the learning challenges their child faces and if a child is diagnosed with a learning disability within the context of the school system,
parents may lack systemic knowledge of how they can gain access to information that will support their child as well as themselves. Many parents feel uncertain about their role in helping their child. Parental stress is heightened when parents initially respond “with denial of and ambivalence about” (Dyson, 1996, p. 280) the diagnosis of the child’s disability. This denial and ambivalence may cause some group members to have unrealistic expectations of what can be achieved. It is important to take into consideration that parents of children who are being assessed are most likely anxious about their child’s school adjustment, peer relationships, and behaviour problems as well as their child’s chances for adjustment in the future (Shectman & Gilat, 2005). If a child is diagnosed with a learning disability parents often deal with negative perceptions others may have of their children and this leaves them feeling “angry, guilty and helpless” (Shectman & Gilat, p. 275). With this in mind, it is important for the school psychologist to be attuned to the comfort levels of parents. Information may need to be adjusted as necessary by opening up the meeting to discussion about any uncertainties or apprehensions. Language barriers may also need to be considered.

*Counselling: Role of the School Psychologist*

For school psychologists, relationship building can be challenging because most meetings are limited to an hour or less. In the best-case scenario, school psychologists have the opportunity to build effective partnerships with school administration, teachers, and support staff prior to meeting to discuss test results. However, in most cases there is no prior opportunity for the school psychologist to meet with parents prior to the WISC-IV assessment. Thus, the school psychologist is placed in a situation where the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of the stakeholders are often indicators of how successful their meeting
will be with the school resource team and the parents. Implementing successful counselling skills assists the school psychologist with effective delivery of WISC-IV test results.

There are two basic outcomes of counselling: (a) facilitating clients to manage their lives more effectively and (b) assisting clients in recognizing their own universal ability to manage problems and develop opportunities (Egan, 2001). Client realization of opportunity development is an essential and integral component of counselling. Counselling does not necessarily conclude with the solving or management of problems. Rather, counselling permits the client to perceive new alternatives to maladaptive choices, conflicts, and tensions within their self. Realizing that opportunities exist gives clients motion to move forward through an impasse.

*Working Alliance, Transference, and the Real Relationship*

*Working Alliance*

An essential derivative of the counselling experience is the relationship developed through a working therapeutic alliance of counsellor and client. Counselling must involve an assertive, competent, and genuine counsellor. Developing a strong working alliance facilitates clients in meeting their desired outcomes. In the case of parents meeting with the teachers and the school psychologist to receive the results of the WISC-IV, a plan of action will be required prior to the end of the meeting. Parents and teachers will be interested in how to maximize student potential in light of the WISC-IV results. The working alliance will help determine future success for effective program planning in the school and support in the home.

In order to maximize the student, parent, teacher, and psychologist plan of action it is important for all stakeholders to recognize the importance and value of the working alliance.
Sheridan and Kratochwill (1992) highlighted the importance of rapport building for effective consultation. It is very important to consider all relationship dynamics and interactions that occur between all important stakeholders: parents, teachers, and school psychologists.

“Working alliance” was the first term used by Greenson in 1967 “to describe the positive collaborative relationship between client and therapist as one of the essential components of success in therapy” (as cited in Horvath & Symonds, 1991, p. 139). Similarly, Hiebert (2004) stated that “client learning is central - the client comes to counselling expecting some change, and that change represents learning on the client’s part” (p. 1). It is widely agreed that the nature of the working alliance is bidirectional and interactive, involving the client and therapist collaborating to facilitate change through engagement and an agreement on therapy tasks (Castonguay, Constantino, & Holtforth, 2006; Hiebert, 2004; Horvath, 2001). It is the bond that develops throughout therapy that facilitates the agreement on tasks and goals (Hiebert). The meeting held by the school psychologist to discuss psychoeducational test results is an example of a brief meeting for which the development of a working alliance is crucial for effective delivery of information related to assessment (Sattler, 2001).

Another widely used and often cited interpretation of the working alliance is presented by Gelso and Carter (1994), who furthered Greenson’s prior work (as cited in Gelso & Carter) by describing the working alliance as having three necessary components: “an alliance, a transference configuration, and a real relationship” (p. 296). The components are interdependent and directly reflect the relationship between the counsellor and client. The work of Gelso and Carter was focused on examining how these three main components...
interact and influence one another. Meissner (2006) supported this investigation and agreed that these three components are an essential part of the working alliance.

Gelso and Carter (1994) characterized the working alliance as the “alignment or joining of the self or ego of the client and the therapist’s analyzing or ‘therapizing’ the self or ego for the purpose of work” (p. 297). This definition of the working alliance is similar to Hiebert’s (2004), which focused on establishing mutual tasks and goals for the purpose of work. Research draws parallels to the working alliance and positive therapeutic change, regardless of a practitioner’s modality of treatment or a client’s presenting concern (Castonguay et al., 2006).

**Transference Configuration**

The transference configuration was characterized by Gelso and Carter (1994) as the “repetition of past conflict with significant others which becomes displaced onto the therapist” (p. 297). Castonguay and colleagues (2006) suggested that therapists may be able to recognize clients with whom they may have a difficult time building alliance. Crits-Christoph, Connolly-Gibbons, and Hearon (2006) proposed that clients also meet the therapist with “various pre-treatment variables” (p. 281). These variables may predispose clients to positive or negative outcomes. They also pointed out that therapists need to be prepared to adjust their approach in order to account for potential relationship challenges.

Due to the brevity of assessment debriefs, school psychologists must address any rupture in the alliance as they transpire (Safran, Muran, Wallner-Samstag, & Stevens, 2001). If parents or teachers feel intimidated when attending a meeting with the school psychologist, they may present as challenging or resistant. Being sensitive to this possibility will help
school psychologists ensure that results are delivered in a manner that limits any negative transference.

A lack of understanding for teachers or parents related to the delivery of psychoeducational results may cause the equivalent of a therapeutic rupture. It is therefore extremely important that the school psychologist be attuned to the cues of teachers and parents that indicate the alliance may be at risk. Being sensitive of how the rupture is addressed is critical. Therapists need to be flexible in their approach when dealing with therapeutic ruptures. Adhering to a rigid schedule of delivery will not repair a rupture (Safran et al., 2001).

It is important to note that Safran and colleagues (2001) cautioned therapists to not mistake a transference interpretation for a weakened alliance. Addressing a therapeutic rupture with teachers or parents in a flexible nondefensive manner as it occurs will improve the alliance. Checking for understanding throughout the delivery of psychoeducational assessment results will also help to build an alliance. An example of a rupture that may occur in a debriefing would be a parent becoming fixated on a piece of information related to assessment that they disagree about. An example of a working alliance skill that would address this matter in a nondefensive and flexible manner would be to sensitively and appropriately interject with a statement of generality and agreement, such as “it is very clear that your child has many strengths and we are very fortunate to have all of you here to recognize those strengths in order to provide the best programming possible.” By agreeing on the overarching purpose of the stakeholders’ meeting, the fixated parent will likely agree and be able to move forward in a nonthreatened manner.
Likewise, Castonguay and colleagues (2006) highlighted the importance of therapists recognizing unresolved issues that may be triggered in themselves should they encounter a challenging client. Countertransference is depicted as “the therapist’s transference to the client’s material” (Gelso & Carter, 1994, p. 297). If school psychologists are aware of negative countertransference, they too can identify any thoughts and feelings that may be triggered by their brief meeting with a student’s parents. An example of negative countertransference may occur if a parent is nervous about attending the debrief meeting. Parents may have had negative past experiences in the school system as they went through school. This immediate countertransference associated strictly by proximity to their experiences may need to be addressed. A simple question such as “how can we support you in order to support your child?” may be the very opening needed for parents to express their uncertainties about the whole process. Similarly, an example of a psychologist’s countertransference may be the psychologist interpreting the parent’s nervousness as resistance and hostility. If the psychologist reacts to the interpretation of hostile behaviour based on the psychologist’s own uncertainties and feelings of nervousness, a rupture may develop that creates an impasse between psychologist and parent. Due to the debrief it is important that the school psychologist work quickly to acknowledge and examine where reactions are coming from so that the working alliance is not damaged.

*The Real Relationship*

Horvath (2000) stated that “the quality of the alliance, notwithstanding some variations in the precise definitions of the concept, is a robust predictor of therapy outcome” (p. 167). In addition, Castonguay and colleagues (2006) stated that “alliance predicts outcome” (p. 273). Therapy modalities have been challenged to develop a common
understanding of the relationship that develops in therapy. According to Gelso and Carter (1994), the real relationship is framed by the two key characteristics of genuineness and realistic perceptions. If a parent senses that the intention of the school psychologist is not genuine, then the real relationship is jeopardized, making it challenging to come to an agreement on collaborative goal setting for the purposes of program planning.

The real relationship also refers to the “dimension of the total relationship that is essentially nontransferential, and thus relatively independent of transference” (Horvath, 2000, p. 297). Within the process of handling client transference and seeking to understand, a deeper relationship develops (Gelso & Carter, 1994). As mentioned previously, Alberta Learning (2002) acknowledged the parents as the experts in understanding their child. If the school psychologist can build a quality alliance that identifies and acknowledges the parents’ concerns for their child’s well-being, the parents are likely to feel valued and connected. This is where the bond between counsellor and client develops, as indicated by Hiebert (2004).

