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Exploring Leadership Experiences Of School Psychologists In Supporting Schools: A Phenomenological Study

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EXPLORING LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS IN
SUPPORTING SCHOOLS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

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ABSTRACT

The passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 2004 have placed increased demands on all educators and administrators. School psychologists find themselves charged with addressing a broad range of issues today, and there is an emphasis on leadership in the effective provision of services. Although the literature is replete with examples of the centrality of leadership in regards to the educational experience of students, there have not been sufficient studies that have studied this topic in school psychology.

The purpose of this study was to discover, understand, and describe in rich detail the lived experience of school psychologists exercising leadership. The researcher interviewed school psychologists within a mid-size school district in Central Florida who were nominated by district administrators that supervise of them. Additionally, this study sought to identify the contexts, domains of practice, universal structures, and opportunities utilized in their experiences. School psychologists demonstrated leadership through collaboration and consultation, professional expertise, student-oriented needs, expert-problem solvers, and communication skills. The contexts of their leadership experiences varied due to the diverse roles taken on by the individual, however they were all demonstrated at the district level, school level, and with their peers.

The leadership experiences identified by the study participants correspond to most of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) domains of practice and also correspond to transformational leadership. The results are particularly salient to school psychologist, as the information comes from the perspective of school psychologists who were noted to be "effective" and displays "leadership" and are now exercising leadership. Future research is encourage to examine leadership experiences across multiple school districts to identify experiences of other leaders across various settings.

This work is dedicated to my mom, Saramma Varkey, who passed away before she could see her

support and influence on me as an adult.   I also dedicate this work to my husband, Thad Joseph

J.D. and to my daughters, Angelina and Adriana, who have been my constant source of support

during the past four years.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

A variety of changes contributes to the expanding roles of school psychologists. Education accountability laws have placed increased demands all on educators and administrators. Additionally, schools are faced with growing variability in students' academic and behavioral needs coupled with families' diverse needs for support (Reschly & Ysseldyke, 2002; Ross, Powell, Elias, 2002). The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requires that students be assessed through a statewide standardized test, and states are required to report data on the performance of all students. Schools are required to demonstrate growth for students in various subgroups such as economically disadvantaged and students with disabilities by meeting benchmarks for adequate yearly progress (AYP). Moreover, it was expected by 2013-2014, that all students would have demonstrated academic proficiency (Yell, Katsiyannis, & Shiner, 2006). When the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) was enacted in 2004, provisions within it allowed for the implementation of a tiered system of support, such as Response to Intervention (RTI), within public schools to provide further supports for students (Dulaney, 2013). Additionally, states were given the option of utilizing a process that would that was based on how a student responds to scientific research-based intervention as a means to assist in the identification of a Specific Learning Disability.

Historically, the primary role of school psychologists has been to conduct assessments to determine a student's eligibility for services through special education (Kavale, 2002). With the passage of NCLB and the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004, the ability of school psychologists to

provide comprehensive services—beyond solely conducting these assessments—has been greatly

expanded. Since the inception of the learning disability category in 1968, school psychologists

have utilized the IQ discrepancy model to identify if a student has a Specific Learning Disability.

However, with the enactment of NCLB, school psychologists are required to use scientific and

researched-based methods (e.g., RTI) to determine if a student qualifies as having a learning

disability (Fuchs & Deshler, 2007; Fuchs, Fuchs & Zumeta, 2008). The use of the RTI model

allows for a more expanded role for school psychologists to provide comprehensive services for

students, families and schools. Prior to the most recent reauthorization of IDEA, there were

limited opportunities for school psychologists to expand their roles through the treatment of

mental health issues, general education interventions, behavior modification procedures, and

program evaluation. That opportunity has been greatly expanded, but since that time, there have

only been a few national studies completed regarding the actual roles of school psychologists

(Larson & Choi, 2010). With the increased accountability and the growing diverse needs of

students in public schools, it is essential to ensure that students are receiving the appropriate

intensity of supports based on their individual needs (Burns, 2011). In order to meet the

multifaceted needs of students and families and the ever-changing dynamics of school systems,

school psychologists are situated in a distinct position to provide supports to students, families,

and schools (Ysseldyke et al., 2006).

School psychologists have highly specialized training in both education and psychology.

Additionally, a school psychologist can assist data analysis, problem-solving, and consultation

skills that are indispensable and necessary to provide supports to schools (National Association

of School Psychologists [NASP], 2010a, 2010b). Although there is variation in the service

delivery and roles of school psychologists across school districts and states, the majority of

school psychologists provide services in schools by conducting assessments, working with

teachers and families, and participating in problem-solving meetings (Curtis, Hunley, & Grier,

2002; Curtis, Grier, & Hunley, 2004). According to the National Association of School

Psychologists, school psychologists can assist schools, students, and families by: (a) providing

services to schools and families that improve the capability and well-being of children, which

includes the promotion of effective and safe learning environments; (b) preventing academic and

behavioral problems; (c) responding to crises; and (d) improving family–school collaboration

(NASP, 2010a).

The described competencies and skills of school psychologists, described as "best

practices" by NASP, can be utilized to work in collaboration with school teams to further

provide supports to students, teachers, and families to ensure the well-being of all children and

that barriers to learning are removed (NASP, 2015a). The Best Practices in School Psychology

provides a leading resource that is critical for effective delivery of school psychological services.

In their myriad roles, school psychologists are asked to utilize these best practices, which are

essential in providing the highest possible level of support to students, teachers, administrators,

and schools.

Statement of the Problem

The new duties and responsibilities being thrust upon school psychologists require them

to take more of a leadership role within the settings they work. Leadership is an important

component of being an effective school psychologist when working with others (e.g., teachers, administrators, guidance counselors, or parents) on various issues facing schools today (Ysseldyke et al., 2006). However, this leadership role is a concept that at present is not well-defined concerning school psychologists (Augustyniak, 2014; Shriberg, 2007). Given the critical need to utilize leadership in school psychological services, there have not been sufficient studies conducted regarding the leadership characteristics of school psychologists (Shriberg, 2007). Although there are a plethora of leadership models for school leaders—specifically administrators, counselors, and even teacher leaders—there is a lack of body of research that has attempted to analyze leadership from the framework of support personnel, such as school psychologists.

School psychologists are in the midst of a paradigm change (Reschly, 2008) which requires them to be proactive agents in the future (Ysseldyke et al., 2006). The expansion of the role of the school psychologist is something that has been sought in the field for several decades (Fagan, 2005). Further, there have been training standards and professional practices which have been updated to reflect a comprehensive model of services and professional ambitions (NASP, 2010a; NASP, 2010b; and Ysseldyke et al., 2006). These training standards and professional goals project that school psychologists will be the leaders of change in systems, be more proactive in their roles, and have the ability to work with all children. (NASP, 2010a; Shriberg, Satchwell, McArdle, & James, 2010).

The practice of school psychology is constantly evolving, as it must stay up to date with new legislation, continue to provide services during economic difficulties, and welcome the new

models of service delivery as delineated by NASP. To ensure that students and schools achieve their best, NASP highlighted the many roles and responsibilities that are required to fulfill this broad goal. NASP developed the Model of Comprehensive and Integrated School Psychological Services to serve as a guide regarding the roles and responsibilities for school psychologists in delivering their services (NASP, 2010a). Recent training standards and changing models for delivery of services implies the concept of leadership in school psychology and makes it an essential skill in being an effective school psychologist. However, leadership as it applies to the role of school psychologists has been understudied (Augustyniak, 2014; Shriberg et al., 2010).

