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Collaborative Ecological Consultation:

Psychologist, Classroom Teacher, and Embedded Interventions

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Introduction

The focus of this research was on ecological collaboration at the intervention stage of psychological consultation in schools. In this action research, teachers and psychologists worked in partnership to select and then to embed appropriate interventions within a curricular unit of study. This collaboration centred on the deliberation of the realities of the teacher's classroom, such as the students and the curriculum, to understand the application of interventions and their potential impact within the context of the classroom. Embedding interventions within a curricular unit with direct teacher involvement is consistent with collaborative ecological consultation that concomitantly considers student characteristics, teacher style and skills, and curriculum context.

This study emerged from a classroom teacher's concerns with the implementation phase of psychological consultation. This teacher requested further collaboration beyond a team meeting in which the psychological assessment report and the list of recommended interventions are debriefed. The teacher indicated that it would be difficult to implement the interventions from the report list within the context of her classroom. This teacher asked, specifically, for an opportunity for further collaboration to review and to embed interventions within a curricular unit of study to support implementation. The teacher's apprehension resonated with me, for on many occasions, I had queried whether this current psychological consultation process was sufficient in meeting teacher and student needs.

Literature Review

There is extensive literature on a shift in the role of the psychologist working in schools from what was once a focus on assessment of individual students to consultation with teachers (Bernes & Witko, 2009; Fagan, 2002; Fagan & Wise, 2007; Farrell, 2010; Kennedy, Frederickson & Monsen, 2008; Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000; Stoiber & Vanderwood, 2008; Ysseldyke et al., 2006; Ysseldyke, Burns & Rosenfield, 2009). Further, research has demonstrated that psychologists continued to focus on the initial stages of assessment and report writing when consulting, leaving less time for supporting the critical stage of implementation (Corkum, French, & Dorey, 2007; Hasuik, 2006; Jordan et al., 2009; Watkins, Crosby, & Pearson, 2001). Yet researchers have argued that written reports and team meetings provide insufficient information for teachers to implement the recommended interventions correctly (Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000).

Researchers have revealed implementation support beyond the team meeting and report debrief is not often provided in schools; all of the responsibility is placed on the teacher, see Table 1. Noell et al., (2005) argued that "simply meeting and talking about implementation was not enough to support implementation" (p. 101). A focus on further collaboration for the psychologist working with the teacher is 'pivotal' to effective consultation and to accurate implementation of interventions (Gutkin & Curtis, 2009). In short, teachers must be substantively involved in the design and implementation of the interventions within a model of increased collaboration and consultation (Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000).

Table 1. Current Psychological Consultation Stages

CONSULTATION STAGES			
Referral	**Assessment, Report, and Meeting**	**Intervention Implementation**	**Follow-up**
• Psychologist, a school team member • Concerns regarding student raised by teacher or assessment data • Teacher meets with school team • Discussion of classroom interventions	• Cumulative record review • Observation in school • Discussion with family • Formal assessment (research-based interventions) • School team meeting • File report	• By teacher	• Informal discussions • Inconsistent observations and/or team meetings

To maximize the school psychologist's impact on supporting students through consultation with teachers, researchers have called for an ecological approach to consultation with an emphasis on examining contextual factors via teacher and psychologist collaboration (Curtis, Chesno Grier & Hunley, 2004; Farrell, 2006; Gutkin, 2009; Gutkin, 2012; Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000; Wizda, 2004). Opportunities to explore the teacher acceptability of the interventions is critical as it must build upon practices that already exist in the classroom (Conoley & Conoley, 1992; Kelliher, Riley-Tillman & Power, 2008; McDougall, Nastasi, & Chafoulaus, 2005; Nastasi et al., 2000), so adapting the teacher plans to fit the context and the students is key (Nastasi et al., 2000). Thus, a collaborative planning process can assist in determining what and how to teach to meet the diverse learning needs of students (Jeary & Schwean, 2012; Ysseldyke et. al., 2012). Therefore, psychology will need to shift consultation toward an ecological model (Gutkin, 2009) in which the classroom context and individual teacher variables are taken into account.

Collaboration within this study had psychologists working with classroom teachers to embed interventions within a curricular unit of study. As Jeary and Schwean (2012) express, psychologists will need to link the intervention recommendations to instructional planning as a strategy to support the teacher and the student. Therefore, do-ability for the teacher must be taken seriously, as the interventions will not happen if they are not do-able. The ecological approach emphasized in this research had psychologists work *with* teachers to understand the environment in which the interventions are to be implemented (Gutkin, 2009; Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000; Wizda, 2004), (see Table 2).

Table 2. Collaborative Ecological Consultation Stages

CONSULTATION STAGES			
Referral	**Assessment, Report, and Meeting**	**Intervention Implementation**	**Follow-up**
• Psychologist, a school team member • Concerns regarding student raised by teacher or assessment data • Teacher meets with school team • Discussion of classroom interventions	• Cumulative record review • Observation in school • Discussion with family • Formal assessment (research-based interventions) • School team meeting • File report	• Collaboration between classroom teacher and psychologist to embed interventions within a curricular unit of study	• Specific discussions • Observations and/or team meetings

Methodology

There were three research questions for this study:

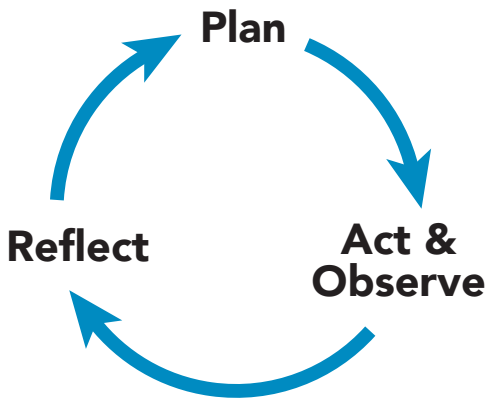
1. How do the teachers and psychologists experience and interpret collaboration in the intervention phase of psychological consultation?

