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Professional Development


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Website: www.IEPAssessment.com

So, You Are a School Psychologist

Maintaining quality of work through effective skills, despite being “green,” unsure, and a large caseload




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Why Now and Why Me?


■ Knowledge and Skills:

- Not Usually Taught in School Psych Programs
- I Accumulated by Experience
- With Which Interns Struggle
- Required to Thrive, Instead of Survive




Must Have Computer Skills

- Text Replacement
- Email
- Calendaring
- Backup
- Remote Access




Auto-Text Replacement

- Follow-up with One Word
- Request Feedback
- Email Drafts
- Respond to Emails More Quickly




Auto-Text Replacement

- *Texter*
- Signatures
- Appreciation
- Thank You




Email

- Email Drag
 - Appointments
 - Contacts
 - Tasks




Email

- Delay Sending
- Auto-Print




Email

- Zero Your Inbox
- Two Minute Rule



Calendar

- Share Your Calendar
 - Publicize professional appointments
 - Privatize personal appointments
- Only One Calendar





Why Use a Calendar?

- Right Place at Right Time
- Prevent Over Scheduling
- Keep Director Informed



Project List vs To Do List

<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Major Projects■ Generalized■ Higher Level or Executive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Action Items■ Next Action or Two Required for Each Project■ Lower Level or Subordinate 
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Dropbox: Effortless Backup

- Backup Files to Multiple Computers
- Access Files from Any Computer with Internet Access



Teamviewer: Remote Access

- www.teamviewer.com
- Access Work Computer as if There
- District only Database
- Print to Work Printer




Use PDF to Create Folders

- Complete Multiple Forms with One Entry
- Pre-Work = Fewer Errors + Less Last Minute Rush
- Complete Case Folder



Templates


- Mail Merge
- Findings and Supporting Evidence



Findings	Supporting Evidence
Elton demonstrates behaviors consistent with ADHD and executive dysfunction. He has trouble attending in class for more than 2 minutes; often fiddles with things at meal time; cannot wait his turn; answers without being called on; and is out of his set every 4 minutes on average.	Class observation 9/1/11 Parent BASC Teacher BASC Parent Interview 9/3/11 Teacher Interview 9/4/11 CPT-2 administered 9/5/11 CAS attention subtest SS of 75


Report Writing

- Scoring Software
 - Copy, Paste, and Augment




Report Writing

- Report-Writing Software Dangers
 - Run-on Sentences
 - Statements You Cannot Support
 - Interventions You Cannot Supply



Leading IEP Meetings

- Name Card



• Use respectful language

• Each person will be given an opportunity to speak

• Right to privacy and confidentiality

• Everyone is treated with respect

• No blaming or judging

• One person will speak at a time

• Time frame 1 – 1 ½ hour

• Speak directly and honestly

• Situations will change

Ground Rules

Fold here

Print your First and Last name:

Welcome to Team Decision Making

Welcome to Team Decision Making

Print your First and Last name:

Fold here

Ground Rules

- Right to privacy and confidentiality
- Everyone is treated with respect
- No blaming or judging
- One person will speak at a time
- Use respectful language
- Each person will be given an opportunity to speak
- Time frame 1 – 1 ½ hour
- Speak directly and honestly
- Silence cell phones

Leading IEP Meetings

■ Agenda




Name of Student _____

- Introductions
- Purpose of IEP meeting
- Establish time parameters, if any (e.g. 2 hours, done by 4:00pm)
- Parent rights
- Update student information on IEP cover page (phone, address, etc...)
- Review current assessments from district
- Review current independent assessments, if any
- Present levels of performance
- Review/determination of eligibility criteria for all areas of suspected disability
- For an eligible student, continue with all IEP pages
- Proposed goals and objectives, discuss, and arrive at consensus
- Individual transition, if required
- Special factors
- Designated placement continuum, with at least three placement options considered by team
- Review IEP team notes
- Sign all forms

Leading IEP Meetings


■ Parking Lot



Leading IEP Meetings


Most Important

- **Follow-up !**




Leading IEP Meetings

- Body Language
- Redirecting




Leading IEP Meetings

- Stay with the Concrete
- Sound Bites




Leading IEP Meetings

- Opening and Closing Statements

An illustration showing four people in a meeting. A man in a suit is standing and pointing at a document on a table. Three other people (two men and one woman) are seated around the table, looking at the document. The scene is set in a professional office environment.


Professionalism

- Appearance
- Comfortable *Demeanor*

An illustration showing four people in a meeting. A man in a suit is standing and pointing at a document on a table. Three other people (two men and one woman) are seated around the table, looking at the document. The scene is set in a professional office environment.


Professionalism

- Language
- Professional Organizations

An illustration showing a group of stylized human figures. The figures are arranged in a line, with the front row being larger and more detailed, and the back rows becoming smaller and less detailed, creating a sense of depth and a large crowd.


Working from Home

- Justification
- Stress




Working from Home

- Be Prepared
- Log Sheet



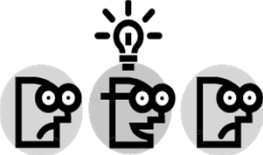
Advocates

- Exaggerated Tales
- **Rule 1:** Do not believe the hyperbolic rhetoric



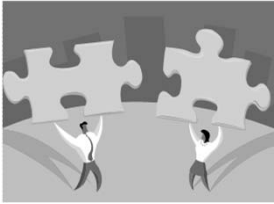
Advocates

- Ridiculous Complaints Wrapped in Legitimate Ones
- **Rule 2:** Address every complaint individually with concrete examples




Advocates

- Correct Legitimate Complaints
- **Rule 3:** Focus on solutions not blame




Advocates

- Come to the Meeting with Several Possible Solutions
- **Rule 4:** Listen with respect and form offer of FAPE after hearing all sides



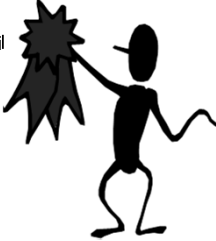
Internet Resources

- www.DrJerryTurner.com/casp12



Bonus

- Microsoft Word
 - Watermark
- Screen Snapshot Email
- Cell Phone to Quiet



Welcome to Team Decision Making

Print your First and Last name:

Fold here.....