Gelso and Carter (1994) noted that it is important that “the therapy participants see each other in an accurate and realistic way” (p. 297). Alberta Education (2006) stated that “ensuring input from all members of the resource team including the parents is open, honest, and respectful will contribute to increased commitment to program planning” (p. 21). This open and honest communication is characteristic of the working alliance and an effective partnership. It is also important to note that “the real relationship and transference coexist, each influencing and being influenced by the working alliance” (Gelso & Carter, 2006, p. 299). Working through ruptures as they occur (Safran et al., 2001) helps build a genuine relationship between the school psychologist, teachers, and, most importantly, the parents. If there is in fact a rupture in the alliance that is not quickly addressed, the likelihood of a
A genuine relationship developing between school psychologist and parents is considerably lower.

To summarize, acknowledging therapeutic ruptures and attending to therapeutic ruptures in a nondefensive manner (Safran et al., 2001) facilitates and promotes further enhancement of the relationship or bond (Bordin, 1979). A commonality among all research literature presented signifies the importance of an empathic, genuine, and trustworthy relationship between counsellors and clients (Bordin; Castonguay et al., 2006; Gelso & Carter, 1994; Hiebert, 2004; Safran et al., 2001). Integration of the working alliance is most successful when these qualities of the counsellor emerge naturally and a strong relationship is developed in the beginning stages of therapy. Gelso and Carter emphasized that high levels of transference in brief therapy may indicate that the working alliance has been jeopardized and is in need of immediate repair. This point highlights how crucial the meeting between parent and psychologist is when delivering psychoeducational test results.

**Goals, Tasks, and Bonds**

When considering the construct of the working alliance Hiebert (2004) stated that clients often expect some kind of education to occur when they are seeking the help of a professional such as the school psychologist. Hiebert reminded professionals that any education that takes place needs to be flexible and collaborative in nature. The professional does not determine the process or outcomes; rather, the working alliance is formed through client-driven goals and outcomes. However, successful explanation of the assessment to parents may help determine the success of the outcome (P. Jerry, personal communication, 2008). “In this way, professional and client are partners in the instructional enterprise and outcomes, the processes, and the specific skills or approaches are determined together” (p. 2).
Bordin (1979) stressed that the main focus within the working alliance includes “three main features: an agreement on goals, an assignment of task, or a series of tasks, and the development of bonds” (p. 253). More recent literature widely agrees that the alliance is a process of collaboration that is most effective if there is an agreement on therapy tasks and goals (Hatcher & Barrends, 2006; Hiebert, 2004; Safran et al., 2001). All three elements are integral and essential in order to elicit a strong working alliance. It is these three elements which give direction to the intended outcome.

As a school psychologist, it is challenging to establish all three features in a single meeting. Alberta Education (2006a) suggested implementing solution-focused meetings as an effective way to facilitate helpful program planning for all important stakeholders involved. Solution-focused meetings are also helpful in establishing goals, tasks, and bonds, as suggested by Bordin (1979).

**Goals**

The intended outcome in the working alliance may be further studied by modalities specifically assessing the method of making goals. The psychodynamic therapist establishes collaborative goals by gearing goal setting “toward an enduring core of thought and feelings that are seen as determining action and experience” (Bordin, 1979, p. 253). In contrast, behavioural therapists direct goal setting in such a way that the concentration and the process of goal setting is focused on more specific areas of a client’s life (Bordin). In both modalities, the intention of the process is therapeutic engagement. It would be helpful for school psychologists to be mindful of their theoretical framework in order to facilitate the development of goals that are meaningful for all involved.
Making goal setting relevant and meaningful in a debrief can be very challenging due to time constraints and the number of stakeholders involved. Goals are most successful if they are meaningful, measurable, and manageable (Alberta Learning, 2006). Alberta Learning also stated “that goals and objectives should include a clear indication of the action, context, terms, and timeline” (p. 4). This planning usually occurs when teachers and parents meet to collaboratively begin planning an effective Individual Program Plan to meet the student’s learning needs.

Due to the brevity of the debrief meeting and the sensitive and cumbersome information that needs to be conveyed, goal setting will most likely be very general. However, if stakeholders have an idea of the general action they would like to see, then tailoring of specific goals related to student performance can be achieved when teachers, parents, and students meet collaboratively to plan the IPP. Some general goals relevant to the debrief may include having stakeholders agreeing upon a meeting time for IPP development or creating one or two immediate interventions that may help the student to be successful until a formal IPP can be developed.

Tasks

The implementation of an agreed-upon contract of desired behaviour goals, in collaboration with the professional guidance of a counsellor is an additional feature used to build a strong working alliance (Bordin, 1979). Tasks can and do include interpreting “activity-passivity, empathic understanding, communicating, interpreting, self-disclosing, etc.” (Gelso & Carter, 1994, p. 254). The counsellor’s therapeutic framework and the success of the alliance created with the client determine tasks that are personally relevant and meaningful steps towards goal-oriented behaviour.
Tasks relevant to a debrief meeting among the psychologist, teachers, and parents may include a discussion related to each stakeholder’s agreed-upon role. A task for the school psychologist is to disseminate information related to the assessment to teachers and parents in a manner that provides understanding. A task of the school may include a planned discussion related to providing the student with the most “enabling placement in a manner consistent with provincial special education policies, in consultation with parents and based on current assessment data” (Alberta Learning, 2004, p. 10). If the local school community is determined to be the best option for the student, an agreed-upon task for the teachers is to design an Individual Program Plan that clearly reflects the results of the assessments and corresponds with the psychologist’s suggested interventions. As experts with regard to their children, it may be the parents’ role to collect any additional personal information and knowledge that teachers may need to be aware of in order for IPP goal setting to be meaningful, manageable, and measurable for the student.

**Bonds**

Bonds between counsellors and clients develop throughout the process of collaboration in the working alliance (Bordin, 1979). These bonds are often the personal connection that unfolds between the counsellor and client and quite often the very elements of genuineness and empathic understanding facilitate the client in taking a step beyond what is comfortable. The bond creates strength in the client and serves as the change agent that promotes and initiates alternatives and new perspectives. When this elicited response occurs, the client is able to ascertain new opportunities.

The development of a bond happens over time and can often be swayed by bumps along the way. Horvath (2000) pointed out recent research that indicated that one to five
sessions can often determine the working alliance bond. If this working alliance is not put into place within the first five sessions of counselling, then the likelihood of a successful working alliance significantly decreases. Without the working alliance bond, the client does not move forward as quickly. The counsellor does not connect with the client on a level that creates and build trust. Horvath also suggested that clients must feel as though they are an active ingredient in the collaborative process of change. “Developing a collaborative framework (alliance) with a client, built on mutual respect, trust, and personal commitment as well as a sense of responsibility to the goals of the treatment” (Horvath, p. 169) is an essential ingredient to a positive working alliance. Hiebert (2001) noted that “one of the key assumptions, that seems to be born out of practice, is that establishing mutually agreeable goals will help all parties develop a greater sense of ownership over both process and outcome, and foster a sense of accomplishment in achieving the end goals” (p. 2).

Creating a strong working alliance fosters a bond between the school psychologist, teacher, and parents. Again, due to the brevity of the debrief meeting, creating a bond that conveys trust, respect, and commitment can be very challenging. Planning an effective debrief can help foster the development of this trust. If teachers and parents walk away from the meeting debrief with a good understanding of the information conveyed and an agreed-upon date and time for further action (i.e., IPP planning), the likelihood of a working alliance developing between stakeholders is much more likely to occur.

Working Alliance: Skills for the School Psychologist

Hiebert (2004) emphasized that professionals need to acquire a certain skill set in order to be effective in their communication with their clients, and stated that “it is important to develop facility on three levels” (p. 3). These three levels include competency in the
following areas: “(a) performance of a basic repertoire of generic skills, (b) implementing skills in a purposeful manner, and (c) an ability to self-monitor and self-reflect” (Hiebert, p. 3). He emphasized that these skills are not attached to any particular theoretical framework. However, it does indicate that the counsellor’s role within the working alliance must be focused on making communication meaningful to both the client and the counsellor. These skills are meant to compliment the counsellor’s theoretical orientation. Hiebert also stated that “client-learning is essential in producing client change” (p. 3). Hiebert’s explanation of generic counselling skills highlights the importance of counsellors systemizing their approach for effective communication. Remembering that the client is the expert of their own experience can help counsellors to be mindful of their role as a navigator “exploring, clarifying and in the end, developing a strong working alliance” (p. 3).

Common characteristics and desired outcomes of goal setting, developing tasks and developing bonds (Bordin, 1979) emerge from the application of an integrated approach. To begin with, the counsellor must have a comprehensive knowledge and skill base and the cognitive processing capabilities to manifest and implement successful counselling (Jennings & Skyvolt, 1999). This manifestation of appropriate knowledge and skill acquisition must also be complimented with a working alliance between counsellor and client (Egan, 1994). Successful therapy is indicative of a client who experiences positive transformation in behaviour, cognitions, and feelings.

*Stages of Group Process*

When the school psychologist, teacher and parents meet to discuss assessment results it could be the first meeting as a entire group. Understanding the stages of group process is as important as having a strong working alliance. Understanding group process can give the
school psychologist additional insight into the type of group interactions that may occur depending upon the cohesion of the group. If for example, the group is meeting for the very first time (e.g., SRG team, psychologists, and teachers), there will most likely be limited cohesion among group members. The level of trust may vary depending upon the stage the group is in prior to meeting with the school psychologist. A school psychologist’s leadership style will depend upon the stage of the group. Corey and Corey (2006) explained the stages of group therapy as the (a) initial phase, (b) transition phase, (c) working stage, and (d) final stage.