2. Within extended consultation, which classroom/teacher or micro-level factors were discussed? How did such discussions lead to the embedding of particular interventions into a curricular unit of study?

3. How did students respond to the interventions with collaboration in the implementation phase?

The action research cycle used the model by Kemmis and McTaggart (2008) (see Figure 1 below). What follows next is an overview of the actions at each research stage: planning, acting and observing, then reflecting.

Figure 1. Action Research Cycle (adapted from Kemmis and McTaggart, 2008)



Planning (with participants)

We began the action research with planning. There were two psychologists and three teacher participants (see Table 3) that formed three dyads. Two of the teachers were from School A where Psychologist 1 worked. One teacher worked at School B with Psychologist 2. The classroom teachers' taught Grades 4/5, Grade 7, and Grade 8. It was logical that Psychologist A would collaborate with Teacher 1 and Teacher 2, and Psychologist 2 with Teacher 3 to align with current work locations.

Table 3. Research Study Participants

PARTICIPANT	CURRENT POSITION	SCHOOL INFORMATION
Teacher 1	Grade 4/5 classroom teacher	School A
Teacher 2	Grade 8 classroom teacher	School A
Psychologist 1	Registered psychologist	School A
Teacher 3	Grade 7 classroom teacher	School B
Psychologist 2	Registered psychologist	School B

The participants and I then booked initial interview times, tentative half-day curricular review times to embed interventions, and dates for observing the effectiveness of the interventions.

Acting and Observing

Next each of the three teacher/psychologist dyads and I met to embed interventions within a curricular unit. Within each team, the psychologists reviewed the students' assessment report to begin each planning session. They highlighted learning concerns, reasons for assessment, and recommendations. The teachers then summarized a selected unit plan including: (a) curricular outcomes; (b) materials; (c) lesson details; and (d) evaluation. At this time, teachers and psychologists discussed the identified students, their current learning needs and potential interventions. Next, we consulted the Ministry of Saskatchewan Education curricula with respect to subject, grade, and unit in order that teachers and psychologists understand the specific learning expectations for each selected student. Having that common goal, teachers then presented resources to actualize the particular curricular unit in light of the chosen student. On-the-ground planning really began with the teachers. The teachers shared curricular unit resources such as games, books, student worksheets, handouts, and activity sheets.

A connection between the students' strengths and weaknesses, identified within the psychological report, determined where the curriculum focus would be. This process solidified the student learning priorities within the teacher-chosen curricular unit. The deliberations around classroom context and teacher preferences helped solidify the selection of specific resources. Table 4 below summarizes each of the above collaborative planning sessions including unit of study, curricular outcome, materials, and primary interventions.

Table 4. Summary of Collaborative Planning Sessions (adapted from curricular outcomes, Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, n.d.)

PARTICIPANT	UNIT OF STUDY	CURRICULAR OUTCOME	MATERIALS	KEY INTERVENTIONS
Teacher 1 and Psychologist 1 Partner	Reading	• Comprehend and Respond (CR) • Outcome: CR4.4 • Read for various purposes and demonstrate comprehension of grade-appropriate fiction.	• Individual reading program • Online library with computer and headset	• Intensive reading skills instruction • Oral stories to listen and respond to with high interest and at grade level
Teacher 2 and Psychologist 1 Partner	Writing	• Compose and Create (CC) • Outcome: CC8.8 • Write to describe, explain, inform, and persuade including several paragraphs or sections organized in logical sequences.	• Persuasive essay visual outline • Persuasive essay sample	• Chunking of steps • Model essay writing example • Visual organizer to scribe ideas
Teacher 3 and Psychologist 2 Partner	Science	Earth and Space Science: Earth's Crust and Resources (EC) EC7.1 • Analyze societal and environmental impacts and understanding of movements and forces within Earth's crust. EC7.2 • Identify locations and processes used to extract Earth's geological resources and examine the impacts. EC7.3 • Investigate the characteristics and formation of the surface geology of Saskatchewan including soil.	• Individual science project materials • Make video of family farm animal's care and safety	• Collaborative peer groups • Individual peer support • Connect new material to current experiences and knowledge

Following the collaborative planning, the actions of observing were organized.

Observing with Discussions: Student Progress

Each psychologist and I observed the curricular lessons to collect data on students' responses to the interventions. The frequency, duration, and timing of observations were collaboratively determined with each teacher. I observed each classroom twice after which the classroom teacher and I met informally. The classroom teacher, psychologists, and I documented observed student behaviour as well as the amount and quality of work completed in comparison to a random peer. The classroom teacher also compiled evaluation data on the student for research and reporting purposes. After these visits, the formal reflection began.

Reflecting/Data Analysis

By and large, reflecting consisted of data gathered from collaborative planning dialogue, semi-structured interviews with each individual participant, journal entries, and artifacts. All data in this research project has been analyzed to determine what themes and evidence has been collected. There were five themes delineated from the dissertation data.

The first theme emerged in that barriers existed for participants when recommending and/or implementing interventions. This data revealed why classroom teachers and psychologists were so interested in this project. The second theme centred on participants' reported positive experiences. All of the participants detailed the effects ecological collaboration had on their professional growth as an individual and as a school team member. The third theme emerged as the data from the deliberations revealed specific classroom and teacher ecological factors pertaining to implementation. The participants of this study deliberated through the ecological factors classroom teachers prioritized including their teaching beliefs and their knowledge of the student dynamics within the classroom. The fourth theme includes findings on the students' responses to embedded interventions. The curricular units were taught, and generally speaking, all students had encouraging outcomes. Finally in theme five, all participants explained that without ecological collaboration the interventions would have continued as either not implemented or not as effective. Each theme or findings will be discussed next in more detail.