Ground Rules

- Right to privacy and confidentiality
- Everyone is treated with respect
- No blaming or judging
- One person will speak at a time
- Use respectful language
- Each person will be given an opportunity to speak
- Time frame 1 – 1 ½ hour
- Speak directly and honestly
- Silence cell phones

So, You Are a School Psychologist

A Guide for Interns and First Year School Psychologists

Dr. Jerry Turner

Excerpts

Acknowledgements:

Every intern taught me something and contributed, in some manner, to this book. For instance, Jim Porter and his outstanding networking skills taught me to harness the strengths of others. I must also acknowledge Glenda Case and James Berg who offered me the opportunity to fulfill my childhood dream of becoming a college professor.

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Introduction

Why write a book for interns and first year school psychologists? My first year was “learn under fire.” Assigned a middle school, two elementary schools, and the district’s only high school, learning to be efficient and effective was the only option. In most districts, and this one was no exception, the high school alone was a full case load. However, my naiveté, thankfulness to have a job, and desire to impress left no other choice but to succeed. Fortunately this was not my first career. Six years in the U. S. Marines taught that one does whatever it takes to complete the mission. Five years as a teacher and high school counselor taught flexibility and organization skills. Reading books about time management taught executive organizational skills. Then there is the year I was 15 – my parents divorced, the Commodore 64 personal computer came on the market, and I lost myself in the science fiction of the time. These elements formed driving forces which eventually lead to a self-teaching of computer programming and love of computer technology. In high school I was one of a few boys in the typing class, a necessary skill for computer interface. In the Marine Corps I would write and sell my first program for triathletes and marathon runners.

All of those prior experiences, knowledge, and skills were put to full use that first year as a new school psychologist. I was conditioned to do what it takes, determined not to fail, and as it turned out possessed skills which led to a successful completion of year one. Chances are your first year will also be a success. I only hope this book makes it a bit easier.

These organizational skills, lessons, and techniques continue to be revised as the field changes and better ways are discovered. This book is to help you, the new or aspiring school psychologist, to start your career as effectively and efficiently as possible. This is a great career; you will meet lots of challenging people and situations; and you have the possibility of changing many lives in ways you can only imagine. This is a serious responsibility and these techniques will help you not just survive but thrive. The days are full, the responsibility great, the cost of mistakes very heavy, but the potential rewards very satisfying. Good luck and Godspeed.

What about the veteran school psychologist? Will he or she get anything out of this? Yes. For several years now, I have given presentations throughout California on “Technology and School Psychology.” The presentations are well received. There are many questions and the presentation often runs over the allotted time. Many of my colleagues do not share my interest in technology or my continuous search for ways to be more effective and efficient. Their passions lay elsewhere which is the great thing about humans – we all have our own passions and strength, which, if we are lucky, we can share with others.

To my colleagues and those aspiring to the field, I welcome your feedback and additional ideas. You may have noticed technology books quickly become out of date. In order to keep information current and ensure best practices, this book will be updated often. The chances are good your great idea will be in the next edition with an acknowledgement and the gratitude of future interns and school psychologists.

Chapter Three excerpts

Tip: Start each new student on a new page. This way you can quickly print requested information for one student at a time.

Work Flow

Case Folders

As mentioned earlier, preparation is the key to a successful evaluation. After office set-up the next most important feature is your case folder. In this folder, you will keep all protocols, emails, documentations and track the assessment progress right up to the IEP meeting. During my first year I discovered the value of creating a case folder which contains most documents I would need for the assessment, parent interview, teacher interview, classroom observation, IEP meeting, and more. Some of the papers were seldom used, but were important enough that I was glad to always have them on hand.

I use Adobe Acrobat to create my case folder materials. Over the years this collection has changed so it is important you understand the basics of Adobe Acrobat. With a basic understanding, you will be able to add your own forms, watermark, etc... Once set up, you will only need to answer a few questions about the student on the first page and all other forms will be filled in with that information. Imagine a case folder with a classroom observation form, which already has the student's name, birthdate, and age on it. Or a parent survey with the student's basic information already filled out. It is quite easy with Adobe Acrobat. In fact setting up a text box on one page called "student name" and then creating additional text boxes in the appropriate places on subsequent forms with the same name "student name" will allow you to fill in the first box which will then change the student's name on every form thereafter.

Adobe has some very good on-line resources at www.adobe.com/support/acrobat.

File Progression

As mentioned in office set-up, a file progression should allow you to visually see your case load and where each folder is as it progresses. I find the best approach is to have a drawer sub-divided into those folders waiting for signed assessment plans and those folders waiting for assessment. When an assessment plan comes in, note the date, and move the folder to the back half of the drawer. Then immediately schedule an assessment time in Outlook. I usually schedule 3 to 4 hours. This is plenty of time for the classroom observation and first level of assessments. It usually allows time for scoring the assessments and deciding if further assessments are necessary. If they are, then schedule them as soon as you get back to your computer, assuming you do not have your calendar with you. This also allows time to interview the teacher, principal, and anyone else who may know the student. In addition, it is always good if you are on campus to allow time for the random questions and teacher inquiries about a certain

student. Visit the teachers' lounge if you get a chance. There is usually coffee and a few teachers with whom you can connect. Being present and available is a sign of a well disciplined and "in control" school psychologist. No matter how much of a hurry you are in "never let them see you sweat." Need to get away for a meeting say, "That is very interesting, could I stop by tomorrow during your break when I can give it my full attention?"