**Initial Phase**

They may experience uncertainties about group expectations, norms, and expected behaviour (Corey & Corey, 2006). Some members may compensate for their uncertainties by giving advice to other members and “members may ask ‘What are we suppose to be doing here? I really don’t know what we should be talking about’” (Corey & Corey, p. 133). It is common for members to question the safety of the group.

Corey and Corey (2006) noted that leaders in the initial stages of the group process are most helpful when they implement a formal structure in the beginning stages of meeting to ease any uncertainties about what is expected to happen. Leaders need to be careful not to structure the meeting too loosely as it may perpetuate feelings of uncertainty in group members. However, too much structure may foster leader-dependent attitudes (Corey & Corey, 2006). Leaders should be able to handle conflict and negative reactions in an open and honest manner and respond openly with the group regarding any cultural conditioning that may affect or influence reactions of information presented or shared. Recognizing and acknowledging and uncertainties, hidden agendas, or anxieties is also imperative.
Transition Stage

The transition stage can be very challenging for leaders and members. If a meeting of the school psychologist, parents, and teachers is in the transition phase, prior communication has most likely occurred between all group members. The group members may be feeling “more intense projections” (Corey & Corey, 2000, p. 51) towards others in the group and members may be willing to take more risks in their disclosures. This willingness to take more risks heightens any anxieties the group may be experiencing.

Corey and Corey (2006) indicated that members in the transition stage of group process may be anxious about the level of trust among group members and also about the leader’s ability. They may also be resistant to becoming engaged for fear of possible rejection or judgment by others. This may result in stakeholders reacting defensively and disengaging from the process.

The most helpful leadership style in this stage includes the ability of the leader to intervene within the transition process in a manner that is sensitive and appropriate (Corey & Corey, 2006). Leaders need to encourage members to explore any resistance or reluctance they may be experiencing and that may be preventing them from becoming authentically engaged in the process of the group. Corey and Corey noted that leaders are also most helpful in the transition stage if they encourage acknowledge and address conflict openly and honestly. One way that the school psychologist may be effective is to normalize the fears of group members by providing the opportunity for open expression and possibly examples of other parents having similar questions.
Working Stage

If a school psychologist has been working with an SRG team and the parents of a child who has been assessed for an extended period of time (e.g., the child may be tested again after a two-year period has passed), there may have been enough group interactions that the group may be considered to be in the working stage of group process. It is important to be aware of the working stage as this is the most likely part of the group process to create change if members (e.g., SRG team and parents) are fully committed and engaged after they leave the meeting in which the assessment results are delivered. The school psychologist may not be a part of this process, but it is important to be cognizant of the possibility of the group getting to the working stage when considering program planning and suggested interventions. Corey and Corey (2006) highlighted that group members in the working stage are open to expressing authentic reactions and perceptions and able to “think out loud” (Corey & Corey, p. 232). Their trust increases and they become hopeful.

Corey and Corey (2000, 2006) emphasized that the most helpful leadership style in this stage is for leaders to be able to describe openly and honestly what is happening in the group. These leaders address any apprehensions they are experiencing in the group, are facilitative rather than directive, and can find a balance between being supportive and confrontational. In this stage the school psychologist would be able to provide specific and meaningful feedback to stakeholders in a sensitive and appropriate manner. By providing this type of leadership the school psychologist can increase stakeholders’ sense of hope and universality.
Final Stage of Group

School psychologist are most likely to not witness or be involved in the final stages of a group that is working to support a child. However, it is important for the school psychologist to be aware of what the group is aiming for as they work together to maximize a student’s opportunity for success. The final stage of group process is characterized by group members celebrating their success and reflecting on what new behaviours they wish to carry on (Corey & Corey, 2006). This is also an important stage for the school psychologist to be aware of, as this is the stage at which “members consolidate their learning and develop strategies for transferring what they learned in the group to daily life” (Corey & Corey, p. 269). This final stage may occur at the end of a school year when the group comes together to sign off on an Individualized Program Plan. This process will help group members determine what action will be most helpful for the student as they consider transition. Corey and Corey suggested that group members in this stage may have difficulties imagining separation from the group as they transition into a new program or grade level. It is important for stakeholders to be reflective of the benefits the group has played in supporting the student in their IPP. It is equally important for stakeholders to develop plans to handle any potential setbacks that may occur (Corey & Corey).

If the school psychologist has an opportunity to be involved in the final stages of the group process, the leadership style that is most helpful is to be supportive of members who may be experiencing anxiety about the group process closing. A leader in this stage also celebrates with group members changes made and helps members plan for future action.
Supporting Diverse Populations

As a school psychologist, it is also important to be aware of each individual’s cultural makeup. “Multiculturalism focuses on the need to consider the unique cultural characteristics of diverse populations in the provision of psychological services, including school consultation” (Ramirez et al., 1998, p. 479). It is particularly important to note that suggestions can be made as to how to work with parents in the most effective manner, but it is equally important that the school psychologist recognize that extreme care must be considered when applying a systematic approach so as to not offend or be insensitive to the diverse needs of all stakeholders. Arthur and Collins (2005) proposed a framework in which the individual therapist and in this case the school psychologist focus on “exploring conceptual and theoretical factors including (a) self-awareness of your own culture and (b) awareness of the client’s culture” (p. 41).

Arthur and Collins (2005) reminded us that the term “culture” implies a broad range of concepts. In their work to revise a “framework for culture-infused counselling” (p. 45), they challenge professionals to see beyond what we have traditionally considered to be classified under the term culture. To be a culturally infused counsellor, Arthur and Collins proposed that we consider the term to be “inclusive of other factors beyond race and ethnicity” (p. 45). They proposed that culture requires professionals to become: (a) knowledgeable and experienced in “specific areas of practice and culture” (p. 45), (b) to recognize and consider clients as having their own cultural identity and worldview separate from the cultural group they may be identified with, (c) to be culturally competent and aware of one’s personal biases and values that may influence one’s work with clients, and (d) to develop a strong working alliance infused with cultural competencies. Therefore, the school
psychologist may need to do some prior research and personal reflection on how to best meet the individual needs of the parents and the teacher with whom they will be working. This exploration of culture will also lend itself to understanding the child they are assessing.

Creating an appreciation of differing worldviews is an ongoing process; however, careful consideration needs to be made in the initial stages of the meeting for parents to be invited to have the opportunity to share with the student resource team how their personal culture affects their own worldview. The school psychologist should consider how to make meetings relevant to people from different backgrounds and nondominant populations. Acquiring a general understanding of belief systems, values, and historical backgrounds of parents prior to meeting will be helpful (Corey & Corey, 2006; Ramirez et al., 1998). Planning should be flexible in order to accommodate, adapt, and modify to meet the individual cultural needs of group members. Having an understanding of how “oppression, racism, discrimination, and stereotyping” (Corey & Corey, p. 43) affect specific members of a cultural group will also ensure deeper cultural sensitivity on behalf of the school psychologist.

It would be unfair to assume that all parents will understand the educational decision-making system in which their child has been assessed. Kalyanpur and Harry (as cited in Schectman & Gilat, 2005) stated that:

Knowing how school systems work is easier for parents who have been through the system themselves and perhaps observed how their own parents negotiated their way through it. The system may be challenging for some parents to understand especially if they have not experienced the school system themselves or have had negative experiences while doing so. (p. 532)
This also highlights the challenges group members may face as they begin to acculturate in an entirely new province or new country. The school system in which their child has been assessed may seem like an entirely different culture in itself. Keeping this in mind, the school psychologist must be aware that, for some parents, being involved with the school system on any level may be completely new to them. Providing ample opportunities for questioning in many different formats such as oral or written will help all members of the school resource team take into special consideration different levels of experience, culture, and education within the group setting. Also, being aware of differing communication styles and learning styles among parents will help the school psychologist be open about how engagement in the group process may vary depending on group members and their individual cultures.

In order for leaders to be culturally sensitive of the group members and, in this case, parents, group leaders (i.e., the school psychologist) need to be culturally attuned to themselves (Arthur & Collins, 2005; Corey & Corey, 2006; Ramirez et al., 1998). Ongoing self-reflection will help school psychologists gain a deep understanding of their culture, which includes an awareness of any values and biases. This personal reflection challenges the school psychologist to be sensitive and cautious in approaching issues of cultural sensitivity when collaborating and sharing assessment results with parents. It is particularly important for the school psychologist to also be cautious of assuming that every parent or SRG team member, as suggested in this project, will accept the collaborative approach to consultation. Some nondominant populations may find the collaborative approach of the school psychologist intimidating and may therefore look for an “expert” to run the meeting (Ramirez et al.). Working from a position of cultural responsiveness includes
“acknowledging, showing interest in and appreciation for, demonstrating knowledge about the individual’s culture and ethnicity, and placing the individual’s problem in a cultural context” (Ramirez et al., p. 488) helps build a strong working alliance.