School psychologists have been called upon to assume primary leadership roles in various areas. School psychologists have been called to lead on a wide range of initiatives including system level-supports in response to high-stakes testing and accountability imperatives (Batsche, Castillo, Ford, Dixon, 2008; Elliott, 2007; and Shriberg, 2007). Further, they have also been asked to support in the improvement school safety initiatives (Borum, Cornell, Modzeleski, & Jimerson, 2010; Furlong, Morris, & Pavelski, 2000; and Reddy et al., 2001). Accordingly, Shriberg et al. (2010) asserts that, "despite these calls for an expansive view of school psychology practice, to date there has been a lack of research examining the construct of leadership as applied to school psychology practice" (p. 10). Given that, there is not a framework for leadership as it relates to the practice of school psychology, there is not a pathway for those school psychologists who would expand their roles to exercise leadership and advocate for students in schools.

Rationale for the Study

The heightened accountability for schools in all aspects of teaching, learning, and assessment of students makes it an increased imperative be able to effectively utilize their skills and expertise to support the learning of all students. Although school psychologists have traditionally allocated an enormous percentage of their professional time for assessment and identification of students for services through special education, they are now being asked to broaden their roles in providing services to students. Ysseldyke et al. (2006) identified leadership as a critical component of efficacy for school psychologists when working with others on various issues facing schools today. Nevertheless, this emerging concept is not presently well-defined in terms of daily practice (Shriberg, 2007; Shriberg et al., 2010). Further, it is a concept within school psychology that is implied as a critical skill; however, one that has been understudied (Augustyniak, 2014; Shriberg et al., 2010). Shriberg (2007) asserts that "all school psychologists have the ability to become leaders and that school psychologists who can successfully tap into their skills has the best opportunity to serve students effectively" (p. 152).

The literature has well established a variety of methods by which school psychologists can provide services; however, there is a not a cogent model for leadership. As a practicing school psychologist, I am familiar with the challenges that exist in schools today and the process of looking at a wide range of ways to provide services to schools. Additionally, I have an interest in understanding and learning about the experience of those who utilize leadership practices in their roles. This study was intended to provide insight to address the gap in the research on that topic. By understanding the current experiences of school psychologists who

are already demonstrating leadership through the use of the comprehensive service model, district leaders and school personnel can develop and utilize professional development in their practice to assist current practitioners in providing further support students, their families, and schools. It is hoped that results from this phenomenological research study will create a new awareness in the field of school psychology specific to understand the experience of others serving students in schools.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand, discover, and describe in rich detail the lived experience of school psychologists exercising leadership within their role. Changes in the legislation (IDEA 2004 and NCLB) include provisions for early intervention, which enhance the opportunities for consultation and collaboration with educators and also enhance opportunities for school psychologists to support students and families (Ysseldyke et al., 2006). Additionally, the increased focus on schools to support students' mental health, safety and behavioral needs also presents contexts and circumstances for school psychologists to move beyond the role of an evaluator. However, due to the evolving roles and responsibilities of school psychologists within their settings, it is important to understand their experience in providing services for students and schools. There are a lack of researchers who have examined the experience of school psychologists in exerting leadership and providing services to schools. What is needed is a study on the experience of school psychologists who are noted to be leaders to understand the phenomenon through their experience. Findings from this study will provide insight and inform those who aspire to be leaders.

Research Questions

Although there are abundant calls for school psychologists to display leadership in several domains, there is not a cogent model that has been delineated as to how leadership can be demonstrated in their diverse roles. To understand the leadership within the field of school psychology, it was deemed important that it be understood within the context of their employment. This study was designed to explore this concept through the examination of one broad exploratory question and three sub-questions. The exploratory question that guided this study is: *What are the lived experiences of school psychologists exercising leadership in their roles?*

Sub-questions. This question was further informed by four research sub-questions:

1. What are the contexts that account for leadership experiences of school psychologists?

2. What are the domains of practice that account for the leadership experiences of school psychologists?

3. What are the universal structures accounting for leadership experiences of school psychologists?

4. What are the opportunities for school psychologists to exert leadership?

Theoretical Framework

For the purposes of this research, leadership was generally defined as "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (Northouse, 2007, p. 58). The research questions in this study were explored through the theoretical lens of the

Transformational Model of Leadership. Transformational leadership is an approach that is presently most strongly associated with the work of James McGregor Burns (1978), Bernard Bass (1985), and Ronald Riggio (2006). The concept of leadership centers to the degree that organizational members are committed to the overall goals of the organization and their capacity to achieve those goals (Leithwood & Duke, 1999).

Within this leadership model, power and authority are not necessarily inherently limited to those individuals occupying administrative roles; rather, they are associated with the individual members of the organization who can successfully foster the collective commitments and ambitions of other members of the organization to achieve the aforementioned goals (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Particularly, this model underscores that leadership is not situated exclusively at the top organization, rather that leadership can occur across many levels, and that leaders are responsible to develop the leadership of those under them. These principles from the theory can be utilized for change in many areas including in families, for careers, and within social/political arenas.

When leadership is framed within the context of school psychology, the idea of transformational leadership suggests that the practice of school psychology consists of an individual's commitment and dedication to actively work and collaborate with others to produce better outcomes for students (Shriberg, 2007). That is, transformational leadership is relational and intends to produce meaningful change in others (Rogers & Shriberg, 2005). School psychologists that employ or utilize the transformational leadership approach would be actively involved in working to improve academic and behavioral performance of students. Further, they

will also be committed to promoting innovations and changes that support success for every student, families in the schools, and educators.

Scope and Delimitations

This study was conducted in large school district in Central Florida. According to the 2014 LEA profile from the state of Florida, this school district has a population of over 66,000 students (FLDOE, 2014). Special education administrators were utilized to identify a selected group of school psychologists who are "effective" and "display leadership" within their role. Afterwards, the school psychologists participated in the study if they met the following criteria: (1) at least 5 years of experience; (2) providing services to two schools at the time of the study; and (3) voluntarily consented to participate in the study. Care was taken to ensure representation of school psychologists from throughout the different clusters in the school district.

Assumptions

It was assumed that participants answered all questions openly and honestly and recollected their lived experiences accurately. It was assumed that the participants in this study understood the scope of the study and the questions posed by the researcher and responded honestly and openly and recollected their lived experiences accurately. Additionally, it was also anticipated that the interpretation of the data collected accurately reflected the intent of the participants. A final supposition was that the methodology that was utilized offered a logical and appropriate design to address the research questions.

Limitations

Limitations of the study were considered and strategies were developed to minimize the drawbacks of these limitations. I am a school psychologist who is also employed within the same school district with the participants of this study. I handled data collection and was also the data analyst. I was familiar with some of the possible participants and was mindful and bracketed my thoughts prior to starting the research study. Moustakas (1994) stressed the importance of Epoche or setting aside personal feelings, to gain an unbiased perspective of the phenomenon. Creswell (2007) describes bracketing as setting aside the researcher's feelings and thoughts.

Definitions of Terms

Assessment: Using systematic data collections, such as observations, interviews, standardized measures, for the purposes of diagnosis, problem solving, treatment or intervention planning, at individual or systematic levels (NASP, 2010a; Ysseldyke et al., 2006).

Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act (IDEA 2004: is a federal law that requires schools to service students with disabilities and provides access to an educational system. IDEA was reauthorized in 2004 and is commonly referred to as IDEA 2004 (IDEA).

Leadership: "A process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (Northouse, 2007, p. 58).