Findings

Theme 1: Current Implementation Barriers

This research data aligns with previous findings that indicate barriers to implementation continue to exist for teachers and psychologists. The debrief meeting and report provided the teachers in this study "a general understanding," "a starting point," and "a couple of ideas … or bits and pieces." At the same time, these teachers continued to feel unsupported implementing interventions. Participants desired a research plan to fill the gap of collaborative supports at the implementation stage. To summarize, a psychologist participant connected the research plan to what proved to be her biggest barrier to psychological consultation in schools.

> I think that the concern … is that we often come up with some really great ideas … evidence-based recommendations for the weaknesses … Then I hope that's something that the teacher will be able to look at and work with … But then I'm not sure how much the information is used afterwards.

This current "dump and run" (Teacher 1) model of consultation also concerned the teachers. "The psychologists do the big reveal of what went on and it just feels like you're given these interventions and ideas and then it stops there." Then for the teachers it's like, "Here it is. This is your baby. Goodbye."

The psychologists believed it would be important to be able to go back and to provide supports to teachers and students. One psychologist described the potential practice improvements from this study as, "Making sure that those things [interventions supports] happen and making sure that there are continual meetings to follow up and to support – Did it work? Great. If not, why not? Where was the breakdown? What do we need to do differently?" This research study provided a concrete example of a collaborative ecological approach to consultation. It also demonstrated that the opportunity to collaborate had a positive impact on the teachers and the psychologists.

Theme 2: Completely Collaborative Consultation

Collaboration was an encouraging approach to formally support intervention implementation. Each teacher/psychologist pair and I spent a half-day to review the teachers' pre-planned curricular unit and to deliberate on potential interventions to embed within it. Without exception, participants were overwhelmingly optimistic in contrast to the previously described challenges of implementation. Teachers and psychologists commented, "The process was awesome," and "Very positive." Participants also described the collaboration as very effective, "It helped a lot … big time!" Teacher 2 encapsulated his experience as, *"It was like I did my job* [emphasis added]." Collaboration, beyond the usual team meeting and report, was crucial to the positive participant experiences. Teacher 1 described it as, *"A good way to learn more about the process [implementation] and find out how to really make use of those reports* [emphasis added] *to benefit students instead of … just being a paper that sits in a file."*

Teacher participants emphasized collaborative planning was an essential component to consultation. Teacher 3 said, "It was really valuable to plan." Teacher 1 added, "To do that special planning is huge … That was I think the best part – that was great. It's something I've never been given before … It's important to have those discussions." Indeed, collaborative planning was so salient that the detailed data warranted three sub-themes: authentic collaboration and relationship building; embedded professional development; and empowering experience.

Sub-Theme 1: Authentic Collaboration and Relationship Building.

Psychologist 1 described how collaboration directly relates to the teacher's classroom and students.

> *To actually sit down with the teacher and look at curriculum and how the recommendations could be embedded … I think it helps bring sort of an authentic feel to what we do, like it's not just an assessment and a report, it's actually a tool that can be used to help teachers plan* [emphasis added].

Not only is collaboration immediately relevant for teachers, it helped to build a better understanding of the role of the psychologist working in schools. Teacher 2 described that previously, the psychologist was "Another strange person who's always here [in the hallway] that I don't know." He suggested, "If what happened [embedded planning] was their job, then they [the psychologist] wouldn't just be that person that comes into your building and does things."

In this way, time for collaboration fosters professional partnerships, and as Psychologist 2 indicated, such collaboration created impetus for increased informal exchanges and not just strangers passing in the hallways.

Just having those relationships to build trust is important. "So the more opportunities we have to sit down and talk with each and get to know each other is going to, in the end, generate more questions and have people be more observant about the changes that are happening in the child." So once you have the relationship, you will get a little bit more of that incidental follow up, like teachers will stop you in the hall and say, 'Hey, wow, I saw a great difference in this kid since I tried this,' and I'll go, 'Right on!' So the collaborative planning potentially could develop stronger relationships.

Psychologist 2 maintained that this research also enhanced these informal conversations and that follow up was no longer incidental and peripheral. Rather, discussions were no longer on the surface and were more frequent, more purposeful, and "more effective."

> Well then like when she [teacher] said, 'Oh I tried this and that worked,' well then I understood what she was talking about because we had sat down and did the unit planning right? … Right, and it's not like, oh I think I understand what's going on right? Because you've experienced the same discussion, so then you can elaborate on it … And just even being in the school, she would say, 'Hey I tried this and it worked really well,' so then we did more [targeted] collaboration just in the hallway. That was nifty.

Psychologist 1 described similar effects of increased and enhanced follow up while within the classroom as well.

> Someone who is willing to give the time to listen and help implement changes for that child. I think it just shows that we are willing to support. Through that collaborative process, *my relationship with* [Teacher 2] *grew because we sat and did that talking, right*. Then when I went in his classroom, he knew why I was there, to watch that kid, and now we are having conversations … It's like he [Teacher 2] is more engaged, he's good, and he was like, thank you for your support. So I think when you have that collaborative planning it builds that relationship for open conversation.

Furthermore, Psychologist 1 thought that, "Showing I was invested enough in that child, to take the time to sit and to collaboratively plan with them [teachers], made them feel like it [implementation] was really important."

To summarize, relationship building transpired to, "The more time you spend with somebody and the more you work together, the more you get to know them" (Teacher 3). According to participants, authentic ecological consultation then involves learning from one another, trusting each other, and tends to work best when focused upon an immediate and meaningful concern. Further, Teacher 3 suggests that investing in collaboration is investing in learning. It is, "You can learn so much from other people just from running ideas by them too. So it [embedded planning] is so valuable!"

Sub-Theme 2: Embedded Professional Development

Participants expressed that the kinds of collaboration, mentioned above, generated new ideas and ultimately was professional development. Such continuing education occurred for both teachers and psychologists, *"I think being able to talk and just being able to do it [collaborate] without pressure allowed for more growth, on her part and my part* [emphasis added]" (Psychologist 2). Teacher 3 explained that the embedded planning "makes you more knowledgeable," and that "It was a huge learning opportunity" (Teacher 2). As Teacher 1 described, "You need to have that discussion with the person [psychologist] that knows more than you about what a student's abilities and disabilities are." Teacher 3 affirmed, "It [collaborative consultation] was really good to connect and to feed off of one another."