It is not only important for school psychologists to be aware of any personal biases that they may have in relation to culture; it is equally important to recognize potential bias in the SRG team that may be influencing a child’s daily functioning and treatment (Ramirez et al., 1998). Ramirez and colleagues strongly emphasized that:

The consultant must be aware of both overt and covert ethnic/racial biases when a culturally diverse student is referred for assessment of any problem, including disabilities. For example, the consultant can and must probe into the teacher’s attributions and expectations to determine the veracity of the referral. Through individual consultation with the teacher, the consultant (school psychologist) can help alter such attributions, rather than labeling a student who already struggles under the various forms of racism. (p. 493)
CHAPTER IV

Manual: Suggestions for Delivering Psychoeducational Results

The following pages comprise the manual.
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Vision

The vision of this manual is to enhance the delivery of psychoeducational test results for the purpose of understanding and action. This manual will include an educational component facilitating the school psychologist to teach others a certain level of basic knowledge and understanding related to the WISC-IV (Wechsler, 2003). Included in the manual are ideas on how to begin goal setting with parents and other team members. Ideas for task-specific goals will also be implemented. The manual will conclude with suggested steps on how to run a successful meeting in order to best meet the needs of the child and the community in which the child thrives.

Meaningful Parent Involvement

Along with the involvement of the school psychologist and teachers is the involvement of the parents. Alberta Education (2006) clearly stated in the Standards for Special Education, Amended 2004, that “schools must invite meaningful involvement of parents in planning, problem solving and decision making related to their child’s special education programming” (p. 1). They also noted that parents should be considered as experts in relation to their child. Therefore, it is obvious that parents, along with other professionals invested in the student, become an integral component in creating a system and partnership for action after the delivery of the WISC-IV assessment results.

Facilitating Collaborative Relationships with Parents

The early development of a solid working alliance with parents and teachers in the initial stages of meeting is paramount for maximizing a systemic approach that promotes successful student learning. Considering the role teachers and parents play a student’s life gives school psychologists insight as they consider their suggested interventions.
When psychoeducational test results are delivered, school psychologists need to consider how to best address the parents. Switzer (1985) stated that if “parents have a low level of understanding of the diagnosis, irrespective of family dynamics, there was likely to be a poor fit between parental expectations and the child’s potential and low acceptance of the treatment plan” (p. 151). According to Geffken, Keeley, Kellison, and Storch (2006):

Factors influencing adherence are various and can include multiple demographic factors (e.g., ethnicity, single parent status, and parent’s education), child’s developmental level, child and parental beliefs, financial concerns, quality of therapeutic relationship, quality of family relationship, or time and transportation constraints.

Increasing knowledge and a parent’s ability to process psychoeducational test results will increase the parent’s ability and motivation to support their child. Parents’ knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to psychoeducational testing may also influence the success of treatment adherence and support.

Previous work by Shauna Pupp (2006) entitled *Guidelines for Reporting Assessment Results* has already been completed. With permission from Pupp, these professional guidelines will provide structure to this manual. However, the focus of this manual will be on the process of delivering assessment results while adhering to these professional guidelines. This manual will also be structured around the *Knowledge, Skills, and Attributes of Teaching Quality* (Alberta Learning, 2004).
Format of Manual: Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes

Both the College of Alberta Psychologists and Alberta Education provide competency guidelines in the form of guidelines for practice. These guidelines, although specific to each profession, centre on the Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes (KSA) of the professional. Alberta Education’s guidelines for competency differ in that they refer to attributes rather than attitudes. Both terms imply similar notions; however, as discussed later, the term “attitudes” is a broad concept and may include many varying degrees of perception. Both regulatory bodies consider the KSA to be guidelines for professional competency. For this reason the format of this manual will center on key knowledge, skills, and attitudes that promote professional competency.

Epstein and Hundert (as cited in Continuing Competence: The Implementation of a Program for Professional Psychology, 2002) stated that “professional competence is the habitual and judicious use of communication, knowledge, technical skills, clinical reasoning, emotions, values, reflection in daily practice for the benefit of the individual and the community being served” (p. 228). For the school psychologist delivering psychoeducational assessment results, it is helpful to consider how the KSA may influence the process of delivery.
Knowledge, Skills, and Attitude Definitions

Definitions Adapted from the College of Alberta Psychologists (CAP, 2006)

**KNOWLEDGE:** Comprehending and understanding a body of information related to issues that a professional practitioner may encounter. A basic requirement of knowledge in the Province of Alberta requires psychologists to complete the requirements for registration by the provincial regulatory body (CAP).

**SKILLS:** “Skill is the ability to effectively apply knowledge in actual practice” (College of Alberta Psychologists, 2006, p. 6). Practical internships are the practice required by CAP to sufficiently meet the competency in skill requirement. Practice in this area includes listening, interviewing, and technical proficiency in other areas such as psychotherapeutic intervention.

**ATTITUDES:** Due to the complexity of what the term “attitudes” means CAP includes competencies related to judgment and diligence (College of Alberta Psychologists, 2006). Competency in these areas refers to recognizing how your own biases and values influence your worldview and professional decision-making. Competency also refers to sustaining a high level of commitment to the KSA provided by your professional regulatory body.
Professional Guidelines for Reporting Psychoeducational Assessment: An Overview

Pupp (2006) highlighted the importance of Sattler’s (2001) guidelines for reporting assessments involving children. A brief summary taken directly from the work of Pupp can be found below. These professional guidelines include:

1. Provide procedures for assessment that are inclusive and nondiscriminatory.
2. Provide assessment that is reflective of the child’s native language.
3. Provide assessment instruments for children whose first language may not be English that measure the child’s need for special programming rather than assessment instruments that measure the child’s English proficiency.
4. Provide a comprehensive evaluation by including a variety of assessment tools.
5. Provide a rationale and purpose for specific standardized tests and their use.
6. Provide qualified professionals who are trained in administering standardized tests and who will follow specific testing procedures.
7. Provide and report information about when the administration of standardized testing was not upheld.
8. Provide assessment instruments and other forms of evaluation that assess educational needs rather than general intelligence.
9. Provide test results of children that “accurately reflect their academic or cognitive abilities, not impairments in communication skills (Pupp, 2006, p. 32).
10. Provide a variety of criterions when determining the presence of a disability and when determining effective educational program planning.
11. Provide assessment for “all areas related to the suspected disability “including appropriate health, vision, hearing, social and emotional status, general intelligence, academic performance, communicative status, and motor abilities” (Pupp, 2006, p. 32).

12. Provide assessment that is all-inclusive and identify any special programming the child may have regardless of the identified disability.

13. Provide only “technically-sound instruments to assess cognitive, behavioural, physical, and developmental factors” (Pupp, 2006, p. 32).

14. Provide assessment tools and strategies that provide pertinent information related to educational programming.
Guidelines for Assessment (Sattler, 2001, p. 43)

- Step 1: Review Referral Information
- Step 2: Accepting Referral
- Step 3: Gathering Background Information
- Step 4: Interview Influence of Others
- Step 5: Observe Student in Other Settings
- Step 6: Choosing Appropriate Test Battery
- Step 7: Interpretation of Assessment Results
- Step 8: Designing Interventions and Offering Recommendations
- Step 9: Writing the Report
- Step 10: Meet With the Parents and Other Concerned Individuals
- Step 11: Follow Up on Recommendations and Revaluation
KNOWLEDGE

Meeting with Parents and Other Concerned Individuals

For the Purpose of Delivering Psychoeducational

Assessment Results
According to Sattler (2001), after writing a report a psychologist is likely to need to present the report in multiple places, including:

- “With the child (where appropriate), with the parents, and the referral source” (p. 18)
- With staff
- In a court of law

The College of Alberta Psychologists (2006) provides Professional Guidelines for psychologists in direct relation to the control of psychological tests by psychologists. That document contains a section that addresses the reporting of Results. The following guidelines have been directly quoted.

- Psychologists should communicate test results in a timely fashion and in a manner that is easily understood and avoids misunderstanding.
- Psychologists have an obligation to make all reasonable efforts to ensure that the results of testing are used appropriately by those to whom they report. (pp. 4-5)

In addition to these reporting guidelines the International Guideline for Test Use (2000) provides guidelines that should also be considered by the school psychologist. These guidelines, also directly quoted, include:

- Make clear that the test data represent just one source of information and should always be considered in conjunction with other information.
- Explain how the importance of the test results should be weighted in relation
to other information about the people being assessed.

☐ Use a form and structure for a report that is appropriate to the context of the assessment.

☐ When appropriate, provide decision-makers with information on how results may be used to inform their decisions.

☐ Explain and support the use of test results used to classify people into categories (e.g., for diagnostic purposes or for job selection).

☐ Present oral feedback to test takers in a constructive and supportive manner.

(Section 2.9)
## KNOWLEDGE

**Effective Delivery of Psychoeducational Assessment:**

**What Does That Look Like in a School?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What the School Psychologist Needs to Know</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐ The College of Alberta Psychologists (2006) provides Professional Guidelines for Psychologists in direct relation to control of psychological tests by psychologists (provided in the previous section).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Be aware of the Standards for Special Education, <em>Amended June 2004</em> (provided in previous section).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Be aware of individual school administrative policy and regulations regarding:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Specialized Assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Right to Access Records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Coordinated Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Parent Involvement (Alberta Learning, 2004, pp. 7-9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Be aware of individual school culture and your viewed role in the school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Be aware of the special attributes involved in working with teachers and parents (see section on attributes).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Be aware of how your assessment results could be interpreted by the school learning team for the purposes of funding in relation to Alberta Learning’s Standards for Special Education (2004).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What Teachers Need to Know

Alberta Learning’s Standards for Special Education, Amended June 2004, state that school boards must:

☐ Ensure teacher practice is in keeping with the Teacher Quality Standard
☐ Ensure teachers know and apply the knowledge, skills and attributes to accommodate individual differences for students with special education needs
☐ Support teachers’ ability to monitor the effectiveness of their practices and adjust practices as necessary (p. 9)

Therefore it is important that the teacher have and understand the appropriate knowledge necessary to understand psychoeducational assessment results. In relation to the WISC-IV, a teacher should be aware of and refer to the following concepts and terminology in order to better understand the results:

☐ Ability - “... refers to a child’s natural aptitude or acquired proficiency in a given area (often expressed as an intelligence quotient)” (P. Jerry, personal communication, 2007, p. 1).