When you return to the office, with the protocols in the student folder, file this folder back in the "To be Assessed Area" or in the "Assessed Ready to Score and Draft" section. This section I keep on my desk in a vertical file stand. The oldest file is in front and newer ones are inserted toward the back. Given any free time in the office, I can pull a folder and draft a report. As a meeting approaches, I may take a folder home to work on the following morning. I am most productive in the mornings and will often work from 6 a.m. to 7:30 a.m. at home. It is quiet and productive way to start the day. Plus the coffee and background music is much better. Find your productive time and do not be afraid to take a little work home. After all, you are a school psychologist with responsibilities and a career to maintain.

Place for High Priority Cases

Always have an "inbox" or some place you keep high priority case folders. I operate under the 85% model. Understanding that the expression "giving 110%" is impossible, I give 85% to most cases and 100% to high priority cases. These may be seriously troubled students; cases with lawyers or advocates; or special requests from the director or principals. These case jump in front of the lineup and should be completed as soon as possible. Keep them separate from the other cases to emphasize their importance.

One note about a director's requests: In the military they had a system known as the "CO's wish" or "Commanding Officer's wish." When the CO wandered through the office and said, "I wish" it was as good as an order. The troops, out of respect for his/her authority, made the wish happen. I try to treat director's requests the same way. Drop everything else and complete their request immediately. It makes them feel special and earns you bonus points when it comes time for that review. In fact, you may also want to practice this with the lead school psychologist and/or principals.

Folders for Projects

In his excellent book, *Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity*, David Allen writes about using folders to track projects (Allen, 2001). Each project has a folder and is appropriately labeled. These folders can then be set to the side and pulled-out one at a time as you work on them. It is important to review all pending projects on a regular basis. Given the timeline intensive nature of special education, I recommend reviewing your entire stack of folders every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.

A review of projects does not mean action. Perhaps there is nothing to do or not enough time. However a regular review will ensure you do not forget a project. Some projects cannot progress until you receive

information from others. A regular review of projects will prompt you to contact that person or send a friendly reminder.

A folder is used as a container and a place to note progress. Each time you review the project, send a request or reminder for information, or take an action, note it on the front cover of the folder. This way as you are reviewing your stack of projects you can quickly see where you left off. For some, writing on a folder is difficult because you know it cannot be re-used. I was like this at the beginning. However, it soon became obvious that a few folders were an acceptable price to pay for organization and a sense of control.

One Project/Case Open on Desk at a Time.

As you are working projects using the folder/project method mentioned above work one at a time. Having only one project folder or student case folder open on your desktop at a time will help you stay focused.

If you are interrupted when working, gather the materials back into the folder, note your progress, and attend to the matter at hand. With student case folders this helps to prevent the all too often first year mistake of mixing up protocols. One student or one project at a time.

Forty-Three Folders

I first saw 43 folders in action in the military, but it took Merlin Mann of www.43folders.com to give it a title. This is one of those simple yet very effective techniques for task tracking and scheduling. Just take one file draw or a file box and fill it with 43 manila folders. Label 12 of the folders January through December (one folder for each month). Label the others with the numbers 1 through 31 these are your date folders. Insert the date folders (31 of them) in front with next month's folder after number 31. Then follow with the rest of the months in calendar order from next months through. For example if this is March 1st you would have folders numbered 1 – 31, then March, April, May through to December then January, February, and March.

Use the system as a daily reminder. When something is due later on in the current month put it in the folder for that date. If it is due in a later month, put it in that month's folder. Each morning check today's folder and any prior folders which were not checked due to holiday, sickness, etc... Empty the contents and file the now empty date folders behind the following month's folder. The last week of the month clean out the next month's folder and distribute the items into their respective date folders. This system is simple and very effective. Merlin Mann's website 43folders.com is worth checking out for additional productivity ideas.

Chapter Review

- ✓ Templates save time when used appropriately.
- ✓ Always list all contributors to the psycho-educational report.
- ✓ Use graphics to show numerical data and trends.
- ✓ A picture is worth a thousand words.
- ✓ The summary is critical.
- ✓ Use recommendations which utilize resources and personnel already available in the district.
- ✓ Arranging all standard scores (academic, cognitive, etc.) from highest to lowest can be very revealing.
- ✓ Develop a tracking sheet for each psycho-educational report.
- ✓ Use Headings and Navigation View in Word to track student information.
- ✓ One folder per student. One folder per project.
- ✓ Designate a place for high priority cases.
- ✓ Have only one project or student folder open on your desk at a time.
- ✓ Use a daily and monthly tickler system, i.e. 43 folders.

Chapter 4

Doing Assessments

After a while, doing assessments becomes second nature, just part of the routine. However, it is always exceptional to the parents. Never forget the anxiety they may go through completing those surveys you sent. Parents may feel as if their parenting skills are being questioned by a highly trained psychologist who has no idea what really goes on in their home. You can avoid being “that psychologist” by communicating regularly through the process. During a recent home purchase the loan agent called and introduced himself, like so many before. He asked a few questions and confirmed some information, then said, “If you have any questions for me write them down because I’ll be calling you once a week as we go through this process.” You can imagine how impressed I was and immediately began implementing the same procedure with the parents of students I was assessing. It made a huge difference, I get great information, and by the time the IEP comes the parents feel understood and comfortable.