Although authentic collaboration (as defined by participants) tended to revolve around immediate and practical concerns, participants felt professional development extended beyond these immediate circumstances. Such embedded professional development created opportunities to learn to meet diverse needs beyond a targeted student and beyond one particular unit of study. Teacher 1 confirmed expanding interventions with other students, and even into other content areas: "*It builds your toolkit* [emphasis added],"

> To really have that talking piece – like this project allowed – to go through it [the unit] and make a plan and – because even doing the one plan helped me structure other things. You know like talking through the reading – it kind of helped me see the essence of okay which of these [interventions] were important, which of them are going to be most impactful, then I can apply that to science; I can apply it to social studies … *It's almost like you know a rock in the water that ripples out* [emphasis added] because you know okay, a lot of those strategies are very similar across subject areas. 'Okay that [intervention] worked here. Now I can try it; I've got the confidence to try it somewhere else' (Teacher 1).

Teacher 2 also commented generalizing ideas and strategies to other students and to other contexts and subjects, "I feel as though these adaptations that are being – that were made – would be effective for a number of different people and for a number of different reasons." Another participant, Psychologist 1 said, "The idea of embedding the interventions in the plan … I think if you do that once with guidance to see how they can relate, then you can do it with the next unit plan" or an ease of application of interventions to another situation. Teacher 3 summarized collaboration as also important for her own growth, "*I just think of it as a professional development experience, and it's just, you know, taking my teaching one step further* [emphasis added] … you know what though, even though they [interventions] were specific to that unit, a lot of those ideas I could adapt to other subjects too."

Psychologist 1 claimed that, now professionally, she had a better understanding of the student's response to the recommended interventions, "The collaborative planning gave me confidence in that what I was recommending did work. So when I saw the final product [artifact of student work] it showed me that, yes, this does work; this is a good strategy." Both psychologists described this as professional development in that they now had the benefit of increased understanding, of knowing what interventions were embedded, and whether the student response was positive. These experiences may assist the psychologists in future consultations and in what is recommended again.

> *So I was just really excited that somebody actually tried that and it actually really worked well, because I myself personally hadn't used that one [fluency program], so I really didn't know how well it would work. So that's good, I'm excited, because I will continue recommending that, I know that it actually works … What the teacher noticed is that the kids became confident readers; they became motivated to read, because they were feeling success from that particular program, and I was just like woo-hoo, I've got something right* [emphasis added] (Psychologist 1).

Further to this, there may also be interventions that Psychologist 1 does not recommend in the future.

> The one recommendation to have him [Student 2] learn to type, he was very frustrated with it; he does not like to type. So now I want to go back and say, okay, if this isn't working for him, what can we do? … And then yeah we can think about making the recommendation for him in the future that he just skip the copying stage – that's just too hard for him … So that's probably not a good recommendation to use next time.

The participants confirmed that the collaboration to embed interventions was particularly significant, embedded professional development. Intervention implementation is a complex process. It required collaboration to prioritize interventions to bridge the student learning gaps. The adaptations aided the education of the identified student, but the teachers also expanded implementation for other students such as within an alike-reading group, and even at times, for the entire class. The classroom teachers and the psychologists described acquiring new knowledge through the collaboration process. Psychologist 2 summarized that, "This [planning] will help me know how to do things different next time with teachers." Along with knowledge, next profiled is the participants reported feelings of empowerment and affirmation from collaboration.

Sub-Theme 3: Empowering Experience

Teacher 1 noted in her journal, "[consultation] Felt much more supportive – like someone else had a shared interest in the student, and we were carrying the responsibility together … like an affirmation." Through collaboration, participants felt connected, and in turn, felt that they could better meet diverse student needs. Teacher 2 suggested the process was especially empowering.

> I do have more confidence in myself knowing that I am capable of executing a plan that is able to aid a student with extra needs … Being collaborative not only aids in the workplace environment, it helps you get through what [… has] proven to me as one of the tougher jobs that I've ever done in my life.

Interestingly, Teacher 2 was initially skeptical about the interventions that he personally selected, but collaboration encouraged him. Truly, he knew what was best for his classroom.

> *I thought it was really strange that the ideas I brought in [collaboration] were actually really good. I was very surprised that I was able to [have input] – like, 'This is what I want to do,' 'This is kind of where I see it going.' I didn't know if I was on the right page and it [collaboration] was just really affirming. I don't know, maybe it's me as a new teacher … But it made me feel as though I wasn't on my own, which was huge … So, the affirmation part was – it was a win for me and a huge confidence boost* [emphasis added].

Teacher 2 surmised that collaboration would also be helpful to the psychologists. He stated the process can, "Affirm the role of psych [psychologist] … the affirmation that their job's important." He explained further, being a psychologist:

> Could be a very difficult job … Telling people what's best practice and have them throw it out the window and not do it. But just the affirmation that there are people doing things that you're suggesting, and they're working! It's just got to be a good feeling.

Psychologist 1 agreed that collaborative unit planning was critical, "It gave him [the teacher] permission, I guess, to try those recommendations. Instead of worrying about just getting through the curriculum … I think the collaborative planning gives the teacher support to try something new."

Tellingly, Teacher 2 indicated, "I feel like understanding this process [collaborative implementation] … could alleviate the stress on teachers, and if stress is alleviated on teachers, they do a better job. It's a nice little domino effect." He concluded that perhaps, "The process isn't as broken as we think. Well, it's not broken. Clearly whatever happened is just maybe an extra conversation that worked." Collaboration was a positive experience for all participants. Next, I present a summary of the data from the next research question, the key classroom and teacher factors that affected the selection of interventions.