☐ Achievement - refers to the quantity and quality of a child’s work (often expressed in a grade level) (P. Jerry, personal communication, 2007).

☐ Norm-Referenced Testing - means that the assessment is standardized, but used to assess a clearly defined group. Scores from a norm-referenced assessment are then scaled and reflect a score that is ranked within a distinct group considered the group norm (Sattler, 2001).

☐ Percentile Rank - refers to a student’s score in relation to other students of the same age (Weiss, & Saklofske, Prifitera, & Holdnack, 2006). Percentile rank is a point in a distribution of scores based on a standardized group. A student who ranks in the 20th percentile performed as high or 20% higher than other students in the same age group, or 80% of students performed higher than this particular student.

☐ Confidence Intervals - reflects a student’s true ability. It is a band or range of scores centred on the student’s actual score in which the true score is likely to be positioned (Sattler, 2006; Weiss et al., 2006).

☐ Group Norms (Age-Related) - a distinct group considered the group norm.

☐ Full-Scale IQ scores - all four areas comprise and represent the full-scale IQ score (FSIQ), or general intellectual functioning.

☐ 4 IQ Domains - Verbal Comprehension, Perceptual Reasoning, Working Memory, and Processing Speed.

☐ Common Discrepancies in WISC-IV Scores - “According to Canadian norms for the WISC-IV, if there is a discrepancy of 12 or more IQ points the difference is considered significant and therefore may indicate a learning disability in either of the domains” (P. Jerry, personal communication, 2007, p. 2). A common inconsistency is a Verbal score lower than a Perceptual score, meaning that a student may not have the same level of verbal abilities in comparison with their nonverbal abilities (P. Jerry, personal communication). A score not as common, but equally important occurs when a student’s Perceptual score is lower than their Verbal score, meaning that their nonverbal skills may not be at the same level as their verbal abilities.

☐ Criteria for Coding
What Parents Need to Know

Alberta Learning’s Standards for Special Education, Amended (June 2004) in accordance with the Preamble of the School Act state that:

Parents have a right and responsibility to make decisions respecting the education of their children. School boards must:

- Ensure parents have the opportunity for participation in decisions that affect student’s education.
- Ensure parents have information needed to make informed decisions.
- Invite meaningful involvement of parents in planning, problem-solving and decision-making relating to students’ special education programming (p. 9).

Therefore, parents should be aware that they have the right and are expected to be involved in the delivery of their child’s psychoeducational assessment results. Parents should also be given a choice about how much knowledge they would find helpful in order to understand the assessment results. It is helpful for all important stakeholders to understand the following terms and concepts:

- Ability - “...refers to a child’s natural aptitude or acquired proficiency in a given area (often expressed as an intelligence quotient)” (P. Jerry, personal communication, 2007, p. 1).
- Achievement - refers to the quantity and quality of a child’s work (often expressed in a grade level) (P. Jerry, personal communication, 2007).
- Norm-referenced testing - means that the assessment is standardized, but it is used to assess a clearly defined group. Scores from a norm-referenced assessment are then scaled and reflect a score that is ranked within a distinct group considered the group norm (Sattler, 2001).
- Percentile Rank - a student’s score in relation to other students of the same age (Weiss et al., 2006). Percentile rank is a point in a distribution of scores based on a standardized group. A student who ranks in the 20th percentile performed as high or 20% higher than other students in the same age group, or 80% percent of students performed higher than this particular student.
- Confidence Intervals - reflects a student’s true ability. It is a band or range of scores centred on the student’s actual score in which the true score is likely to be positioned (Sattler, 2001; Weiss et al., 2006).
- Group Norms (Age-Related) - a distinct group considered the group norm.
- Full-Scale IQ scores - All four areas comprise and represent the full-scale IQ score (FSIQ), or general intellectual functioning.
- 4 IQ Domains: Verbal Comprehension, Perceptual Reasoning, Working Memory, Processing Speed
- Common Discrepancies in WISC-IV Scores - “According to Canadian Norms for the WISC-IV, if there is a discrepancy of 12 or more IQ points the difference is considered significant and therefore may indicate a learning disability in either of the domains” (P. Jerry, personal communication, 2007, p. 2). A common inconsistency is a Verbal score lower than a Perceptual score, meaning that a student may not have the same level of
verbal abilities as nonverbal abilities (P. Jerry, personal communication). A score not as common, but equally important, occurs when a student’s Perceptual score is lower than the Verbal score, meaning that the student’s nonverbal skills are lower than the student’s verbal abilities.

As will be discussed in the Attributes component of this manual, it is important to recognize that all parents may not be able to absorb or comprehend or may not be interested in the above information. It is important for the school psychologist to continually check for understanding throughout the meeting. By relying on perception-checking, the school psychologist should be able to gear the level of in-depth explanation to the level of parental understanding.

Sending a letter home may be a very useful way to distribute this knowledge to parents prior to meeting with them to debrief the results of their child’s assessment.

After the delivery of the assessment results, parents should be sure to ask the school the following:

☐ What does this mean for my child?
☐ What kind of programming can I expect if my child meets the criteria for a learning disability in accordance with Alberta Learning?
☐ Will my child receive special funding?
☐ What placement in the school system will best meet the needs of my child?
SKILLS

For the School Psychologist
SKILLS

Generic Working Alliance Skills

Hiebert (2001) stressed that it is important to remember that the theoretical orientation of the professional (school psychologist) is not the main focus of the working alliance. However, there are some stipulations for all professionals to understand and practice when working towards creating a solid working alliance. Hiebert pointed out that the professional’s role is to facilitate a “systemic and purposeful endeavour” and that the professional “believes that client learning is centrally important in producing client change” (p. 4). Hiebert provided several helpful generic interpersonal skills and concepts to be mindful of when creating a working alliance. See the table below for a summarized taxonomy of Hiebert’s generic skills.

Core Working Alliance Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Helpful Hints</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structuring Skills</td>
<td>Overviewing</td>
<td>Overviewing helps to provide a general idea of what may occur in a meeting. It helps all stakeholders collaborate with a common purpose (Hiebert, 2001).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Enhances Meaning”</td>
<td>Overviewing</td>
<td><strong>HELPFUL HINTS:</strong> Overviewing gives the SRG team and parents a sense of what to expect during the delivery of WISC-IV results. It also is a time to focus the attention of the team on the intended purpose of coming together to better understand the special needs of the student being discussed. This would be an appropriate time to hand out a detailed agenda for all members to follow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reviewing</td>
<td>Reviewing “recaps what has been done in previous sessions” (Hiebert, 2001).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reviewing</td>
<td><strong>HELPFUL HINTS:</strong> Although parents and the SRG team...</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
may be meeting for the first time, it is helpful to review what has taken place up until this meeting so that the team can gain a clear sense of what action has already taken. This also prevents any duplication of discussion and provides clarity for stakeholders. It can be helpful to praise the team for their efforts up until this point.

**EXAMPLE:** Prior to this meeting, the SRG team and I have discussed some of the strengths as well as some of the concerns related to your child’s learning…”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Helpful Hints</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goal Setting</td>
<td>Goal setting helps stakeholders focus on what the team hopes to accomplish as they leave the meeting.</td>
<td><strong>HELPFUL HINTS:</strong> “The focus may be on acquiring information, practicing particular skills, or exploring different aspects of the problem so as to arrive at a consensus between professional and client about the best strategy to use in attempting to rectify a situation” (Hiebert, 2004, p. 6). Focusing a student’s strengths is very helpful as the team considers what goals would be most appropriate.</td>
<td><strong>EXAMPLE:</strong> “What steps do we need to take in order to best meet the learning needs of this student?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summarizing</td>
<td>Summarizing “provides structure to the session by identifying patterns or themes across many client messages and/or interpersonal exchanges” (Hiebert, 2001, p. 5).</td>
<td><strong>HELPFUL HINTS:</strong> Due to the number of team members involved in a team atmosphere, it is important, especially for parents, for the school psychologist to provide brief summaries of what has taken place within the meeting. This is also an opportunity to check for parental understanding and can be used as a perception check for all important stakeholders.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitions</td>
<td>Provides clarity for stakeholders about when a change of topic will and has occurred.</td>
<td><strong>HELPFUL HINTS:</strong> Being very clear about when you are switching topics provides clarity for all team members.</td>
<td><strong>EXAMPLE:</strong> A simple statement like “I would like to change topics now” helps others understand that the direction of the conversation is changing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>Providing facts related to the assessment. Hiebert (2001) suggested that information giving “be limited to small portions or ‘chunks’ not to exceed a time limit of two”</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Engagement | Questioning | Questioning helps stakeholders examine and gather information related to the topic of discussion.  

**HELPFUL HINTS:** Using open questions will generate a greater amount of discussion among team members as opposed to closed questions that elicit a “yes” or “no” response. Open questions also encourage open expression in a nonthreatening manner.  

**EXAMPLE:** “What types of strategies have worked in the past for you and your child/student?”  

| Probing | Probing is using sentence beginnings such as “describe, tell me, elaborate, explain, expand, provide, etc.” (Hiebert, 2001, p. 9). This is useful when you are looking for more information.  