Every assessment is different. If your assessments appear to be blending together here are some tips to differentiate the experience. Focus on the uniqueness of the child. Notice what strategies if any s/he is using to attack problems. These strategies will tell you as much as the assessment results. Students with better strategies probably have better incidental learning skills. That is learning from watching others. They are probably able to see the task as whole and not just individual sections. The Cognitive Assessment System (CAS) Plan Code sub-test is a great example of this skill. Some students will fill in the codes left to right as if they are writing a sentence and demonstrate poor attack strategies. Other students will immediately see the pattern and fill in all the A’s in column one, then B’s in column two, and so on.

Notice the student’s eye movement. Where do they look when they are concentrating? Do they blink a lot? Do they squint? These are usually unique for each child. There are some theorists who will say where a person looks when they answer a question or tell a story indicates what type of learner they are (visual, auditory, or kinesthetic) or even if the person is lying or telling the truth. I have never found this

information useful during an assessment or relevant. However, noticing the eyes will tell you right away if the student is struggling to keep material in focus. Any eye strain is detrimental to the learning process. Students, especially younger ones, may not know their eyes are straining.

Of all the theories on eye movement, the only one which served me is “eye blocking.” This is an automatic reaction to seeing something one does not like. The classic example is the person who notices you when you walk in a room, then immediately looks away. This is an indication the person does not wish to engage in a conversation, does not like you, or does not like what you represent. With students I often watch for this during the initial interview. When a subject arises they do not want to discuss, you will notice them break eye contact. I really like to use this with principals when discussing possible interventions. You will know right away which interventions the principal is not willing to consider. Recently while discussing several special education students with an elementary principal I noticed she looked away and her posture slumped slightly each time I mentioned Mark’s name or situation. Mark was a particularly difficult student and it was obvious the principal felt ill prepared to help him. This student would not be well served if the principal did not have some success working with him. Noticing this behavior told me to focus my interventions on Mark, help the teacher create an effective behavior support plan for Mark, work closely with the parents and increase their involvement, and notify the principal of every small step in behavior improvement Mark made. It was an intense intervention, but reaped great rewards. Although the principal never admitted it (and they often will not) I helped her save the only student she felt certain would end up moving to a more restrictive placement.

Listen to the words the student chooses to use. They learn this vocabulary from somewhere (usually from home) and it can be quite telling. Record the student’s use of the words “I” and “you know.” Can the student tell a story from the point of view of others or does the world center on them? Studies show a student’s vocabulary when starting school directly correlates to their reading ability later in school. Try to deduce the parent’s educational level based on the child’s vocabulary. Children from more enriched environments typically have a larger vocabulary and are typically from higher socio-economic classes. An enriching environment does not require lots of money, but it is most often found in the homes and lifestyles of college educated parents. Enriching environments are mostly about getting out from in front of the television, visiting museums, reading aloud, listening to a variety of music, sharing family time, and being creative. The student’s vocabulary will give you an indication of where they spend the most time. Talk to the student about television shows popular with kids their age and try to assess the amount of television a student watches each week. This is great material for future recommendations.

As mentioned in previous chapters, notice if the student is right or left handed. With which hand does s/he write? Take a break and toss a ball. Note with which hand they throw with and with which foot they kick. Most right handed students throw with their right hand and kick with their right foot. Left handed students usually throw with their left hand and kick with their left foot. However this is not always the case. When a student writes with a different hand then s/he throws with or on a different side then his/her

kicking foot there may be an issue. Although some people are ambidextrous, this is rare. There are basically five types of handedness.

1. Right-handed – the most common, studies suggest 70-90% of people are right handed. These people have greater dexterity and fine motor control in their right hand.
2. Left-handed – 8 to 15% of people are left handed therefore having greater dexterity and fine motor control in their left hand.
3. Mixed-handedness – sometimes called cross-dominance. This student will usually have a dominate hand for writing and perform other tasks (i.e., throwing or cutting) better with his/her left hand.
4. Ambidexterity – is very rare. A student how is truly ambidextrous can do any task equally well with either hand.
5. Ambisinistrous – are the rarest of all these groups. They demonstrate awkwardness and poor fine motor control with both hands. This term is very controversial and I have never had a good reason for using it in a psycho-educational report. It is provided here only to fully develop your understanding of the possibilities.

Environment

The testing environment is important, but not as important as most people believe. Ideally, to maintain standards and ensure the most representative score you want a quiet, uninterrupted room with the perfect combination of artificial light and sunlight, walls of forest green and light blue on the ceiling. Okay, as you can see you can get carried away setting up the perfect testing environment. While the environment should be considered, do not be overly concerned. Try to ensure you have a room with no other students and sit the student so s/he cannot see students in a hallway or outside a window. Make note of when the bell is to ring and schedule the assessment to be between sub-tests when it rings. Minor disruptions are normal in real-life and may actually help the student feel comfortable. If you have ever been in a sound-proof booth for a hearing test you know how distracting too much silence can be.

Help the student relax by clearly introducing yourself, explain the purpose of the assessment, and answer any questions they may have. I like to remind the student to do their very best. Between sub-tests it is okay to laugh about the previous sub-test or like the student, complain about not having enough time. A proper response to most comments by the student about a sub-test is “Well I just want to thank you for doing your very best, I really appreciate it.”

Providing proper instructions is very important and is always provided in the assessment protocol or testing manual. This is worth stressing. As you become familiar with an assessment the temptation will be to recall instructions by memory, after all you gave it a hundred times. For best practice resist this temptation. In your striving to be more efficient you may start cutting corners with the instructions and

this will invalidate the assessment. Although you may never be caught, the results will not be the best representation of the student's ability. The instructions provided in the manual were painstakingly thought out and written to have as little cultural impact as possible.