Theme 3: Ecological Factors

As already pointed out, researchers report that teachers are key to bringing about changes in the environment for students (Estep, 2002; Gravois, 2012; Gutkin, 2009; Rosenfield et al., 2008). Indeed, participant responses suggested that ecological consultation – an approach that takes the context seriously – was a required addition to consultation. For these reasons, the teachers were encouraged to discuss ecological variables influencing implementation within the context of the classroom. From interviews, journals, and collaborative planning data, three critical contextual factors emerged as sub-themes: 1) personal teaching experiences and style; 2) preference for inclusive approaches; and 3) classroom dynamics and student characteristics. What follows is an expansion of these three ecological dimensions, these "pieces in a puzzle" (Teacher 3), and their importance to implementation.

Sub-Theme 1: Teaching Experiences and Style

Psychologist 1 was well aware of the need to seriously engage with teachers as unique professionals, *"The tricky part is making recommendations that go with the personality of the teacher and* [emphasis added] their teaching style … Whatever I'm recommending has to fit that mould [teacher variables] or it's not going to happen. No matter how much we want it to happen, it's not going to happen." Teacher 1 supported this assertion, "Interventions have to take into account a teacher's style or they [teachers] won't do them; teachers will just ignore them." In fact, Teacher 1 defines intervention as something that has to "fit with your teaching style." She emphasized the importance of an ecological approach to intervention, *"Everybody has a different teaching style … What you do as a teacher definitely impacts which interventions you gravitate towards … it's important to have those discussions* [emphasis added]."

Sub-Theme 2: Inclusive Practice

All the teachers advocated that inclusion and inclusive practices were a priority. Teacher 1 firmly emphasized that she did not believe in individual/segregated interventions, "And sometimes I do conclude that just 'No, I'm not going there, I won't do that in my room,' for you know, sometimes I just generally believe it's not right for that student or right for my students as a whole." Teacher 2 stressed:

> *So, creating those individual programs or specialized programs for one, two, or three children really creates a barrier put up between themselves and everybody else. So, I'm a firm believer in everybody does the same stuff to some degree* [emphasis added].

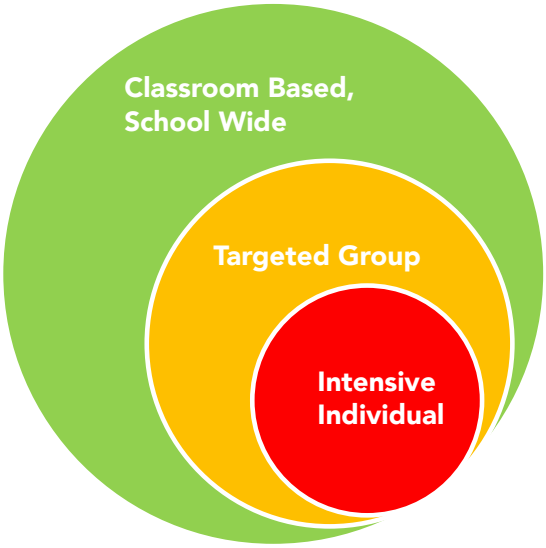
She preferred inclusive practice and explained that, "I tried to pick the best fit for everyone." As Psychologist 1 suggested, "It [intervention] needs to be something … that you can do within the whole group, like it doesn't have to be the whole group gets it, but it has to be something you can do within the whole group." Teacher 1 added:

> The more general ones [interventions] I find easier to implement … I tend to gravitate towards interventions that are universal design; I tend to be a very universal design [implementer], so I tend to look for things like, 'OK, how can this be adapted to fit everybody?' … Even sometimes things that I know are meant to be specific. I always ask myself, 'OK, how can I implement this with everybody?' I really do believe that if it benefits one, it will benefit all … I also gravitate towards the interventions that are more about adapting your teaching technique and how you present information and the supports.

As Teacher 1 firmly emphasized that she did not believe in individual/segregated interventions, Psychologist 1 confirmed inclusion as important to teachers. She expressed this key ecological factor as, "I think it was important to him [teacher] that he do something inclusive that all the kids would try."

In summary, inclusive interventions were key variables for teacher implementation. Such strategies would typically be located within the classroom-based level (often depicted within a green zone) of a response to intervention (RTI) list (see Figure 2). Participants expressed some concerns with utilizing tiered RTIs in this dissertation research. Criticisms revolved around intent and implementation of the next two tiers: the targeted and intensive interventions (yellow and red level). Psychologist 2 reasoned that the classroom-based interventions are easier for teachers to understand and those educators do not always have the experience of implementing interventions that are more intensive.

Figure 2. Tiers of Support (adapted from the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2015)



Psychologist 1 also mentioned challenges with tiered interventions and suggested an RTI process should not stop with the child or the classroom but a tiered model requires an integrated process and supports, "*It has to be the child, the classroom and it has to be tied into the whole school, and even bigger would be the whole division* [emphasis added]." Perhaps for all the reasons above, participants highlighted a preference for universally designed methods to implementation. They acknowledged the need for curricular interventions but preferred an inclusive model. Teachers also argued that their students would also prefer an inclusive approach based on their knowledge of the individual students and the classroom dynamics.

Sub-Theme 3: Classroom Dynamics and Student Characteristics

Every teacher felt that even the students themselves do not necessarily 'buy into' individual/segregated interventions, as they want to be like those around them. "It's just like they [psychologists] have to take into account the child's style because the child won't buy-in either … But the buy-in from the kids is so huge" (Teacher 1). Indeed, the teachers and psychologists noted that the students in this dissertation wanted, "to do what everybody was doing." Teacher 1 concurred, "That's important too that he [student] gets to do whatever with the class as long as he's able." Furthermore, Psychologist 1 commented, "Sometimes they [teachers] go with what motivates the student, like what the student is motivated with." In addition, as one might expect, participants indicated that interventions needed to be appropriate for the grade of the student and classroom dynamics. Teacher 2 explained, "With the nature of my classroom, I tried to pick the best fit for everyone." It was stressed by Teacher 1 that intervention "needs to fit within what's being done [classroom context], what works for the kid." Teacher 1 concludes, "*[interventions] Are never a one-size-fits-all but yeah, that's where the discussions [collaboration] I think are good for that* [emphasis added]."