National Association of School Psychologists (NASP): NASP is the major professional organization for school psychologists in the United States. The mission of NASP is to "empower

school psychologists by advancing effective practices to improve students' learning, behavior, and mental health (NASP, 2015b).

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB): The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 is a major legislation for K-12 education. This law increased the federal role in holding schools accountable for the academic progress of all students. The main goals of NCLB were to make every student in public schools reach proficiency in reading and math by 2013-2014 (NCLB).

Problem-Solving Process: A process that is essential to making adjustments that is needed for continual improvement in both student level of response and rate of progress. There are four parts: (a) define the problem, (b) analyze the problem, (c) develop and implement a plan, and (d) measure the progress or response to the intervention (GTIPS, 2008).

Response to Intervention (RTI): Response to Intervention is a process whereby local education agencies (LEAs) document a child's response to scientific, research-based intervention ensuing a tiered approach. RTI was authorized for use in December 2004 as part of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA; www.ldonline.org/glossary).

Transformational Leadership: A leadership style where the leaders engage with others and raises their motivation by placing the needs of the group (Buns, 1978).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical Perspectives of School Psychology

The field of school psychology has been part of the American education system since the turn of the 20th century (Fagan & Warden, 1996; Fagan & Wells, 2000). Fagan and Warden divided the field of school psychology into two-time periods. The first period ranged from 1890 to 1969 and was called the "Hybrid Years." During this time, school psychology utilized educational and psychological perspectives, which focused on the assessment of children for special education placement. During this period, the evaluation of individual students for identification and diagnosis was the primary role of school psychologists. The second period, from 1970 to the present, is known as the "Thoroughbred Years." During this time, enactment of federal laws produced special education programs and requirements to assess children (Fagan & Warden, 1996). These legal underpinnings were not only for placement in such programs but also to monitor progress and make diagnostic recommendations for interventions (Fagan & Wells, 2000).

Fagan and Wise (2000) report that one of the most important duties of early school psychologists was conducting psychological assessments for the purpose of identifying children with learning problems and prescribing interventions. The secondary role and less emphasized role were that of the group and individual counseling of students with academic and adjustment issues. According to Fagan, the number of school psychologists working started to increase during the 1960s. The first important national conference, called the Thayer Conference, was the first major attempt to delineate the role of school psychologists during that period (Fagan, 2005).

Topics such as necessary training, a code of ethics, practitioner-to-student ratios, certification and credentialing requirements, and job requirements were discussed during this first conference.

During the early 1970s, school psychologists were exploring ways to expand their roles to provide services such as counseling, consultation, and systems-based intervention, however, psychological assessment remained the primary function of the school psychologist. The 1970s was a time of growth in the university programs, practitioners in the field, state and national associations, literature, and regulations, which have all contributed to the existence of school psychology. After Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) was passed in 1975, there was an enormous growth in the number of school psychologists (Fagan, 2005). The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) began determining educational and professional qualifications and standards.

Fagan & Wise (2007) emphasizes that the enactment of the EAHCA in 1975, also known as Public Law 94-142, formalized the need to provide an appropriate education for students with disabilities. The legislation formalized the role that many school psychologists had been doing, but was formally requiring that school psychologists conduct assessments, which has remained the primary role for the majority of school psychologists to the present (Fagan & Wise, 2007; Reschly, 2000; Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000; Sheridan & D'Amato, 2003;). Although, the legal mandate for eligibility assessment expanded the field of school psychology, it also "entrenched the school psychologist as the gatekeeper to the broad expanded role" that many advocate for (Merrell, Erivin, & Gimpel, 2006 p. 33).

School psychologists have a long history of working with students who have difficulty with general education curriculum from the time of identification of a disability to the time students' graduate high school. The next portion of the literature will review the history of special education.

History of Special Education

Students with disabilities have an exclusionary past within the education system—in which services and access to education were withheld and denied. Education for students with disabilities has been historically difficult for educational systems. Also, students with learning or behavioral needs have usually had few options for support in regular education (Canter, Klotz, & Cowan, 2008). Furthermore, the services that were available for students with disabilities were often solely through private institutions, residential settings, and special schools (Aron & Loprest, 2012). It was not until the 1970's that many of these children were excluded from educational opportunities; whereas others received insufficient and inappropriate services (Martin, Martin, & Terman, 1996). Due to the inequities that existed, parents lobbied and filed suit for better educational opportunities for their children resulting in the passage of the EAHCA (Aron & Loprest, 2012).

The passage of Public Law 94-142, which was the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), was a monumental legislation that provided federal funding for initiatives geared towards the education of children with disabilities. The EAHCA as later renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) is viewed to be the "bill of rights" for students with exceptionalities and their families (Yell, 1998 p. 20). This law guaranteed free and

appropriate educational opportunities for all school age children with disabilities and was the cornerstone legislative piece for dramatically improving the services for a student with disabilities (Gargiuolo, 2006). The enactment of IDEA ensured that students had a free and appropriate public education (FAPE), and they were educated with students without disabilities to the maximum extent possible (LRE). Further, children with disabilities were able to have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) to ensure that they will have an education that is tailored specifically to their areas of need (Garigulo, 2006). IDEA was later reauthorized in 2004, which further that supported students and families and strengthened their roles in participation for their students.

IDEA has impacted every school in the country and has transformed the roles of all educators and participants in the process of educating students (Bradley-Johnson & Dean, 2000; Katsiyannis, Yell & Bradley, 2001). Furthermore, the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which is the most recent authorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), has also impacted the services for students with disabilities. There are now many requirements and criteria set forth by this legislation to improve the educational opportunities for all students. Additionally, NCLB seeks to raise the academic achievement of all students, but also to close the achievement gap for those that have historically performed lower than their peers (Smith, 2007). NCLB increased the demand for schools to establish student achievement for all students and also increased accountability for school leaders.

School psychologists have been assessing and conducting evaluations for students for the past four decades and although, similar to special education, the enactment of legislation has facilitated the capability to provide additional supports to students and families.

Response To Intervention

School psychologists have been long looking for ways to expand their roles, and the framework of Response To Intervention (RTI) has provided that opportunity. The RTI model is grounded in research that has been conducted by several respected researchers in the field of education. RTI model is focused on a system of intervention focused on the early screening of students experiencing learning challenges in the classroom (Goyette-Ewing & Stahl, 2008). RTI is essentially a multi-tiered system designed to increase interventions and assist students in moving through the tiers. The theoretical foundation of RTI goes to the call for pre-referral intervention that originated back in the 1970s (Lindstrom, Tuckwiller, & Hallagan, 2008). The concept of response to intervention operates on the discrepancy based approach; conversely, it is not between ability and achievement scores, rather between the beginning and ending of intervention levels of performance (Gresham, 2002).