Administer the assessment in order starting with the first sub-test. Do not skip around. Again most tests are standardized to be administered in a particular order. There are a few, such as the Nepsy-II, which can be administered out of order, however this is the exception. The temptation is to group the sub-test together into those that require the student response booklet, those requiring the stimulus booklet, and then the auditory responses and administer the assessment more efficiently. In fact, this was the method used by my mentor and he was convinced it did not in-validate the scores. However, he had been a school psychologist for twenty plus years and could tell more about a student by the way they walked than I could after hours of standardized assessment, observations, and teacher/parent interviews. Perhaps he was right about the administration of the sub-tests. However, he was never asked to test that theory in court. During his time as a school psychologist, no parent ever filed a complaint or questioned his psycho-educational report. Although he was a great mentor, I do not plan to be so lucky during my twenty plus years and in fact have already had several psycho-educational reports called into question, thus far with favorable outcomes. I continue to strive to be effective instead of efficient.

Should you be in the middle of assessment and the environmental conditions change, be flexible enough to reschedule or find a new location. Moving locations in the middle of assessment will not invalidate the findings. In fact the short break may help the child and gives you the opportunity to role model flexibility and coolness under pressure. Breaks are important to children and most do not realize just how important. I remember working with a young man who refused breaks, although it was obvious he was tired and becoming frustrated. One intervention recommended in my psycho-educational report was to help cognitively restructure the way he views breaks.

Demeanor

Your demeanor during assessment has a tremendous impact on the student. It will affect his/her ability to build rapport, which will affect just how hard s/he will work for you. Your best role model is Mr. Rogers. His demeanor was calm and respectful. His first goal in every interaction was to build a relationship "want to be my neighbor." His second goal was to teach and his modality was multisensory, he used auditory, visual, kinesthetic, touch, and makes believe lands.

Most children respond to respect and will laugh at the silliest attempt at joking. Kids have fewer filters than adults when it comes to communication. So if you are obviously trying to make a joke they will usually try to understand and at least give a chuckle in hopes of eventually having some fun. So relax, treat the student with respect, and create an environment where they feel safe to ask questions (again you

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Chapter 5

Writing Psycho-Educational Reports

The psycho-educational report is where you should concentrate most of your efforts. A good psycho-educational report will follow the student for years and has the potential of short and long-term effects on the student's education. Of course a great psycho-educational report requires a great assessment of the child, interview of parents and teachers, observations, and records review. Every interaction you have with the student may provide more information for your report when you are careful and watchful.

I have already discussed the template and how to format various parts of your report. In this section you look at four topics so important they deserve their own chapter. These have more to do with a philosophical approach to writing your psycho-educational report than to procedures. The recommendation section is particularly important and may relieve your struggle between providing the appropriate resources in the district and the best resources money can buy.

Scoring Software

As mentioned in Chapter One, scoring software is worth the money. Every scoring program I use saves time. Most have decent reports which can be used as a good starting point for reporting how the student did on the assessment. Some have the ability to integrate scores from other assessments and compare the expected outcomes to the actual outcomes. This last feature is common on intelligence assessment software and can be valuable in analyzing the student.

The biggest mistake people make with scoring software is not reading the manual and therefore not fully utilizing the program. This is similar to how most people use most programs and is perfectly understandable, if you have ever tried to read software manuals. Scoring software manuals are usually shorter and always worth the read.

Try to avoid copying and pasting without editing. You never know who will read that report. After a short time, a psychologist can recognize information copied and pasted from scoring software. Do not be "that psychologist." Remember, at any time during that student's educational career an advocate or attorney may become involved and every report will be reviewed. Copied and pasted sections really stand out and lessen the value and legal defensibility of your report.

It is okay to copy and paste when this is your starting point and you add to the information. The minimum information you can add is how the student attacked each sub-test and any comments s/he made. You may notice the student talks his/her way through each problem aloud. Listen to the words they use, are they being negative, telling themselves they cannot do this? Are they just working through the problem? Talking to oneself through a problem is an attack strategy. Note these comments on your protocol and in that section of the copied and pasted report from the scoring software.

Additional information you can include in your report includes selected answers you find interesting or atypical; any unusual body movements such as sitting sideways, hand wringing, squinting, and nervous tics. As questions become more difficult you can see the student's anxiety level increase, this is a great behavior to note for behavior intervention plans. In the chapter on behavior intervention plans I discussed the importance of noticing signs of anxiety in order to break an escalation cycle.

Another interesting number to integrate into those copied and pasted reports are the child's performance on sub-tests from other assessments which assess a similar skill. You can also integrate information from prior assessments, especially if you are giving the same assessment three years later. This gives the opportunity to discuss growth and how standardized scores work. For example the same standard score three years later indicates three years' worth of growth, not a lack of growth.

Report-Writer Software

Do not use report writing software.

There are a few good attempts at creating a software program which integrates information from the various assessments and generates an automatically written psycho-educational report. However, even if the technology exists and someone creates a report writing software which produces a report which reads like it was written by Hemingway, you still have two problems. Firstly, all your reports will have the same tone and secondly you may not have made the connections or understand why the report writer reports a given score as significant or atypical. This lack of understanding on your part will become most important at the most inopportune time - a fair hearing.