As discussed, the recommended interventions list within the psychological report was not helpful for these classroom teachers. As well, the tiered approach is not clear to the classroom teachers nor the psychologists within this research. In the collaboration process, the previously highlighted classroom and teacher variables were part of the deliberations when selecting interventions to embed into the curricular plans. Next, the deliberations and ultimate selection of interventions had a positive impact on the student academic progress.

Theme 4: Consultation, Collaboration, and Completely Positive Student Outcomes

Finally, all students benefited from the implemented interventions. The data indicated teachers preferred collaboration rather than what they had described as a 'dump and run' consultation approach. Psychologists explained that they had an increased understanding of what interventions are actually effective rather than 'hoping' so. The research data analysis indicated that all the students successfully met the outcomes of the curricular unit. This is an impressive outcome indeed. This section begins with the broad positive responses from the participants.

"I thought it was a really good collaboration; it was successful [emphasis added]," Teacher 1 reflected on the research. All participants expressed that each of the interventions worked well for the students. Teacher 2 expanded that, "*I really enjoyed the process, and I really benefited from it. I like to think the student benefited from it … Because you were affirmed, that that [intervention] was what to do, so you kind of felt like 'let's do it,' and it worked out* [emphasis added]." Teacher 3 noted similar benefits, "Of course he [student] did well because they [interventions] were just planned so well and suited for him." Teacher 1 also described positive student response to the embedded interventions, *"So I think we did get more success* [emphasis added] and definitely the plan we had come up with together in the reading … I think we saw more gains, more engagement because I was mindful of the needs and the recommendations."

In conclusion, Psychologist 1 described, *"I liked being involved in the project, because I got to do the collaborative planning, which I usually don't do, and I think that we should do more of [that], because I think with both of them [students], we saw positive results* [emphasis added]. The kids were happier; they were engaged; they completed their work … I've seen a lot of improvement in the particular student, and he's shown growth in many areas." Each of the three students identified for this research project had specific positive outcomes from the interventions embedded within the curricular plan. The data, to determine positive student responses, was different for each individual student as listed in Table 5. Participant responses are reported for each student to provide further clarity on the measures of success.

Table 5. Individual Student Subject and Interventions Summary

PROFESSIONAL PSEUDONYM	STUDENT PSEUDONYM	GRADE	SUBJECT	EMBEDDED INTERVENTIONS	SCHOOL
Teacher 1	Student J	4	Reading	• Intensive reading skills instruction (letters and sounds) • Oral stories to listen and to respond to with high interest and at grade level	School A
Teacher 2	Student C	8	Writing	• Chunking of steps • Model essay writing example • Visual organizer to scribe ideas	School A
Teacher 3	Student L	7	Science	• Collaborative peer groups • Individual peer support • Connect new material to current experiences and knowledge of farming	School B

Student J (Teacher 1)

Evidence of success for Student J was compiled from Teacher 1 interview data, researcher and teacher journal notes, parent comments, and school staff comments. Teacher 1 started with ,"I just saw more engagement from him … A big part of his goal was just to be engaged and become involved and then work from there … But he's really, like, actually willing to engage." Teacher 1 described Student J as committed to the learning plans, intensive reading skills instruction, and an oral grade-level story with high interest. In her journal, this teacher recorded that her student was participating in the intensive, small group reading skills instruction.

> He has engaged in both games that I have introduced to him … He is also engaging in the hands-on spelling strategies. Student J surprised me by coming to the table and engaging right away at the next meeting … He responded very well to choral reading … He did well at decoding using the picture and text for cues.

Teacher 1 also discussed the audiobook intervention as a very successful intervention for the student. "He did really well with the audiobook that we had suggested – I had picked." She also elaborated in her research journal, "Over the past few weeks, I've been implementing the plan we came up with. Student J is very keen on the audiobook I have downloaded for him. He looks forward to listening to it every day, and it has solved the problem of him doing nothing during his independent reading and writing blocks." She expressed Student J was, "Really engaged in getting headphones and sitting at my computer [audiobook reading time]." Teacher 1 also described that his commitment to the audiobook aided in his overall interest in reading, "He's actually even willingly reading, inviting somebody to read with him … He started to, 'Can I ask a peer or an EA to read with me,' which is good too. But the audiobook really worked, if we could get him to continue, you know."

There were other staff, and even family members, expressing student success as well. Teacher 1 cited, "Other colleagues have commented that he's in the classroom … He smiles in the morning; like he comes in smiling; you can tell he's relaxed; he's happy to be in school." From the family perspective, "They're really pleased with how he's doing. Yeah they're quite happy that he's in the room."

Student C (Teacher 2)

Student 2, like Student J, met the curricular outcomes for the unit. Evidence of success for Student C was compiled from Teacher 2 interview data, psychologist interview data, student feedback, and artifact work samples. Psychologist 1 indicated that:

> I think he [teacher] found it successful. I haven't really followed up with him to ask him if he did, but he seems quite proud of the end product … And then again with the collaborative process we did, to work on the essay writing, I think [teacher] was pleased with the success he saw from that student.

The teacher confirmed that Student C had success from the curricular plan with the embedded interventions. Teacher 2 provided evidence from the student work, the student comments, and his demeanour in the classroom.

> In terms of his [Student C] individual success with this assignment, I would say he did very well … He produced a quality piece [of work] … And he was proud of the learning he was able to do … But I mean he was referred, because he wasn't ready [to meet curricular outcomes], so the fact that he produced a quality piece shows that it must have made a difference, right … That is so much more of an accomplishment than what it could have been [without collaboration], or much more work than I would typically see [from Student C].