**HELPFUL HINTS:** It is important to remember that a parent’s worldview will determine the appropriateness of the use of these questions. Hiebert (2001) also suggested that if you suspect that a parent may find the probes interrogative you can soften the approach by adding “please” to the beginning of the probe.  

**EXAMPLE:** “Describe for me one situation where your child feels successful.”  

| Clarifying / Providing Feedback | Reflecting Meaning | Reflecting meaning lets stakeholders know you are listening genuinely and that you understand the message they are conveying (Hiebert, 2001).  

**HELPFUL HINTS:** This is an extremely important skill to use when considering all members involved. Due to the number of differing worldviews and perceptions present in the room, it is important that the school psychologist reflect meaning as a way to ensure that everyone has been heard.  

**EXAMPLE:** “It sounds like you’re feeling as though you are unsure as to how to move forward with this new information.” |
# SKILLS

## Running an Effective Meeting for the Purpose of Understanding and Action

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meeting Preparation</th>
<th>Creating an Agenda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Distributing Advance Information</strong></td>
<td>Creating an agenda prior to walking into a meeting will help you to re-think the purpose of the meeting, which in turn will help you identify potential interventions (McConnell, 1997; Ogborn, 1994). The agenda is to be used as a guideline and needs to be flexible in order to accommodate any presenting concerns of the SRG team or the parents. Arranging topics of discussion with time allotments will encourage the school psychologist to maintain the focus of the meeting. This will also help prevent any digressions that may hinder meeting the objectives of the proposed meeting. It is important to remember throughout the meeting to be very cognizant of building rapport and developing a working alliance between all members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any background information related to the meeting should be sent to members in advance in order to permit them to consider any new information prior to meeting (McConnell, 1997).</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupp (2006) provided professional guidelines for involving parents that should have been completed prior to the delivery of assessment results:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Letter sent home to parents indicating request for assessment.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Any technical information or educational material related to the WISC-IV requested by parent for general understanding.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Notify and remind SRG team and parents.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Ideally, a written notification of the impending meeting to all important stakeholders should be provided. This written notification should include time, place, preparations, objectives, and anything the members should bring to the meeting (McConnell, 1997) (e.g., samples of student work).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Preparation for Proper Facilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes the school psychologist may not have a choice as to where the group is meeting; however, considering the physical setup of the room may decrease a parent’s anxiety and be the very first step in creating a successful working alliance. Be sure to book an available space for the meeting that will accommodate all members comfortably (McConnell, 1997). Make sure the meeting place will be free of interruptions. Plan to have any additional materials such as a white board in place prior to meeting.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Meeting Checklist

**SKILLS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meeting Checklist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agenda complete.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copies of agenda for members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis: Prior to walking into the meeting the school psychologist should have a hypothesis in relation to the reason a student may be experiencing learning difficulties. Consider referring to Fiorello and Hale’s (Fiorello &amp; Snyder, 2006) model of Cognitive Hypothesis Testing (CHT). In addition to the standardized cognitive/intellectual assessment that has occurred, this model encourages the psychologist to hypothesize based on the presenting problem, history, and prior interventions when determining diagnosis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal’s Agenda: Some schools may have an established agenda for discussing assessment results. Keeping in mind effective partnerships and the working alliance skills, it is important to clarify with the school principal who will be the chairperson of the meeting. Be prepared to modify your agenda if the principal is the chairperson.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student cumulative file (if necessary and if you have access).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of school dynamics and relationships.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Building a Working Alliance: Some Helpful Hints:

- Remember that parents’ experiences with the school system may vary. They may be feeling intimidated as they walk into the meeting.
- Share a bit about your role and who you are.
- Invite parents to ask questions whenever they need.
- Ask if they have any concerns they would like to address.
- Discuss your approach to discussing assessment results (a collaborative approach as opposed to an expert model\(^1\)).
- Share general concerns the school has had in relation to the need for assessment.
- Ask if they are in agreement with any of the school’s concerns.
- Ask if there is any additional information that they would like you to know about that may be relative to their child’s performance and ability (e.g., some parents may share cultural beliefs and norms that may be of importance to understanding their child).
- Ask if there may be any medical history, socioeconomic or socioemotional issues that may be affecting their child.
- If you feel it is necessary and appropriate timing, you may invite parents to take home an Adaptive Behaviour assessment in order to gain further insight if coding is likely.
- Ask if they have any additional questions.
- Ask if it would be okay to bring in the SRG team.

---

\(^1\) Due to past experiences in school systems and cultural beliefs, some parents expect the school psychologist to work from an expert model. It is beneficial to explain how a collaborative systems approach is helpful.
### SAMPLE MEETING PLAN

For School Psychologist Reference: Sample Meeting Plan

(Also see Alberta Learning Suggestions for Solution-Focused Meetings)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5 min</th>
<th>Introductions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Take time to introduce yourself and share what your role in the team is. Allow enough time for all members to introduce themselves. Have all members explain their role in helping the child. Be sure to give parents an opportunity to introduce themselves and share.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2-5 min</th>
<th>Share your approach to facilitating the meeting.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Explaining that your approach is collaborative is very important. Some members of the SRG team or the parents may view you as the “expert” and may be looking for you to deliver the meeting as such. Being attuned to the members’ preferred style will also help you to adjust your role as the facilitator if necessary. Explain that any additional information that members can provide will help you clarify your interpretation of the assessment results because their input will place the results in context.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5 min</th>
<th>Guideline One: <em>Review the purpose of the assessment and what the results are for (Pupp, 2006).</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- General overview of the purpose of the WISC-IV.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- General descriptions of technical INFORMATION that may be included to provide clarity and purpose:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Norm Referenced Tests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Test Validity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Test Reliability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Provide facts related to the assessment. Hiebert (2001) suggested that information giving “be limited to small portions or ‘chunks’ not to exceed a time limit of two minutes” (p. 7). Be attuned to the parent’s level of understanding and adjust as necessary.

**Guideline Two:** *Review the strengths of each test conducted, considering again what the particular tool was intended to measure (Pupp, 2006).*

- Be careful not to overwhelm any of the team members with too much technical jargon, as it can be very intimidating for all members. Remember that, prior to this meeting, parents and SRG team members were invited to contact you if they were interested in gaining a deeper
understanding of the WISC-IV. You may have chosen to send a letter with technical information. Be open to sharing technical details of the assessment, but offer to share this information outside the meeting time.

- Invite members to ask any questions before you begin sharing assessment results

| 3 min | Guideline Three: Review the challenges and strengths, noting how the strengths can be used to assist the client with the challenges (Pupp, 2006).

Recent Child Growth?
- Begin by having parents share any recent growths that they have witnessed.
- Begin with strengths of the child and commend parents and SRG team on supports they have put in place in order for the child to be successful in these given areas.

Focus on highlighting the strengths of the child and encourage parents to open this discussion. Invite others from the SRG team to share what they have noticed.

General Overview of the Purpose of the WISC-IV.

| 20 - 30 min | Sharing and Exploring the Results (REMEMBER WORKING ALLIANCE SKILLS!)

Guideline Four: Review the scores and what they mean, using language the client can understand (Pupp, 2006).

- Using a bell curve diagram is a good place to begin, but context needs to be provided. A visual provides a concise representation of where the child falls in the full scale range and in each of the four index scores. It also addresses differing learning styles of both parent and teacher.
- It is helpful if you have created a basic bell curve separate from your results prior to the meeting to be used specifically as a visual.
- Use real-life examples of how discrepancies in results may affect a child.
  - E.g., at home this may look like…
  - E.g., in the classroom this may look like…
- Share specific examples of results and subtest scores, but be sure to back these up with evidence of what it may look like at home and at school. This will address different members’ learning styles.
Providing some suggestions for remediation through this exploration of the results can be helpful. Be careful, however, not to overwhelm members with what they should be doing differently. Time will be given at the end of the meeting to focus on three goals for the child. Remediation strategies can be focused around these three goals.

Be sure to continually check perceptions throughout this process, as insight provided by any of the other team members may provide poignant insight for further interpretation and clarification.

Be aware of any resistance from any members and be prepared to address this, as this will be part of moving the team forward. If the resistance is not addressed it will continually be the “white elephant” (Corey & Corey, 2006) in the room preventing cohesion among team members.

Refer to examples in the cumulative file if history is needed to support results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>15 min</th>
<th>Guideline Five: <em>Review areas of recommendations and limitations to assessment (Pupp, 2006).</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This may be an appropriate time to suggest any immediate recommendations or strategies that may be helpful to implement until the written assessment can be fully completed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Point out any areas of concern that the assessment may not have addressed. Encourage teachers and parents to explore these areas further if necessary (e.g., environmental concerns or factors related to the child).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Alberta Learning Goal Setting

| 5 min | Closure Questions Contact Information |
Attitudes:

Attitudes to Consider for the School Psychologist
Attitudes

Special Considerations for Group Members of Nondominant Populations

When a child has been assessed by a school psychologist within the context of the school system, parents may lack systemic knowledge of how they can gain access to information that will support their child as well as themselves as they begin to acknowledge and accept the learning challenges their child faces. Many parents feel uncertain about their role in helping their child. Parental stress is heightened when parents “initially respond to the diagnosis with “denial of, and ambivalence about” (Dyson, 1996, p. 280) the child’s disability. This denial and ambivalence may cause some parents to have unrealistic expectations of what can be achieved through one single meeting.