I have reviewed hundreds of psycho-educational reports in my role as an Independent Educational Evaluator (IEE). It is always readily obvious when a report writer is used. Some of the more extreme

indications I have seen with report writers used by others include a paragraph listing attributes the student demonstrated during a class observation. This paragraph contained only one sentence and was over 200 words long. It had lots of semi-colons and was probably grammatically correct, but obviously not written by a person. Another example was a records review for a student in a district where every psychologist used the same report writer. Every psycho-educational report for this high school student was formatted exactly the same and had the same tone but different authors. These reports all contained the same errors and same statements of concern which were not addressed by any assessment.

Report writing software has, up to this point, been the siren's call: The promise of a 15 minute psycho-educational report. Some are starting to come very close, but none in my experience have made it. They would be okay if you used them like the copied and pasted sections from the score software section mentioned above. The report writing software could do the formatting and reporting of the basic facts. You would then take the end result and fill in the details. However, and trust me on this, there is the potential for two problems. The first problem is that your reports will "sound" the same to your special education teachers. They will have the same "tone" and your teachers will doubt their individuality and therefore your recommendations for the student will not carry as much weight. The second problem is the temptation to use the report writing software and generate a quick report when you have to write a report the night before an IEP meeting. This report will contain the information you have not proofed and may contain some of the errors mentioned above. Sure parents may not know the difference, but an advocate, attorney, or independent educational evaluator will recognize it as a computer generated report with little effort put forth on your part and easily justify a request for an Independent Educational Evaluation at district expense.

Face it, there is no easy quick way to write a legally defensible psycho-educational report. Every shortcut you take moves you further away from understanding the child and producing a legally defensible psycho-educational report and, more importantly, providing the right services for that student. There are great ideas in this book which will save you time in other areas of your day (i.e., organization, emails, phone calls, relationships, etc. . .) so you have more time to assess children, interview teachers and parents, do classroom observations, and write psycho-educational reports.

Recommendations

Providing recommendations for overcoming a weak academic area is always good. However, it is best to give recommendations which allow the student to better utilize his/her strengths (both cognitive and academic). For example, if their assessment reveals a visual processing deficiency, but an auditory strength, use the recommendations for teaching auditory learners (recommendations for different learning styles can be found in the appendix of this book). By doing this, you are building on the student's strengths. Studies conducted by The Gallop Organization and Edward "Chip" Anderson of Azusa Pacific University found the most successful college students took classes and majored in subjects which made

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Chapter six excerpt

A final note about the offer of FAPE. It is best practice to always spell out your offer in plain parent friendly language in the last paragraph of the notes. A good offer of FAPE would read something like this:

"Beautiful Mountain Unified School District's offer of Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE) for Elton is Specialized Academic Instruction (SAI) with push in services 100 times a year for 40 minute sessions during Elton's general education classes."

Please note the lack of acronyms in the above offer of FAPE. It takes a little more time, but leaves little doubt in anyone's mind. Further notice that although the team discussed this SAI service being provided in the general education math classes the offer of FAPE does not lock the district into the math class. This increases the flexibility and defensibility of the offer.

Staying Focused (It's all about the student)

Keep the conversation about the student. When the parent starts blaming the teacher, make a comment about the student and keep returning the conversation to the student. I have sat through enough meetings where parents, advocates, and others have verbally attacked the teacher or counselor to tell you it is not fun. It is much better for everyone if you redirect the conversation to the student. This can be forceful or tactfully done. Interrupting a complaint with a question about the student usually redirects the topic. Others in the team will see what you are doing and help move the conversation back to the student. Of course sometimes it is necessary to establish a rule against criticism and state the goal of this meeting is to move forward, any punitive action or complaints can be made outside this meeting directly with the principal or appropriate district personnel.

When teaching a student to drive you will often hear parents shout, "Keep your eyes on the road!" This is great advice for IEP meetings. "Keep your eyes on the agenda!" Stay focused both literally and figuratively on the meeting's agenda and you will notice when the conversation begins to shift or get off track. Staying on agenda keeps everyone focused on the student and keeps the IEP meeting moving forward.

The first rule a pilot learns during training is "Fly the plane." Should you run out of fuel "Fly the plane." If a door comes open or an engine stops "Fly the plane." This singularity of focus has saved me and the plane lots of times. It is a mantra which helps focus the pilot's attention during an emergency. Instead of panicking about the potential danger, one stays in the moment and do the only thing that really matters "Fly the plane." A similar mantra may help you during those rough meetings where advocates and attorneys are questioning your very right to exist. "Fly the student," may sound strange if you start chanting it aloud. If others hear you just buy them a copy of this book and highlight this section. Prepare your team to stay focused on the student. Any statement not relating directly to the student and the IEP

should not be considered or noted on the summary page of the IEP. When the advocate starts harassing you for not using APA format "Fly the student." When the attorney questions your classroom observation, "Fly the student." Move all your answers back to the student and away from you. Relax and do not worry about potential outcomes, just "Fly the student."

There is a Zen practice to remove the "self" from the equation. This is a great thing to practice during all IEP meetings. The basic first step is to do away with the word "I." This is the first assignment my psychology 101 students receive. They all report it is the easiest and most difficult assignment they have ever had. Try it for yourself. Go one week without using the word "I" and you will notice just how often you use it. This will require more thought before responding, not a bad thing. Others will immediately notice what a great conversationalist you are. Practice this when responding to emails. Consider which of the following two sentences sound more professional:

"I would recommend we extend his time on test."

"Additional time on test usually works well with this type of behavior."

Both may result in the same intervention; however the second sounds more definitive and objective instead of the subjective first statement. Yes, you are a professional and your training has prepared you to make statements like the first one. But you will sound more professional when you take "I" out of your sentences and recommendations.