The essential components that comprise RTI are the systematic approach where: (a) research based interventions are provided in the general education setting, (b) there is ongoing monitoring of student's response to prescribed interventions, and (c) data are utilized to inform instructional practices (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Zumeta, 2008). RTI is used within the continuum of services for a student with academic difficulties within the general education setting (Whitten, Esteves & Woodrow, 2009). Federal and state statues call for systems that are scientifically

researched and evidence-based (Detrich, 2008). The Individuals with Disabilities Education

Improvement Act has defined RTI as a method of research that involves the application of

rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures in order to attain reliable and valid knowledge

relevant to educational activities and programs (Detrich, 2008). Furthermore, RTI merged

IDEIA and the mandates of NCLB (Fuchs, Mock, Morgan & Young, 2003) in order to provide a

foundation for increasing the academic performance of all students with disabilities (Detrich,

2008). As a result, the roles of general education and special education teachers had changed as

students with disabilities were receiving access to general education. Therefore, the importance

of collaborating and working together was paramount for the success of students (Nagle, Yunker,

& Malmgren, 2006)

Although, RTI is a process utilized to support students with academic difficulties, the

provisions set forth in IDEA 2004 also permits states to utilize the RTI process as a means of

also identifying students with a Specific Learning Disabilities. RTI model gives schools

additional choice to implement in the identification of students with a Specific Learning

Disability that is based on scientific research and is currently the process utilized in Florida for

determining eligibility (Florida Department of Education, 2006). Supporters of the RTI model

believe that early intervention, and scientifically evidence based research is the answer to meet

the needs of all students (Fuchs et al., 2003), by providing the data needed to determine a

learning disability. No longer did students have to show a significant discrepancy also known as

the "wait to fail model" to receive services through special education.

The capability of utilizing RTI model had a critical impact on the assessment, evaluation, and identification, and eligibility of students who are suspected of having a learning disability (Burn & Gibbons, 2013; Elliott, 2007). Given that school psychologists were primarily responsible for conducting assessments for the identification of students, the changes of legislation have significantly impacted the practice of school psychology. The framework of RTI has provided the opportunity for school psychologists to utilize their skillsets of analyzing data in working with school-based teams to develop preventive methods and further utilize problem-solving methods with schools to develop interventions and support in monitoring progress (Batsche et al., 2008; Burns & Coolong-Chafin, 2006; Elliott, 2007; Gresham, 2002).

According to a survey conducted by Hosp and Reschly (2002), school psychologists reported spending at least half of their time towards eligibility related activities. The results from the study reflect the disparity between what school psychologists would like to do and what they are doing. An additional important finding from the study was that many of the school psychologists did not feel they had the essential skills needed to deliver a full array of psychological services for students, staff, and parents (Hosp & Reschly, 2002). Nonetheless, some believe that school psychologists are the most prepared to lead the implementation of RTI because of their training in assessment (Batshe et al., 2008; Elliott, 2007).

Burns and Coolong-Chaffin (2006) emphasize that school psychologists are likely to obtain a more consistent and desirable role through the RTI framework within the school system. In order to expand their roles and increase their competencies and skills, school psychologists need to be well-informed in a variety of assessment systems and differentiate what system will

work best for specific populations and individual students (Curtis, Grier, & Hunley, 2004; Hunley, Curtis, & Batsche, 2002). Within the RTI framework, it is essential for school psychologists to work in collaboration with teachers and other school staff regarding criteria and procedures for moving through the tiers, and identifying students that may need more intense interventions.

IDEA (2004) have produced a shift and expanded the roles that school psychologists fulfill at schools. School psychologists can participate in a critical role in assisting schools and districts to support RTI implementation. Others have also suggested that school psychologists are a potential resource for providing support to schools and districts in implementing and evaluating new practices (Curtis & Stollar, 2002; Curtis et al., 2008; Godber, 2008). Nonetheless, the data thus far collected indicate that many school psychologists remain involved in traditional activities such as individual student and special education related services the majority of the time, rather than fulfill this role (Castillo, Curtis, Chappel, & Cunningham, 2011).

Leadership in School Psychology

According to the numerous literature in education, leadership matters and there is a broad range of leadership models and styles that are tailored to education. It can be noted that effective leadership within education makes a marked improvement in learning. In order to formulate a theory of leadership, it becomes driven by the context, just like the role of a school psychologist is determined by the policies set forth by their district (Shriberg & Shriberg, 2011). Since the definition of leadership is tied directly to context, to apply a leadership definition to school

psychologists is difficult when the definition rests upon the school policies driving their roles. In

2010, NASP published its Model for Comprehensive and Integrated School Psychological

Services (NASP, 2010a) which summarized the role of the school psychologist. According to

this publication, school psychologists:

> provide effective services to help children and youth succeed academically,
> socially, behaviorally, and emotionally. School psychologists provide direct
> educational and mental health services for children and youth, as well as
> work with parents, educators, and other professionals to create supportive
> learning and social environments for all children. School psychologists
> apply their knowledge of both psychology and education during consultation
> and collaboration with others. They conduct effective decision making using
> a foundation of assessment and data collection. School psychologist
> engage in specific services for students, such as direct and indirect
> interventions that focus on academic skills, learning, socialization, and
> mental health. School psychologists provide services to schools and
> families that enhance the competence and well-being of children, including
> promotion of effective and safe learning environments, prevention of
> academic and behavior problems, response to crises, and improvement of family–school
> collaboration. (NASP, 2010a p. 1)

Given the wide range of roles available for school psychologists, it can be argued that those

who are effective school psychologists and want to utilize these practices is supporting students

and families will utilize leadership in their role. Due to the wide range of the roles and the

discrepant responsibilities of school psychologists, leadership can be employed in different

domains. School psychologists "need to leadership in identifying those instructional environments

and cognitive, emotional, social, and behavioral factors that have a significant impact on school

achievement and the development of personal competence" (Ysseldyke et al., 2006, p.18). School

psychologists have been called to lead on a wide range of initiatives including system level-

supports in response to high-stakes testing and accountability imperatives (Batsche et al., 2008;

Elliott, 2007; & Shriberg, 2007). Further, they have been asked to lead with school safety initiatives (Borum, Cornell, Modzeleski, & Jimerson, 2010; Furlong, Morris, & Pavelski, 2000; Reddy et al., 2001).

Although leadership is described as an important component of being an effective school psychologist (e.g., Ysseldyke et al., 2006)— at present is not well defined for school psychologists (Shriberg, 2007). When looking at leadership within school psychology, it is important to understand the context, just as it as with any other forms of leadership. Defining leadership within the practice of school psychology essentially becomes problematic due to the context-driven role in itself, similar to the role of a school psychologist within their school(s) as it is driven by the district's policy on service delivery and, therefore, the task of defining leadership within the field becomes difficult (Shriberg & Shriberg, 2011).

One of the areas leadership by school psychologists has been studied within the context of systems-level support of two school psychologists. Both of the school psychologists described their transformative leadership role in assessing high stakes data and studying school assessment procedures to impact the outcomes for more students in their respective districts (Shriberg, 2007). School psychologists who are able to combine their vision to expand their roles and make a positive change while being "committed to data, advocacy, and interpersonal savvy within a complex educational structure have the opportunity to assume leadership in this current educational climate where test scores have been given tremendous prominence and importance" (Shriberg, 2007, p. 158).

Within the context of school psychology, the notion of transformational leadership suggests that the practice of school psychology comprises of an individual's commitment and dedication to actively work and collaborate with others to produce better outcomes for students (Shriberg, 2007). Therefore, a school psychologist who exercises a transformational leadership approach would be persistently involved in working to improve educational outcomes for the student. Further, they will also be committed to promoting innovations and changes that support success for every student, families in the schools, and educators (Shriberg, 2007). The lack of literature addressing leadership within the context of school psychology is evident as Shriberg et al. (2010) study "stands as *solitary effort* to articulate a model of leadership in school psychology (Augustyniak, 2014 p. 16).

When looking at leadership as it relates to the field of school psychology, there is a lack of clarity in the empirical research. Given the current demands placed on students, schools, families, and school systems coupled with the increasing demands for accountability, school psychologists are positioned to provide the needed support. This study seeks to explore and understand leadership characteristics or behaviors that need to be employed by school psychologists in serving students with disabilities and schools.

Transactional and Transformational Leadership.