Student C also revealed to the teacher that, "This organizer really made his essay easy." Teacher 2 agreed and responded that, "It [intervention] worked really well for him and that in class, well, just that he's happier."

Student L (Teacher 3)

Evidence of success for Student L was compiled from Teacher 3 interview data, psychologist interview data, Teacher 3 journal notes, psychologist journal notes, researcher journal notes, and anecdotal feedback from parents. Teacher 3 journal notes provide a succinct summary of the student response to the embedded interventions.

> The student responded well to the adaptations – that allowed him to speak to what he knows and what he cares about … Also another highlight of the programming we developed for him was that he was able to create various hands-on projects that aligned with the current curriculum. So when we were able to connect it to something that he already knew a lot about, he was that much more confident. Then we saw so much of a growth in terms of his oral communication. The [psychologist] … said, 'I don't think I've ever heard him talk that much.' And it was because of that connection to what he knew already … So he was really, really involved with his farm and the acreage … And then the way that I saw how much it meant to him to have those specific projects [farm animals video assignment, farm soil samples activity] made it so worthwhile. It was just right up his alley. And then when you're enjoying something, you learn.

Psychologist 2 also summarized her understanding of the student success as:

> There was that connection there that was more meaningful to him, that helped him grow and to communicate more which is I guess kind of what we're trying to work towards. I have worked with this student for over four years, and I have never seen him verbalize that much information for that long. I have never seen this student in the four to six years – I can't remember how long I worked with him – talk this long, and talk but actually can explain, and know what he was talking about and apply it to his everyday living, for him to be up there [presenting to class] and confident and for a peer to help him, and they did the demonstration. He looked like a leader. He was able to feel confident about himself, and he had learned something. I was pretty impressed actually. His face was absolutely glowing during the presentation, since he loved it so much, and it tied into science curriculum … But what I saw was his demeanour, and the happiness, and being able to share. That was not typical for him to talk that long. That's even amazing, because it's usually one-word answers, but he had practiced it, and he delivered it. He didn't have to read it word for word. He knew it, and that was pretty key.

I also commented in my researcher journal that while in the classroom for the second visit, "It also appeared during the observation that the student was comfortable and proud of what he did. He gave appropriate eye contact and smiled." Teacher 3 confirmed, "I did get a lot of positive feedback from her [mom]." As well Psychologist 2 noted in her journal that, "Told her [mom] how delighted I was to see the experiment [intervention] and how well it went … Well mom is quite delighted, because I talked to her."

Psychologist 1 summarized the collaboration as an opportunity to build authentic relationships, grow professionally, and enhance the student outcomes.

> Just having those relationships to build trust is important, so the more opportunities we have to sit down and talk with each other and get to know each other is going to, in the end, I think, make more results and generate more questions and have people more observant about the changes that are happening in the child.

Overall, the participants described the collaboration to support the intervention implementation stage of psychological consultation as helpful for both themselves and for the students. All participants also concurred that without the collaboration to embed interventions within the curricular unit, the plan would not have been as effective.

Theme 5: Not Without Collaboration

Through the planned interventions, students attained positive learning experiences; they performed better, and all the teacher and psychologist participants emphasized that the encouraging outcomes were a direct result of the collaboration to support implementation. As Teacher 1 and Psychologist 1 explained, the plan we developed together, *"Definitely [influenced] the student reading … So I think we did get more success … And we come up with probably a completely different plan than I might have on my own* [emphasis added]." Further to this, *"Without the planning* [emphasis added], I don't think you would have got the same quality of work [from the student]," or that the teacher, "may have gone off in a completely different way" (Psychologist 1).

To be clear, interventions that emanated from teacher-psychologist co-planning seemed to be interventions that really would not have happened otherwise and had not happened up to this point. Psychologists may have assumed that teachers understood their recommendations. Teachers may have assumed that psychologists understood the exigencies of their classroom to implement such recommendations, but significantly, until these professionals were in the same room and on the same page, interventions were unsuccessful. This was news for the teachers and psychologists; this was truly an aha moment; each participant said so. Psychologist 2 agreed that it was, "An eye-opening experience … And it's just making the time to make it effective," as such collaborative interventions were successful.

Conclusion

Five key themes emerged from the data analysis that aligns with previous research indicating that barriers to implementation continue to exist for teachers and psychologists. Further to this, collaborative ecological consultation, focused on the teacher and classroom variables, is essential for improving the intervention process. Psychologist 2 reflected on the collaboration research project as, "*It wasn't until we sat down and did the unit planning that I realized that probably most teachers do not know how to take the recommendations and incorporate or embed* [emphasis added]." What's more, she also described an ecological approach to consultation as, "It makes it a way to navigate, what can you change and how would you deliver it differently to meet the [student] need."

Not only did collaboration support the selection of interventions from the report and the embedding into a curricular unit, it also expanded the intervention options. Teacher 2 described the deliberations actually brought in a key intervention that was not listed in the student report, "It was an idea that wasn't in here [psychological report] but seemed to be one of the key pieces that really made a difference, and it's a good – it's a good practice, a good strategy." Consequently, this process provided professional development opportunities for both the teacher and the psychologist. The deliberation of ecological variables at the micro-level had an impact on the review of the curricular unit plan and on the selection of interventions. The opportunity to embed interventions through collaboration also had a positive impact on the student learning.

These findings support the current literature and call for an ecological approach to implementation. This research study provided a concrete example of a collaborative ecological approach to consultation. It also demonstrated that the opportunity to collaborate had a positive impact on the teacher, the psychologist, and most importantly, the student. Research describes the psychological consultation process as professional problem solving (Watkins & Hill, 2010), and utilizing an ecological approach allows for deliberation on the ever-important teacher acceptability of the interventions (Gutkin & Curtis, 2009; Kelliher et al., 2008). In the next section, I will concentrate on the potential impact of this research on the future role of the psychologist in schools. What happens if psychological consultation is completely contextualized?