Remove yourself from the IEP meeting by staying focused on the child and stop talking about what assessment you gave the child and instead on how the child did on the assessments. Keep your brief short and your answers to the point. People seldom get in trouble for what they do not say. In fact, when you go to a fair hearing the district's attorney will coach you in how to answer questions. The classic advice is to answer only the question you are asked and provide no additional information. For example when asked, "Do you know what time it is?" The correct response in a fair hearing is "Yes." not "Yes, it is 10:10 a.m." I am not advising you to be this exact in IEP meetings, but stay somewhere between the courtroom approach and the Chatty Kathy approach.

Another mindset to stay in is that everyone's behavior is for positive reasons. Understand that advocates have a need to promote their business and make the parent feel heard. Their abrasiveness is not a negative attack on you. Their objective is to impress the parent with their knowledge and fortitude. It has nothing to do with a dislike of you or the district, but an attempt to sway the district's offer of FAPE in their favor. Keeping this in mind allows you to see clearly their objective and tactics. Being able to see these tactics is a necessary step to counter them (if necessary) or gently direct the advocate in a more suitable win-win direction.

Follow-up

A good psycho-educational report, delivered early, and presented well at the IEP meeting should be your minimum standard. This may set you above some other psychologists in the district. However, one of the most powerful tools you have to prevent unfair hearings and keep parents satisfied is communication. But communication should not stop with the IEP meeting, this is where it starts. At the very least use the delay sending option in Outlook to send a follow up email two weeks after the IEP meeting. Or send yourself a reminder, using the same delay sending option, to call the parents and check on how the student is doing.

You may be tempted to move on to the next meeting, student, assessment, behavior support plan, etc... Yes you will be busy, but keeping communication open with parents with brief emails and phone calls may save you hours of preparation for fair hearing and the stress of having your assessment scrutinized by attorneys.

Furthermore, there are times when in a meeting you will have the perfect solution and offer it. The only catch is it requires you to remember to do something in the future and you feel so confident and excited you know you will not forget and do not need to write it down. You see where this is going? By making it a common practice to always follow up with the parents and/or teacher you will be reminded of those promised interventions. So the habit of following up will keep you out of hot water, keep the lines of communication open, reduce your overall workload and stress, and set you above the average school psychologist.

A good IEP meeting is more than showing up, presenting, and walking out. It is a process that begins with good preparation, stays focused on the child, and continues through follow-up communication. Of course not all meetings will be good ones. As time goes by you may believe you can tell which parents need more attention and service than others. I am a big believer in trusting one's gut feelings, but you will be surprised. Maintain an acceptable minimum level of service and hold yourself to a minimum standard which you are comfortable at defending for every case and every set of parents.

Chapter Review

- ✓ It is all about the IEP meeting.
- ✓ Stay brief and focused when presenting your psycho-educational report.
- ✓ Remember your audience – the parent.

- ✓ Be able to explain each sub-test and use the protocol to show what the student actually did.
- ✓ Use silence for parents to process information and to emphasize important concepts.
- ✓ Never be afraid to say “I don’t know.”
- ✓ Distribute a copy of your IEP at least one week early to team members.
- ✓ Use name place holders to reinforce ground rules.
- ✓ Use and stay on the agenda.
- ✓ Be involved in development of behavior goals.
- ✓ Use one of three methods for taking notes.
- ✓ Fly the student.
- ✓ Avoid “I.”
- ✓ Focus your answers.
- ✓ Remember others are trying to promote their careers.

Chapter 15

Difficult Cases

A limited district budget, students with special needs, and parents who want only the best form the perfect storm for difficult cases. Do not let these cases get to you. They will take a lot of time, but each will teach you some legal aspect of school psychology you did not know and motivate you to do better psycho-educational reports, follow-up with parents, and provides professional training. Whether involved in the case or not, when one of the district's cases goes to fair hearing or mediation, I make every attempt to be there. While there, I can be emotional support for the school staff and colleagues, and know what to expect the next time I am called to testify. During your internship and first years as a school psychologist make an effort to observe these cases. You will see how the questioning goes and what happens when the psychologist fails to know the answer to a question or has to justify why s/he did or did not administer a particular assessment. It certainly makes you stop and seriously consider your assessment tools.

During these cases it is more important than ever to remember that while we all make mistakes, the smartest ones learn from those mistakes, implement changes immediately, and never make them again. Do not strive to never make a mistake or test every student so completely you do not have time to write the psycho-educational report. Instead strive to be the psychologist with the reputation of learning from mistakes and learning quickly. This latter approach offers hope to the director and reduces the stress on you to always be perfect.

Prevention

Most of the material in this book is aimed at keeping you both effective and efficient. But there are a few things more to keep in mind and help prevent parents from feeling as if they have to hire outside help (an advocate) in order to be heard or get results.

Initial referrals made by Student Study Teams are made for a reason. You are not a gatekeeper to special education services. When a student struggles academically in school, even if they do not qualify for special education, they need help. Academic struggle is an indication something is going wrong and/or went wrong in the past. Granted, you cannot change the home environment but professionally you are obligated to provide interventions to the teachers and parents. The primary purpose of your psycho-educational report is to bring together the many facets of the student, to state them in parent friendly language, and provide recommendations to assist the student academically. The secondary purpose of your psycho-educational report is consideration for qualification.

Take every initial referral very seriously and if you do not qualify the student, then clearly establish why s/he is struggling. In most cases when a student does not qualify, it should mean more tracking and follow-up on your part. When a student qualifies, they are assigned a case carrier who will track the student's progress. When a student does not qualify, you must provide this tracking and follow-up. At the IEP meeting add follow-up dates to your calendar, at least one every other month. This follow-up consists of emailing the teacher (an email automatically sent using the delay sending feature discussed earlier in the book) and then a phone call to the parent with the teacher's report and seeking their feedback. Do this until the student is academically successful or you learn of some reason the student qualifies for special education.