The transformational and transactional leadership approach is associated with the work of James McGregor Burns (1978). In Burn's 1978 seminal book *Leadership*, he introduced transformational and transactional leadership styles. Burns contrasted between transformational and transactional leadership in regards to what leaders and followers offer one another. Within

the transactional leadership, the leader focuses on the exchange tangible rewards or punishments for the loyalty of workers and punishments for those that do not follow directions (Burns, 1978). In contrast, within transformational leadership style, the leader engages with others and raises their motivation by placing the needs of the group (Burns, 1978). Bernard Bass (1985) based his theory of transformational leadership on the work of Burns (1978) by extending and modifying the initial conceptualization of the model.

Bass' (1985) conceptualization of transformational and transactional leadership differs from Burns (1978). Rather than differing between the two, he indicated that they were both ends of a continuum and noted that the best leaders are those that utilize both of these styles (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Bass noted that leaders increase the awareness of the task value, identify ways to focus on the goals of the organization and activate high order needs (Bass, 1985). Transformational leadership emphasizes that changes in organization occur through the use of empowerment, sharing the vision and being ethical. Bass identified four components which are needed for leadership behavior: (a) idealized influence, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) intellectual motivation, and (d) individual consideration. The leader utilizes their qualities to create dynamic outcomes and influences others to rise to the higher level and motivating others (Avolio & Bass, 2004). Whereas, Judge and Piccolo (2004) identified three forms of transactional leadership which are: (a) contingent reward or constructive-transactional, (b) management by exception-active, and (c) management by exception-passive. The difference between active management and passive management essentially lies in the timing of the leader's involvement with issues facing the organization (Judge & Piccolo, 2004).

Transactional Leadership. Transactional leaders often guide and motivate employees as well as clearly delineate the goals of an organization and the responsibilities and roles of its employees (Bass, 1985). The essential difference between transformational and transactional leadership is in how one works within the parameters of an organization, whereas the transformational leaders transform or change the organization (Bass, 1985). Within the conditional reward model of this theory, the leader determines the responsibilities and goals for its employees and the employees know that they will be rewarded when they follow through. The transactional approach works well when short-term outcomes are required fast (Vecchio, Justin, & Pearce, 2008). According to research conducted by Vecchio, Justin, and Pearce (2008) examining the integration of principles of transactional leadership theory and transformational leadership theory, findings indicated that transactional leadership had a stronger role in explaining the success of transformational leadership.

According to a study conducted by Smith and Bell (2011) of examining transformative and transactional leadership models in northern England, findings indicated that transformational leadership and transactional leadership were utilized for different purpose. Transactional leadership was utilized to respond to external expectations, however transformative leadership was more effective in producing successful school development. Essentially, when the administrators or teacher heads had to meet a timeline, or meet a target, for which their schools were evaluated on, they often employed the transactional approach of leadership to accomplish their goal of meeting the standards set forth (Smith & Bell, 2011).

Transformational Leadership. Transformational leadership is based on the commitment and capacity of members. The higher the levels of individual commitment, the greater the capabilities for achievement those goals. (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999). Mainly, this model underscores that leadership is not situated exclusively in the top organization, rather that leadership can occur across many levels, and that leaders are responsible to develop the leadership of those below them. Transformational leadership has been conducted within the business leadership, government, healthcare, non-profit (Bass and Riggio, 2006). Principles from this theory are fundamental to effective leadership and widely applicable in many areas including in families, for careers, and within social/political arenas (Avolio & Bass, 2004; Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Effective leadership is fundamental to the success of schools and school systems (Fullan, 2011; Datnow & Castellano, 2011). While, there is the agreement regarding the central components of leadership, it is still unclear which behaviors are most likely to cultivate favorable results (Bush & Middlewood, 2013). Therefore, the identification of alternative approaches to leadership is noted to be critical to develop aspiring leaders (Bush & Middlewood, 2013). With the demands for school structuring since the late 1980s, it was incumbent on principals and school administrators to redefine their leadership styles to match the needs and changes (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990). Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinbach (1999) provided rich descriptions of transformational leadership practices within schools in their book, *Changing Leadership for Changing Times*. The "central focus of leadership ought to be the commitment and capacities of organizational members" to support the various needs impacting schools (Leithwood, Jantzi, &

Steinbach, 1999 p.9). Accordingly, numerous studies have been conducted on leadership styles and their impact on schools.

Marzano, Waters, & McNulty (2005) concluded that principals using transformational leadership style had a substantiating and direct effect on student achievement. Further, transformational leadership by principals indicated positive impacts teacher motivation, professional growth, school culture and contributed to the educational change in schools (Kruger, Witziers, & Sleegers, 2007). Similarly, principals who demonstrated this style of leadership improved the collective efficacy of their teachers. Efficacy of teachers was improved by the implementation of opportunities for meaningful professional development, collaborative work among staff, clarified new opportunities of schools (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008).

Transformational leadership theories argue that given the adequate support, organizational members became highly engaged and motivated by goals since they are associated with values that they firmly believe. Accordingly, Leithwood and Sun (2012) sought to identify the practice related to transformational school leadership and identify school condition that impacts it and the influence on student achievement. Results indicated that the leadership practice had moderate effects on teacher internal states and behaviors and as well as school conditions. These findings support the central claims of transformational leadership. Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2012) indicated strong effects within the leadership dimension, which means that the more leaders focus on their relationship, their work, and their knowledge of the core business of learning, the greater the influence of outcomes.

Summary

This review of the literature examined the history of school psychology, the impact of various legislations and its impact on the practice. The literature revealed that school psychologists have been looking for ways to broaden their role for the past several decades. Information regarding the history of special education and the various legislations was discovered. The impact of RTI, as it relates to the identification of students with specific learning disabilities, was reviewed. Thus, the reauthorization of IDEA (2004) has provided more opportunities for school psychologists to taken on a broader role. Additionally, the concept of leadership, as it relates to school psychology, was limited. Lastly, information regarding transformational and transactional leadership revealed information concerning school leadership. However, research related to leadership within the context of school psychology was limited.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This chapter will discuss the methodology of phenomenology utilized within to discover, describe, and understand the leadership experience of school psychologists. The suitability of qualitative research is discussed further, the overarching research question, gathering the sample for this study, data collection, data analysis, reporting, the role of the researcher, and the credibility and dependability of the research will be discussed.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand, discover and describe in rich detail, the lived experience of school psychologists exercising leadership within their roles.

Research Questions

Creswell describes overarching questions as the broadest questions that can be asked and that do not limit the emerging data (2007).   Sub-questions then focus the study without constraining the research. The research questions are critical in guiding the design of the interview protocols while informing the data discovery process. The exploratory question that guided this study was: *What are the lived experiences of school psychologists exercising leadership in their roles?*

Sub-questions. This question was further informed by four research sub-questions:

1. What are the contexts that account for leadership experiences of school psychologists?

2. What are the domains of practice that account for the leadership experiences of school psychologists?

3. What are the universal structures accounting for the leadership experiences of school psychologists?

4. What are the opportunities for school psychologists to exert leadership?

Phenomenological Research

A review of the literature described various areas in which school psychologists can provide services; however, there was a lack of information in regards to leadership. Due to the nature of the study, the interest of the researcher, and the kind of question that was being asked, a qualitative research method was deemed appropriate for this study. The intent of this study was not to focus on the life or one individual and view it as a narrative approach or develop a theory as in a grounded approach. Nor, was the intent to describe how a cultural group operates as in an ethnography or study an in-depth scenario for a case study. In this research, I was interested in exploring an experience shared by a group of individuals. Creswell (2005; 2007) suggested using phenomenology to discover the meaning that individuals attribute to an experience. To most effectively gain a deeper and insightful understanding of these experiences, a phenomenological research design was utilized. This method was selected because the approach lends itself to the study of a small group that has common experiences with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2005; Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenology seeks to address questions about the experience of individuals with particular phenomenon (Ary, Jacobs, Sorenson, & Walker, 2013; Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenological approach attempts to "describe the meaning for several individuals' of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon" (Creswell, 2007, pg. 57).