It is also important to take into consideration that parents of learning disabled children are anxious about their child’s school adjustment, peer relationships, and behaviour problems as well as their child’s chances for adjustment in the future (Shectman & Gilat, 2005, p. 275). Parents often deal with negative perceptions others may have of their children and this leaves them feeling “angry, guilty, and helpless” (Shectman & Gilat, p. 275). Keeping this in mind, it is important to be attuned to the comfort levels members have with any information provided within the meeting and adjust as necessary by opening up the discussion about any uncertainties or apprehensions. Language barriers may also need to be considered.

School psychologists need to be aware of the cultural diversity that encompasses parents and teachers. Although some members may struggle with similar feelings of anger, guilt, and helplessness, it is also important to be aware of each individual’s cultural makeup. Creating an appreciation of differing worldviews is an ongoing process; however, careful
consideration will be made in the initial stages of therapy for members to share with other group members how their personal culture affects their own worldview. To make the team meeting experience relevant to people from different backgrounds and non-dominant populations, the school psychologist will need to acquire a general understanding of belief systems, values and historical backgrounds of particular members within the group (Corey & Corey, 2006). Having an agenda for the meeting is important; however, being flexible and open to modifications in the agenda is necessary in order to accommodate, adapt, and modify to meet individual cultural needs of group members. Having an understanding of how “oppression, racism, discrimination, and stereotyping” (Corey & Corey, p. 43) affect specific members of a cultural group will also ensure deeper cultural sensitivity.

It would be unfair to assume that all parents will understand the educational decision-making system in which their child has been assessed. Kalyanpur and Harry (as cited in Schectman & Gilat, 2005) stated that:

Knowing how school systems work is easier for parents who have been through the system themselves and perhaps observed how their own parents negotiated their way through it. The system may be challenging for some parents to understand especially if they have not experienced the school system themselves or have had negative experiences while doing so. (p. 532)

This also highlights the challenges group members may face as they begin to acculturate in an entirely new province or country. The school system in which their child has been assessed may seem like an entirely different culture in itself.

Keeping this in mind, the school psychologist must be aware that, for some parents, being involved with the school system on any level may be completely new to them.
Providing ample opportunities for questioning in many different formats such as oral or written will help the psychologist take into special consideration different levels of experience, culture, and education within the group setting. Also, being aware of differing communication and learning styles among parents will help the school psychologist be open about how engagement within the meeting may vary depending on group members and their individual cultures.

Corey and Corey (2006) also noted that in order for professionals to be culturally sensitive of group members they need to be culturally attuned to themselves. Ongoing self-reflection will help gain a deep understanding of their own culture, which includes an awareness of potential values and biases. School psychologists should create a climate of openness so that members feel comfortable addressing any issues or concerns related to their cultural identity.
ATTITUDES

Considering Group Process in the Delivery of Psychoeducational Assessment
ATTITUDES

Understanding the stages of group process can give the school psychologist additional insight into the type of group interactions that may occur depending upon the cohesion of the group. If for example, the group is meeting for the first time (e.g., SRG team, psychologists, and teachers), there most likely will be limited cohesion among group members. The level of trust may vary depending upon the stage the group is in prior to meeting with the school psychologist. A school psychologist’s leadership style will depend upon the stage of the group. Corey and Corey (2006) explained the stages of group therapy as follows.

Consider Stages of Group Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages of Group Process</th>
<th>Most Helpful Leadership Style</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial Phase</td>
<td>Most Helpful Leadership Style (Initial Stage)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The initial stage of group process is characterized by:</td>
<td>Corey and Corey (2006) noted that leaders in the initial stages of the group process are most helpful when leaders:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Members who are tentative</td>
<td>□ Implement a formal structure in the beginning stages of meeting to ease any uncertainties about what is expected to happen. Leaders need to be careful not to structure the meeting too loosely as it may perpetuate feelings of uncertainty in group members. However, too much structure may foster leader-dependent attitudes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ High anxiety of all members</td>
<td>□ Are able to handle conflict and negative reactions in an open and honest manner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Uncertainties about group expectations, norms, and expected behaviour (Corey &amp; Corey, 2006, p. 133)</td>
<td>□ Explore openly with the group any cultural conditioning that may affect or influence reactions of information presented or shared.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Advice giving by members</td>
<td>□ Recognize, acknowledge, and encourage expression of any uncertainties, hidden agendas, or anxieties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ “Members may ask ‘What are we suppose to be doing here?’ or I really don’t know what we should be talking about” (Corey &amp; Corey, p. 133)</td>
<td>□ Address conflict early with an open and honest approach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Members may question the safety of the group</td>
<td>□ Have members focus on their roles in the group process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ Role model “attitudes and actions leading to trust” (p. 141) (applying working alliance skills).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Help members identify group goals by using a task-oriented approach.

### Transition Stage
The transition stage can be very challenging for leaders and members. If a meeting of the school psychologist, SRG team and parents is in the transition phase, prior communication has most likely occurred between all group members. The group members may be feeling “more intense projections” (Corey & Corey, 2000, p. 51) towards others in the group and members may be willing to take more risks in their disclosures. This willingness to take more risks heightens any anxieties the group may be experiencing.

Corey and Corey (2006) highlight that members in the transition stage of group process may be:

- Anxious about the level of trust among group members and also about the leaders ability
- Resistant to become engaged for fear of possible rejection or judgment by others
- Defensive and may experience conflict with other group members
- May question leaders trustworthiness
- Disengaged in the process
- Be learning to express themselves in a way that encourages others to listen (Corey & Corey, 2001)

### Most Helpful Leadership Style (Transition Stage)
Corey and Corey (2000) highlighted the importance of leaders being able to intervene within the transition process in a manner that is “sensitive and appropriate” (p. 52). Leaders need to encourage members to explore any resistance or reluctance they may be experiencing which may be preventing them from becoming authentically engaged in the process of the group. Corey and Corey highlighted that leaders are most helpful in the transition stage if they:

- Encourage exploration of resistance
- Acknowledge and address conflict openly and honestly
- Normalize group members fears
- “Assess if members fears are related to leadership ineffectiveness” (p. 182)
- Address any “here and now” concerns of group members
- Remain sensitive to issues of diversity within the group
- Invite all members to respond
- Are aware of member styles that can disrupt the group process and are able to sensitively address these behaviours (e.g., monopolistic behaviour, storytellers, and advice giving)
- Are able to reflect on their own resistance or feelings of defensiveness
- Are able to educate members on “productive group behaviours that will maximize the benefits of the group experience” (p. 193)

### Working Stage
If a school psychologist has been working with an SRG team and the parents of a child who has been assessed for an extended period of time (e.g., the child may be being tested gain after a two-year period has passed), there may have been enough group interactions to consider the group to be within the working stages of group process. It is also important to be aware of the working stage, as this is most likely part of the group process that will create change (e.g., SRG team and parents) if members are fully committed and engaged in the process after they leave the meeting in which the assessment results are delivered. The school

### Most Helpful Leadership Style (Working Stage)
Corey and Corey (2000, 2006) emphasized that leaders who are working with a group in the working stage are most helpful if they:

- Describe openly and honestly what is happening in the group
- Address openly and honestly any apprehensions they may be experiencing in the group
- Are facilitative rather than directive and can find a balance between being supportive and being confrontational
- Are aware of appropriateness of self-disclosures and of what needs may be met by
psychologist may not be a part of this process, but it is important to be cognizant of the possibility of the group getting to the working stage when considering program planning and suggested interventions. Corey and Corey (2006) highlighted that group members in the working are:
- Open to expressing authentic reactions and perceptions
- Able to “think out loud” (p. 232)
- Able to take greater risks in their disclosures
- Trusting of one another
- Willing to accept responsibility
- Able to resolve defensiveness
- Hopeful of possible outcomes
- Respectful of diversity within the group
- Aware of the group process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Final Stage of Group</th>
<th>Most Helpful Leadership Style (Final Stage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supportive of members who may be experiencing anxiety about the group process closing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Celebrate with group members any changes made</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Help members plan for future action</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Final Stage of Group
Most likely a school psychologist may not be able to witness or be involved in the final stages of a group who is working to support a child who has been assessed. However, it is important to be aware of what the group is aiming for as they work together to maximize a student’s opportunity for success. The final stage of group process is characterized by group members celebrating their success and reflecting on what new behaviours they wish to carry on (Corey & Corey, 2006). This is also an important stage for the school psychologist to be aware of as this is the stage where “members consolidate their learning and develop strategies for transferring what they learned in the group to daily life” (p. 269). This final stage may occur at the end of a school year when the group comes together to sign off on an Individualized Program Plan (IPP). This process will help group members determine what action will be most helpful for a student as they consider transition. Corey and Corey suggested that group members in this stage may be:
- Having difficulties imagining separation from the group as they transition into a new program or grade level
- Reflective of the benefits the group has played in supporting the student in the IPP
- Developing plans to handle any potential setbacks that may occur

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>self-disclosing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are able to provide specific and meaningful feedback to members in a sensitive and appropriate manner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are able to illuminate members’ sense of hope and universality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are able to help members create “a cognitive framework that will enable them to put their here-and-now experiencing into perspective” (Corey &amp; Corey, 2006, p. 252)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are able to recognize themes of universality among group members</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most Helpful Leadership Style (Final Stage)
- Supportive of members who may be experiencing anxiety about the group process closing
- Celebrate with group members any changes made
- Help members plan for future action

Celebrate with group members changes made!
ATTITUDES

Considering Member Styles

Bachelor’s (1995) working alliance study discovered that you can typify certain working alliances that best meet the needs of the client. Three types of working alliances emerged from this study: a nurturant alliance, an insight-oriented alliance, and a collaborative alliance. The client who seeks a nurturant alliance benefits from an approach in which the client’s feelings and experience are central to therapy. Optimizing the client-therapist relationship for the nurturant alliance would involve the counselor taking an "active and directive role” (p. 327) in the counseling process. This client thrives on the trust, acceptance, attentiveness, and trust of the counsellor.