In my experience, most advocates are brought in due to initials which did not qualify the student and the parents feeling "left out in the cold" with nowhere to turn for help. By no means should you qualify every student just for being referred. That would be illegal and unethical. However, you have an expertise and an obligation to assist struggling students once they are brought to your attention. The current legal trend is to provide more pre-referral and general education interventions in order to prevent the need for special education services. You are operating well within your scope of practice to provide ongoing monitoring, feedback, and consultation with students who did not initially qualify. This will keep the parents feeling heard and save you lots of hassle when advocates and attorneys are not called or needed.

When a student does not qualify for special education, the team should stress the follow-up and ongoing monitoring at the IEP meeting. You can also schedule future parent/teacher/psychologist meetings to facilitate the follow-up. Also, it may help the parent accept the non-qualification report if you mention (verbally during the meeting) the positive impact of not labeling their child as special education. These include possible self-esteem issues and lowered teacher expectations which may result from being labeled special education.

When conducting a triennial, consider all evidence, past and present, before changing the student's qualification category or status. Changing a child's qualifying category may raise questions in the parent's mind about the quality of prior assessments, the quality of your assessment, and the appropriateness of services provided to this point.

I have worked with many students labeled Specific Learning Disability or Other Health Impaired who were actually Intellectually Disabled, but no one wanted to tell the parents. These are very difficult cases and need to be handled very delicately. Most of the time these students are even on a diploma track which they are incapable of completing. A diploma or certificated track means little in elementary and middle schools, however it makes a world of difference in high school. It is not fair to the parents or the student to learn in high school that the student will not graduate with a high school diploma. When presented with such a case I try to stick to the facts and the future. It does no good to point back to old assessment data and prior psychologists and teachers too afraid to label a student Intellectually Disabled. Keep the conversation about the future and all the possibilities. When the parent asks about compensatory education, talk about local, county, and state services for which the child now qualifies. When the parent asks about how this was overlooked in the past, talk about your assessment and the findings it indicates. Keep the conversation and team looking forward to how services will look in the future. Of course, this can happen with any disability change, so approach these meetings with caution. In most cases a pre-meeting with the parent may be helpful.

When conducting your triennial consider the prior assessments. Using the same assessments makes it easier to compare growth. Different assessments may be assessing the same skill in different ways and while one way may play to the student's strengths, another may not. Consider the differences in cognitive assessments. The WISC is built on an entirely different model of intelligence than the Cognitive Assessment System (CAS). Currently both models are accepted, although one uses the Cattell-Horn-Carroll (CHC) model and the other is a neuropsychological model of intelligence. Always remind the parent that standard scores are based on age or grade, so a standard score of 90 three years ago and a standard score of 90 this year is a growth of three years. The requirement to score a 90 becomes increasingly more difficult each year.

Timelines are important. In fact they are so important that being one day late is the same as being one month late. Most states monitor timelines and they are a reflection on the director's leadership. There is no legitimate excuse for being late. The state does not care about how busy you are, the crisis in which you intervened, or the number of times you rescheduled the meeting due to parent "no shows." Plan to hold all meetings two or more weeks before the deadline. This will allow for a couple of reschedules if/when necessary.

When you get the gut feeling a meeting or situation is heading south, schedule more meetings. Parents tend to get most upset when they feel left out of the picture and when they do not have a say. Scheduling additional meetings is a way to ensure the team hears the parent. The parent's comments and concerns are documented in the IEP notes and addressed in the meetings.

Always keep your communication logs up-to-date. It is best practice to make an entry in the appropriate communication log (one for each student) right after the communication or attempted communication.

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Dr. Turner's Rules for Better School Psychology

1. Plow with the horses you have
2. Communicate, Communicate, Communicate
3. Quality over Quantity
4. Effectiveness over Efficiency
5. Turn off email notification
6. Keep an interruptions list
7. Focus instead of multi-tasking
8. Create Writing Days, Assessment Days, and Meeting Days
9. Know if it is a “won’t” or a “can’t”
10. Create a Common Place Book – A single location for important information
11. For physical health increase sleep and exercise
12. For emotional health increase gratitude, gratefulness, and beauty
13. For mental health increase meditation, appreciation, and learning
14. When organized you save all the time you used to spend looking for things
15. Stop striving for perfection, instead strive for improvement
16. Don't waste time
17. If what you are doing isn't working, do something different
18. Use feedback to be more productive
19. Focus on strengths as much or more than weaknesses
20. Consider the perch – the view of a principal (the school) is different than a teacher (the classroom) and different than the school psychologist (the student).
21. Take your own advice
22. Flexibility is key
23. Balance life with work
24. Arrive early
25. Use a “to-do” list
26. The perfect solution requires perfect knowledge
27. Arrive early (worth repeating)
28. Never calendar more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of your day
29. Stay in touch
30. Even the worst meeting will end and you must be able to live with yourself
31. Fly the student
32. Keep your eyes on the agenda
33. Admit when you are wrong
34. Take responsibility

35. Taking risks is necessary for growth
36. Be courteous
37. Use good manners
38. Hold yourself to higher standards
39. It is okay to be stressed at work. It is okay not to be stressed at work.
40. What we do is a reflection of ourselves
41. Dress the part
42. Listen twice as much as you speak (you have two ears and one mouth)
43. When attending a conference find one or two take a ways and implement right away
44. Join and support professional organizations
45. Prioritize Director's request as very important
46. Do a monthly review of all open cases and all folders laying around your office
47. Fridays are for writing and catching up
48. Stay home when sick
49. Learn from mistakes
50. Consider it your duty to be happy