Future of Ecological Collaboration

This section focuses on the implications for future psychological practice in schools. It is recommended that psychologists advocate and implement collaboration throughout

the stages of consultation. As researchers have stated, advocacy is required for a role evolution for the psychologist working in schools. Advocacy at many levels, to activate a movement to collaborative ecological approach, is essential for psychological consultation in Saskatchewan schools. I suggest that endorsement would need to occur at multiple levels within Saskatchewan to be effective such as at the provincial-government level, post-secondary level, fraternal-organizational level, and at the individual-psychologist level. The possible approaches to promote collaborative ecological, psychological consultation at each of these levels are outlined next.

At the Ministry of Education level, the living document *Guidelines for the Practice of Professional Psychology in Schools within Saskatchewan* needs updating. It is time to clarify within this practice document an emphasis on a collaborative ecological approach to implementation for the psychologist – to shift from tester to collaborator. The example of how to do this could be including collaboration from this study. Of course, prioritizing time within the psychologist role to support teachers is another very concrete way to demonstrate support for an ecological approach. The Ministry ought to place a caseload recommendation within this document rather than just a sidebar notation. Currently, the document references research in that an ideal psychologist-to-student ratio would be 1:1000, but this is not discussed further within the body of the document. As well, this recommendation is outdated. The school psychology section of the CPA recorded the following ratios within their 2014 position paper: 1:500 to 1:700 when providing comprehensive and preventative services (CPA, 2014). The ratio for the psychologists in this study was approximately 1:900, but participants maintained that there were still pressures of time when it came to supporting implementation. Ultimately, ratio is impacted by the students' needs and a collaborative approach; flexibility would allow for these considerations. Consequently, the Ministry of Education could promote an updated document emphasizing implementation as a necessity in the psychologist role, as well as a current recommended student ratio to bequeath time and energy for an ecological approach within school divisions.

Another stakeholder key to the continued evolution of the psychologist role is the Psychology Association of Saskatchewan (PAS). The key objectives of PAS, which connect to a role shift and this dissertation, would be to encourage and promote the advancement of psychological research, education, and training in the province of Saskatchewan and to increase public awareness of psychology and psychological services in Saskatchewan. This fraternal organization should have significant involvement to advocate for a role shift and ratios within Saskatchewan schools. It may be warranted to survey and collect baseline data on various aspects of the psychologist role such as ratios, job descriptions, implementation time, and current teacher supports available beyond the meeting and report. This data could then be analyzed and utilized to advocate for refining the practices of psychologists in schools.

In Saskatchewan, there are two post-secondary institutions to emphasize a role shift as a part of the psychologist training and, as a start, to include a mandatory course on consultation. A review with pre-service psychologists indicates that intervention supports are not prioritized services for the psychologist and that the four stages of consultation are not followed (Bramlett, Murphy, Johnson, Wallingsford and Hall, 2002). Therefore, this course could review the literature on calls for a collaborative ecological approach to intervention and to emphasize this role within the students' practicum experience in schools. These students may also then contribute to further development of practicing psychologists in modelling and educating of current best practices.

In the future, individual psychologists will also need to advocate within their own school divisions to clarify a process to support implementation and for the provision of time within their role. There is a need to explore the implications for practice with consideration of the extended time required for collaboration within schools. Although the teacher reported that the planning process ultimately was more efficient, the process would require additional classroom-based consultation time from the psychologist. While the additional time may be initially considered prohibitive, there is need to explore the longer-term implications and efficiencies of building teacher and psychologist knowledge of ecologically valid approaches for instruction and support. Increasing collaborative time in education may require increased financial supports, so expanding this understanding and support is a vital part of advocacy. This shift would align with an inclusive movement in which psychologists could be attached to classrooms as support rather than to individual students. Psychologists and teachers could collaborate frequently as support for implementation as a consultation practice. There is designated preparation time for teachers and the potential of incorporating a collaboration during unit planning may be very compatible.

The psychologists will need to work with senior school division staff to meet the challenge set out by researchers and to shift their focus from the individual student to working with the adults who control the environments to impact the student learning (Curtis, Chesno Grier, & Hunley, 2004; Gutkin, 2009; Gutkin, 2012; Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000). Psychologists, as professional leaders within the schools divisions of Saskatchewan, need to continue to develop consultation approaches to support teachers in the intervention implementation stage. Psychologists need to design a consultation approach, with less emphasis on the report and debrief meeting, as a resource for teachers and families to work collaboratively in consideration of the key ecological factors impacting implementation integrity and fidelity.

To recap, the participants in this research study described barriers with the intervention implementation phase of consultation. For as Sheridan and Gutkin (2000) emphasize, "It should come as no surprise that teachers gain insufficient information from our [psychologists] traditional methods of communication" (p. 487). The two main barriers discussed by participants were no clear process for the provision of implementation supports, and if implementation supports were adopted, all participants suggested the model must be efficient and timely. The fact that psychologists within this study continue to rely on the consult and hope (Wilkinson, 2006) consultation model, and "haven't been able to make that [the implementation stage] a priority" (Psychologist 1), may reinforce a multi-layer plan to support a shift in the role for the province.

Recall that a service-delivery model focused on assessment is "dysfunctional by design" (Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000, p. 486) and increased involvement in collaboration and consultation are some of the anticipated changes for psychologists (Kemp-Koo & Claypool, 2011). This action research study examined a collaborative ecological approach to the intervention-implementation stage of consultation for psychologists working in Saskatchewan schools. Collaborative planning was an opportunity for psychologists to work with teachers, for as Gutkin and Curtis (2009) argue, interventions need to align with the ecological systems of the classroom to impact student learning. Collaboration was an encouraging approach to formally support intervention implementation. All of the participants determined the collaboration to embed interventions within a curricular unit of study was positive for the classroom teachers, the psychologists, and most importantly, the students.

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