The lived experience reports are utilized to gather in-depth data specifically from those who have experienced the phenomenon of interest (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2005). In phenomenological research, there are not any treatments or items to validate, rather this method is seeking to utilize and to understand the whole picture (Moustakas, 1994). The premise of transcendental phenomenology is that the focus is placed on the participant's description of the events as opposed to the interpretations of the researcher.

In this research, the focus was describing, understanding, and discovering the shared experiences or collective experiences of this group of psychologists with this phenomenon of leadership within their school. This type of qualitative research focuses on understanding social phenomena from the perspective of human participants while also trying to be free of initial bias, assumption or interpretation on the part of the researcher (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2010; Creswell, 2007; & Slavin, 2007). Phenomenology is based on philosophical foundations and draws heavily on the writings of the German mathematician Edmund Husserl (1859-1938; Creswell, 2007). When looking from the theoretical perspective, phenomenology has its origins in interpretivism (Crotty, 2003). Interpretivism seems to understand and explain human and social reality. Mostly, this approach looks for culturally situated and historically derived explanations of the social world (Crotty, 2003). This type of phenomenology is derived from first person reports of real life experiences with the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenology model supports many of the purposes of this study. Additionally, these methods, process, data analysis, and the focus on the phenomenon being studied are useful for capturing the essence of the lived experiences of the

participants (Moustakas, 1994). The model is designed to address the entire experience of the phenomenon. Transcendental phenomenology is not focused on the interpretations of the researcher rather it is more on the descriptions of participants (Moustakas, 1994). Another method that Moustakas emphasizes within the transcendental phenomenology method is one of Husserl's concepts called Epoche. Epoche is "a Greek word meaning to stay away or abstain" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85). The process of Epoche is not to withdraw one's experience, but rather to suspend and remove any presuppositions or thoughts regarding this topic. The product of phenomenology study is a "composite description that presents the 'essence' of the phenomenon, called the essential or the invariant structure" (Creswell, 2007 p. 62). When a person reads a report of the phenomenological study, he or she will understand the lived experienced the people in the study.

Prior to Starting Research

The dissertation proposal was submitted to the dissertation committee members during the proposal defense and adjustments were made to the initial questions formulated by the researcher and were approved by the committee members. Information and documentation regarding this study was presented to the Institutional Review Board at the University of Central Florida. Once the IRB approval (Appendix A) was obtained from the University of Central Florida, information and documentation regarding this study was submitted to the school district where this study was conducted. Once the approval was received from the school district, this researcher met with the district supervisors for the special education program, per the stipulation from the school district, to gain their permission to conduct the study with the participants.

Afterwards, the researcher contacted the special education administrators to inform them about the study and provided them a letter explaining the research and sought their nominations (Appendix B). Information was presented to the directors, and they consented to contacting the special education administrators for the nominations of school psychologists. Each of the special education administrators in the school district was contacted and information regarding the study was shared. A letter to the special education administrators was also sent via email informing them about the topic of the study and the criteria that should be utilized when making nominations (Appendix B).

Ethical Concerns

It was the intention of this researcher to establish a caring and considerate rapport with the participants without overstepping the limits of the study. Informed consent from all participants was sought, and the purpose and procedures of the study will be explicitly stated. All required information was submitted for IRB approval, and all research was conducted according to approved IRB guidelines. The researcher made every effort to cover all aspects of the study and answer all questions participants had in advance regarding the study and his or her participation. It was clearly stated that all information related to this study will remain confidential and that the participants and any information that may identify them personally will remain anonymous. The research was conducted in an environment that was mutually agreed upon by the interviewee and the researcher to assist with the comfort levels for both. Involvement in the study was voluntary and participants were free to withdraw at any time. Any potential risks were seen as minimal.

Participants and Selection Criteria

A sample of school psychologists from each area in a southern urban school district was represented in the study. Although there are divergent parameters that are identified for thematic saturation, according to Creswell (2005; 2007), participant numbers can range from 5 to 25 within a phenomenological design. Identically, Polkinghorne (1989) suggest 5 to 25 and Slavin (2007) recommends 5 to 20 participants. Although there are different recommendations, Moustakas (1994) suggests, "there is a not in-advance criterion for locating and selecting the research participants" (p. 107). Therefore, in order to have at least 5 participants, this researcher asked for 2-3 nominations from each of the five district administrators.

Subject Selection

Due to the type of research methodology that was utilized in this study, it was critical that the participants had experienced this phenomenon (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Moustakas, 1994). In order to identify school psychologists for this study, the researcher sought the nomination from special education administrators to recommend 2-3 school psychologists who are deemed as "effective" and "display leadership" in their roles. There are five special education administrators under the departments that supervise school psychologists across the four district clusters and one that oversees compliance at the district level. They were contacted via email with an introduction to the study and were asked to nominate 2-3 school psychologists that they supervise within their clusters. Nominations from the special education administrators were deemed to be appropriate due to the fact that these are the individuals that supervise and provide support for school psychologists from four of the cluster areas in the school district that this

researcher would like to study. The administrators were provided several of the Florida Principal

Leadership Standards as a basis for the nomination.

The Florida Principal Leadership Standards are used by the Florida Department of

Education as a set of criteria by which leadership capacity can be measured. While these

standards are typically used to determine the effectiveness of a school administrator, the

following also seem particularly germane to the role of a school psychologist (FLDOE, 2015):

- Student Learning as a Priority: Effective school leaders demonstrate that student learning is their top priority through leadership actions that build and support a learning organization focused on student success.
- Instructional Plan Implementation: Effective school leaders work collaboratively to develop and implement an instructional framework that aligns curriculum with state standards, effective instructional practices, student learning needs and assessments.
- Decision Making: Effective school leaders employ and monitor a decision-making process that is based on vision, mission and improvement priorities using facts and data.
- Communication: Effective school leaders practice two-way communications and use appropriate oral, written, and electronic communication and collaboration skills to accomplish school and system goals by building and maintaining relationships with students, faculty, parents, and community.
- Professional and Ethical Behaviors: Effective school leaders demonstrate personal and professional behaviors consistent with quality practices in education and as a community leader.

Purposive sampling was utilized to identify the subjects being investigated in this study

(Ary et. al, 2010). Once a list has been generated from the special education administrators,

those school psychologists that met the criteria of also supporting two schools in their role were

contacted and information regarding the study were contacted and explanation of research was

provided to them. The nominations yielded 11 school psychologist from 5 of the special

education administrators. It should be noted that 4 of the individuals that were nominated did

not have a role that included having at least two school they supported, as they worked in a consultative capacity within the school district.

In order to be part of the study, the participant had to meet the following criteria: (a) nominated by their administrator as someone who is "effective" and "displays leadership" in their role, (b) support at least two schools in their current role (c) school psychologist who has been working for at least 5 years, and (d) willing to be recorded in person during the interview process. Each potential participant was presented and asked to review the explanation of research form (Appendix C). The examiner contacted each of the participants via email or contacted them via phone regarding the study. After the four criteria for participation were met, an interviewing time that was mutually agreed by the researcher and co-researcher was selected. Once the participants understood the time requirements, an interviewing time was selected. After all the questions were asked by the researcher, some of the participants asked to go back to a previous question or wanted opportunities to further share their experiences and recording was continued.