A client who is described by Bachelor (1995) as insight-oriented is a more active participant in therapy. Often these clients seek to understand why they are the way that they are, ask for clarification from the counselor, and seek to explore the meaning of self. In turn, this insight will uncover a meaningful and participatory sense of counselling for these clients.

Finally, a client defined as collaborative needs to be aware of the process implemented by the counsellor in order for positive change to occur. The client must also be active in the process. The collaborative alliance type client is able to “acknowledge or recognize that the work of therapy and positive change was not exclusively the therapist’s responsibility” (Bachelor, 1995, p. 328). A client who is characterized by the collaborative alliance values trust, active involvement, professionalism, mutuality, involvement, and a sense of togetherness. This type of client is likely to be able to assume more responsibility for maladaptive behaviour, is open to constructive and thoughtful criticism, allows for
reflection, is open to feedback from counsellor, and prefers “participation in the evaluation of strategies, solutions” (p. 328).

Knowing your group members will help you adjust the meeting to fit the needs of your members accordingly. Keeping in mind the differing personality types of members may also help you determine the level of technical information related to the WISC-IV necessary in order for members to feel confident about making decisions for future planning and action as they consider program planning.
Planning For Action

For Teachers:
How to Read the Psychoeducational Assessment in Order to Set Goals for
Individual Program Planning
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual Program Checklist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ Check student cumulative file for any recent and applicable assessments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Check for a diagnosis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Make sure you understand what that diagnosis is and how it relates to the student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Read and carefully understand the student’s assessment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Pay close attention to recommendations and strategies provided by the school psychologist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Hint: Sometimes you can pull language to create meaningful goals directly from this section.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Devise a least one annual goal that is directly reflective of the assessment results, the diagnosis, and the recommendations provided by the school psychologist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Be sure to create goals that are meaningful, measurable, and manageable (Alberta Learning, 2004).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Refer to the acronym SMART when creating goals.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How Do I Write Goals that Reflect the Student’s Needs?

Alberta Education (2006) provided a structure for identifying “meaningful, measurable and manageable goals” (p. 1). *Meaningful* means that they are relevant to a student’s life. *Measurable* means that the goals have parameters that provide the student and learning team with specific targets to evaluate. *Manageable* goals are within the student’s ability to achieve. Alberta Education also referred to the acronym SMART.

SMART GOALS
S Specific
M Measurable
A Achievable
R Relevant
T Time-Limited

Annual Goals

Alberta Education (2006) stated that an annual goal is a “statement of one specific learning outcome that a student could realistically be expected to accomplish in one year” (p. 1, Chapter 7).

Peden (2007) stated that priorities need to be based upon the student’s physical and cognitive abilities, age, time left in school, and expectations for the future. In addition, be sure to limit annual goals to a maximum of three. Anything larger becomes too cumbersome for the student.

Annual Goal Domains\(^2\)

Peden (2007) has broken down annual goals into four domains:

- **Academics** – reading comprehension, reading decoding, reading fluency, written expression, written language conventions, spelling, math computation, math fluency, math problem solving
- **Social skills** – initiating conversation, joining social activity, maintaining appropriate personal space, gaining peer attention, reading nonverbal social cues
- **Communication** – articulation, length of utterance, expressive language, social scripts
- **Behavioral skills** – time on task, appropriate responses to frustration, identifying

\(^2\) Borrowed and adapted with permission from Sara Peden, Calgary Board of Education
Peden (2007) Identification of 3M Goals involves Learning Team consideration of priority areas to focus on:\n
- how this need affects overall learning and achievement
- related areas of strength
- age appropriateness
- how long it will take to master the new skill
- possibilities for using the new skill or knowledge in other areas and settings
- transferability to other subject areas
- how the skills and knowledge relate to future goals
- contribution to independence (PowerPoint Presentation)

*By brainstorming as a collaborative team before the debrief has ended, the chances that the IPP will be individually tailored to meet the student’s unique learning profile are far greater. This also involves all stakeholders in a process of collaboration.

---

3 Borrowed and adapted with permission from Sara Peden, Calgary Board of Education
APPENDIX

Solution-Focused Meetings Handout (Alberta Learning)


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* Variation: This form can be used as a reference tool to facilitate planning of action. It can be very helpful if it is given as homework in the previous session. This form can be the contract!
Chapter VI

Synthesis and Implications

This chapter restates the importance of the school psychologist, teacher, and parents working together to build a community of understanding related to the delivery and debriefing of psychoeducational assessment results. The purpose of this section is to highlight how important systems thinking, strong working alliances, and partnerships are when receiving information related to psychoeducational assessment results.

After being in the classroom as a Grade Nine Humanities teacher for the past five years, I have found that parents, teachers, and support staff often have limited understanding of what psychoeducational assessments really mean. Research does not provide a consistent way to deliver psychoeducational assessment results. School psychologists may have very little training on how to work within a system that includes parents and teachers working together to meet the educational needs of a student. Educating parents and teachers on the implications of psychoeducational testing has been left to the school psychologist, who has very little literature for reference. This lack of consistency in the delivery of assessment results to assist understanding, for the purposes of understanding consequently leaves many parents and teachers feeling as though they are unable to effectively support their child and student. Due to a lack of understanding, teachers have also become overwhelmed with psychological assessments, interpreting them as a burden rather than as a reference tool for program planning.

The purpose of this project is to build a new level of understanding for all stakeholders. To do this there is a need for a consultation process that is ongoing (Jennings,
“When group members systematize their experiences - organize the data, see it as sufficient, and do analyses while identifying gaps and relationships - they build new levels of understanding” (Smith, Willms, & Johnson, 1997). By following Pupp’s (2006) Guidelines for Practice and focusing on the process involved in emulating a systemic approach to delivering assessment results, a student’s support networks increase. When stakeholders provide consistent support the goal of maximizing student potential is viewed as a holistic approach rather than a single effort to infuse change.

Impact

By partnering with teachers and parents, school psychologists can be hopeful that the complex work involved in administrating and interpreting psychoeducational assessments will be put to good use. Helping teachers and parents to understand what the results of an assessment such as the WISC-IV mean for their student and child provides program planning that is congruent with individual student needs. Teachers will be able to create Individual Program Plans that are reflective of the recommendations and strategies suggested by the school psychologist. Parents will have enough information to feel confident to ask more questions and to provide additional support as an extension of what is being completed at school. School psychologists can be confident that their work is not misinterpreted for the purposes of creating labels for specialized funding. As Pupp (2006) stated, the information presented “can also benefit other mental health practitioners involved in administrating and interpreting psychological testing tools” (p. 54). The process of delivery needs to be carefully thought out and planned in order to benefit all stakeholders planning for future action.

Limitations
One major limitation of this project is in describing the actual process involved in planning for future action once the delivery of psychoeducational assessment results has been completed. The dissemination and translation of the psychoeducational assessment for the purposes of developing an IPP is beyond the scope of this project, but equally as valuable. Future work in this area would benefit teachers to effectively plan IPPs that clearly relate, apply, and reflect the special learning needs of the student based on the psychoeducational assessment. In my experience as a teacher, the written psychoeducational assessment that is provided by the school psychologist to be placed in the cumulative file of the student is often very challenging to understand due to the limited background information related to the purpose of psychoeducational assessment. There are no clear guidelines that discuss the linkages between assessment and planned intervention for the student. The potential for school psychologists and teachers partnering to gain a basic understanding of how to read and link successful interventions based on the written psychoeducational assessment could be very useful. In addition to this work it would be helpful to describe the actual detailed process of translating the psychoeducational assessment into an IPP.

**Implications of the Project**

The manual created in this project will help create a structure that builds confidence in all stakeholders. The hope is that the school psychologist, especially a new school psychologist, will refer to this prior to reporting any psychoeducational assessment results. What would also be helpful would be for more provisional psychologists to be provided with training specifically related to the process of delivering psychoeducational assessments. Training specifically related to partnering with educators in order to maximize student success would also be extremely beneficial.
Similarly, it would be helpful if all teachers were provided with basic training in reading and understanding the implications of psychoeducational assessments. By having a basic understanding of assessments such as the WISC-IV, teachers are more likely to be confident in their approach to teaching students with special learning needs. Individual Program Plans will be reflective of a student’s learning profile, which will also create confidence in the student. Teachers will also be more likely to partner with parents if they themselves are confident that they understand the often complex learning needs of their child. Teachers can also provide additional support and education to parents after the assessment has been delivered. Sometimes parents may be anxious, have language barriers, or lack the background knowledge to be able to fully comprehend the meaning of the assessment results. If teachers have a solid understanding of the results, they can partner through ongoing communication and Individual Program Plan reviews to ensure that parents understand how their child’s assessment results are now being supported.

Parents are the experts when discussing their children. They have an in-depth understanding and knowledge of their child that no other professional will ever be able to grasp or acquire. Without parental support a student’s opportunity for success narrows. Parents need to know everything they can about how they can extend learning in school to the home. A partnership between all important stakeholders helps parents feel confident that their child is valued. This feeling alone creates success!
References