Six participants, five female and one male, participated in this study. Four of the participants had a specialist degree and two of the participants had doctoral degrees. The years of experience working as a school psychologist ranged from six-years to 23- years. Four of the participants shared work experiences in other school districts.

Procedures for this Study

Qualitative researchers typically use a combination of data collection procedures such as participant observation and interviews (Ary et al., 210). Further, Creswell suggests that data

collection procedures can involve observations, interviews, documents, and visual images (1994). In this study, the primary sources for gathering the data were the participant observations and field notes journal. Once the participants for the research study were identified, the researcher contacted the participant via telephone to determine the interview location and time and also answer any questions they may have. The researcher reviewed again the purpose of the research and reassured the participant's the anonymity throughout the research study and afterward.

Three of the participants were interviewed in one of their schools and two of the participants were interviewed within their home on a mutually agreed time. One of the participants was interviewed at an alternative work location in a quiet room. The interviews were recorded with a Livescribe Pulse Smartpen, which allowed digital audio recording of the session while recording any written content on the Smartdot paper. This devise was noted to be useful as the researcher was able to write down field notes, such as intonations, behavioral observations and can tap at those specific locations later to hear the exact statements conveyed by the participants. This researcher utilized a semi-structured interview as it allowed for flexibility and integration of closed and open-ended questions. This was noted to be useful as it allowed room to adjust to the participants' responses.

Prior to the start of each interview, rapport was established with each of the participants. The researcher provided the purpose of the study, reviewed the explanation of research form, and reminded them that the interview would be audio recorded. Consent was provided for both audio recording and written notes pertaining to the interview. It should be noted that since this

researcher also works in the school district as a school psychologist, time was taken just to answer any questions or concerns the participants had. All of the interviews were completed in one session, ranging from 40 minutes to over an hour and a half.

The interview questions were developed to allow the participants to freely recall experiences that they felt were relevant. Depending on the response of the participants, probing and follow-up questions were used to clarify answers or seek further elaborations of their responses. In this study, the phenomenon was the lived experience of leadership utilized in their role as a school psychologist as experienced by each of them.

Once the interviews were conducted, the researcher transcribed each of the interviews to a password protected laptop. The interviews were uploaded into Endnotes, which is a software that is compatible with the Pulse Livescribe smartpen and allowed the researcher to play the recording, as well as see the notes from the interview. Afterwards, the researcher selected Microsoft Windows Player, as it has the capacity to slow the audio files, allowing the researcher to replay and listen to the recording. Eventually, information was transcribed using Word 2013 and windows media player allowed for following the interview in about two to three weeks. Each of the transcriptions was provided to each of the participants to ensure that they had an opportunity to review the content of the interview and add or modify any of the content, so that it would accurately capture their experiences.

It should be noted that the field notes that were taken during each of the interview also reflected body language, intonation, pauses, laughter etc. and using the Livescribe Pen, this researcher was able to hear the exact statements again when the specific notes were written. The

audio recording, transcriptions from the interviews, and the documents utilized to analyze the data will be maintained up to five years and will be destroyed afterwards.

It is believed that this research demonstrated creditability by providing detailed outline and explanation for the research methodology. The participants that were involved in this study were nominated as they were observed to display leadership and they also identified themselves as experiencing it.

Credibility and Dependability

Participants for this study were selected since they have experienced the phenomenon and were willing to share their lived experiences. Credibility occurs when the researcher's analysis indicates corroboration from the participants of the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) highlights that member checks as "the most crucial technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314) in a study. In this study, each of the participants was given their interview transcripts for review for clarity and accuracy and they had opportunity to modify or provide any additional information.

Another method utilized was triangulation, which involved using a wide range of informants, and this can be noted as one way of triangulating through the source of data (Shenton, 2004). The credibility of the researcher is important as the researcher is the major instrument during data collection and analysis (Patton, 2005). Consequently, this researcher has provided information regarding the professional work history. Lastly, rich thick descriptions of the phenomenon can be utilized as it helps to illustrate the phenomenon that has occurred and the setting and circumstances that surround them (Shenton, 2004).

Analysis of the Data

1. Once the interview was transcribed, the researcher re-listened to the audio file, while reading the transcription in order to understand and get a sense of the whole.

2. Moustakas (1994) method of data analysis was used, using the phenomenological reduction.

3. Each of the statements in the transcriptions was given equal value, which is called *horizonalization*.

4. During the process of horizonalization, the data were examined for descriptions and actions relevant to the participant's experience and repetitive statements and any data that overlapped were discarded.

5. Remaining horizons called invariant constituents were grouped into clusters, and the clusters were developed into themes for each individual participant. It should be noted that the themes formulated would be the basis of the individual textural descriptions.

6. Individual structural descriptions were developed from the individual textural descriptions

7. A validity check on textural-structural descriptions of the research participants' experience was completed to ensure that the descriptions and the synthesis were accurate according to the research participants. It should be noted that the research participants were be provided a copy of this description and any corrections, deletions, and additions will be made as necessary.

Anticipated Finding

Due to the nature of a phenomenological study, constructing expected findings was not feasible with this type of research. Pre-supposing results of this study will contradict the essence of the lived experiences of the research participant. The intent of the study was to attain insights from this study that will benefit school psychologists, educators, administrators, and researchers that are connected with the phenomenon of interest. It is expected that findings from this study can be utilized to support others who might not be taking on the leadership role in schools. Mostly, it would be anticipated that the information can be utilized by school psychologists to provide support to schools to ensure academic and behavioral success for all students. This study has the potential to foster possibilities for awareness, information, and actions, also to identifying professional and academic implications.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to discover, understand, and describe in rich detail the lived experience of school psychologists exercising leadership. The intent of this chapter is to present the data collected from this study and the analysis utilizing Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenology.

Method

The research questions of this study were designed to discover and understand the lived experiences of school psychologists. Since the purpose of the phenomenology is to enter the work of individuals and to understand their experience with leadership in their role as school psychologists, the primary research question asked: *What are the lived experiences of school psychologists exercising leadership in their roles?*

The sub-research questions asked:

1. What are the contexts that account for the leadership experiences of school psychologists?

2. What are the domains of practice that account for leadership experiences of school psychologists?

3. What are the universal structures accounting for leadership experiences of school psychologists?

4. What are the opportunities for school psychologists to exercise leadership?

Epoche

  Epoche is a process where the researcher set aside their own opinions, thoughts, principles, beliefs, and prejudgments from their professional and personal experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Epoche is "a Greek word meaning to stay away or abstain" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85). The process of Epoche is not to withdraw one's experience, but rather to suspend and remove any presuppositions or thoughts regarding this topic. This topic of leadership is one that that has always fascinated me, and I have also been working as a school psychologist for 10 years. Prior to that, I began my career as an ESE teacher, so I have an interest for working with students who have academic and behavioral difficulties. I have also has been working in the school district where this study was conducted for the past three years. As such, I have a personal and professional interest in understanding practices and working with school systems to provide comprehensive services for students. Along with my interests, I also believe in being a resource for students, teachers, and families in my schools and have read and studied on how to improve my own practices. I've had opportunities to work in three different school districts as a school psychologists and have had opportunities to see how district policies and procedures can impact how the role of a school psychologist can differ. The experience of being a school psychologist and working with students, teachers, and parents has provided the ability to build active listening skills and opportunities to conduct face-to-face interviews, and these strategies were utilized during the data collection of this study. Prior to starting the research for this study, a journal was utilized to document my own personal beliefs, attitudes, and biases about this

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topic. This journal was utilized to bracket my own thoughts during the data analysis and writing of this chapter.

Central Research Question

The study was based on the following overarching research question "What are the lived experiences of school psychologists exercising leadership in their roles?"

      Contexts for leadership. Research sub-question 1 asks, "What are the contexts that account for leadership experiences of school psychologists?" According to the input from the participants in this study, there were a wide range of circumstances, settings, and conditions that precipitated the utilization of leadership skills. Participants imparted their experiences in employing leadership at the district level, at the individual school level, facilitating practices to support their peers, and working individually with teachers and parents. Although each of the participants was able to describe and recall scenarios and situations where they utilized leadership skills, they also described the barriers to utilize their leadership skills. Given the wide range of roles and responsibilities the participants had, their leadership experiences will be delineated by the settings.

      Leadership experiences at the systems level. When looking at the various roles that each of the participants has participated in across their years of working, they were able to talk about some of the practices and supports they were able to provide. All of the participants were able to recall events where they were able to provide supports to a wide range of individuals at the district level. SP 2, SP 4, SP 5, and SP 6 provided examples of delivering services that impacts staff at the district level. SP 2 noted that he has taught "professional crisis management…technique to

prevent injury for very aggressive children…and I've taught hundreds at this point." He noted that

he has been a trainer in that capacity for several years, along with supporting two schools. SP 4

also noted that she has also taught the PCM course for several years at the district level like SP 2.

Similar to the SP 2 and SP 4, two other school psychologists noted that they were able to develop

practices or processes at the district level that resulted in a change of procedures.

SP 5 recalled her experience of utilizing her expertise to modify the practices of

assessment for a specified population of students. SP 5 noted that when she came to the current

school district, she became aware that there was not a specified procedure for working with a

specified group of students, that she had the expertise in.

> When I joined this county, there really was no process put in place. It was haphazard
> and…[there was] nothing was written down. I think there was a general understanding,
> but there was not a process, there was not a flowchart, there was not a sequence for
> people to follow to make sure that we were really attempting to engage across the board
> in best practice …So, I would say that I think that capacity was better tapped here in this
> county than it was, let's say, in my previous county …[where] there was also a more
> comprehensive process in place already.

As a result of "collaborating" and working with an administrator that she knew as a colleague at

district, she was able to have a "dialogue of ideas on what was reasonable, what was not

reasonable, what had been done, what should be done, and what could be done." Similar to SP

5, SP 6 had an opportunity to modify procedures at the district level, however she noted this

occurred a previous school district. SP 6 recalled that when she worked in a "specialized

department dealing with private schools and charter schools," and she learned a lot and "stepped

up [her] leadership skills." SP 6 noted that she:

> Came in and reconfigured the systematic way that they were doing things in the
> department…We had flowcharts that were created and there was a lot that we redid

because it was very inefficient. So, myself and another colleague kind of stepped up and took charge and redid everything. I also developed trainings for private school teachers… Every single week, we delivered this training to a group of private school teachers.

Providing Supports to School psychologists, Interns, and Practicum Students.

Participants shared their experiences of taking on a school psychology intern to support for one school year, working with practicum students from the local university, and being a resource to fellow school psychologists as a resource and also as a mentor. SP 2 and SP 5 noted that they teach courses to the graduate students in the school psychology program, outside their role. SP 2 noted that since he "teaches a lot of kids who end up being school psychologist" and that "they naturally sort of look up to me." Conversely, some of the participants volunteered to work with school psychology interns for the past several years. SP 1, SP 4, and SP 5 have supervised school psychology interns and they shared various ways they have helped to "enhance and provide experiences for school psychology interns." SP 1 recalls her beliefs about what she feels are "important" about the internship:

> Its also my job to give the as much information and education as I can in one year. So, an important of that is to "expose them to as many cases, to as many different assessments, and opportunities to work with different populations as much as possible…so, that they can next year, come as a practicing school psychologist with all that experience and then feel comfortable in any given situation."

Similar to SP 1, SP noted that she has shared her skills and practices with school psychology interns,

> I've had an intern for many years now, and just being able to try to share my service delivery, the planning process, the execution of whatever the evaluation process is, the follow-up, and just trying to share my approaches, which I believe is best practice with them, and trying to encourage them to develop similar practices in their service delivery.

Along with working and supervising school psychology interns, participants have also taken on opportunities to support their peers, who are practicing in other areas of the district. By "volunteering to help other school psychologists" with their caseloads like SP 1 or being a resource for others with their "expertise," and "providing workshops" for instruments or "best practices" like SP 1, SP 3 and SP 5 on something they have more knowledge about, participants noted that this has facilitated support for their peers. The participants also shared that have utilized opportunities to "mentor school psychologists" who have started their career at the current school district from another school district.

Leadership at Schools Each of the participants recalled scenarios and situations that they exercise leadership within their own schools that they support in various settings. One of the areas where "leadership qualities" exercised is during team meetings, such as an student study team meetings, where discussions occur among team members about referrals for evaluations, discussions about eligibility for programs, development of Individual Education Plans, and discussions about progress monitoring data. All of the participants conveyed the importance of working collaboratively with others, but also being "aware" of the "perception" as an "expert." SP 2 noted:

> When we go, when we are sitting at student study, we have a difficult case, you question, because this is a child's educational career. Even though it's a team decision, and I really feel like it's a team decision, but everybody is always looks at us as the school psychs, so what do we do? And in that sense, we're a leader of the student study team.

And at times, it's "important" to "communicate" and "advocate" for the "needs of the student, as opposed to what they want." Being aware of this and still doing it is a practice that the participants were able to recall as SP 3 illustrates:

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it's not always an easy thing to do or what other people want to hear, but often times what schools want, or want a teacher may want, or principal may want, may not really be in the best interest of the child.

Along with working in teams at their schools, participants noted "collaborating" and "consulting" with individual teachers, support staff, and administrators. All of the participants shared examples of working with a teacher or consulting on a "scenario or specific situation" to "provide more support." At times, it may require more than just meeting with them one time, but checking in with them weekly. SP 2 noted that when a "teacher comes to you with a problem with a student, they from experience with you that you are going to come and observe, so they feel validated in their concern…we will meet on a weekly basis just to see how it is going." At times, its working with someone who may be "difficult to work with" and may involve where "you have to have some kind of relationship… and tiptoe, but still try to get what you want because it's what the kids need" as recalled by SP 3 in regards to her experience of working with an individual at her school.

Domains of Practice That Accounts for Leadership   In response to sub-question 2 which states, "What the domains are of practice that account for leadership experiences of school psychologists?", the NASP Model for Comprehensive Integrated School Psychological Services was reviewed. The NASP Model was developed to be used as a set of principle that guide the training, credentialing, and also to be utilized as a guide for professional practice of school psychologists (NASP, 2010a). There are 10 domains that guide the professional practices of school psychologists. The researcher was interested to identify the domains of practices that accounted for leadership. When asked to describe the various ways that participants utilized their leadership

across the domains of their practice, the themes that emerged were: Collaboration and Consultation, Professional Expertise, Student-Focused Needs, Expert Problem Solvers, and Communication Skills.

Consultation and Collaboration. Participants provided narratives that described the various ways they worked with others by collaborating and consulting with a wide range of individuals. Each of the participants was able to illustrate and provide examples of times when this occurred. Examples of consultation and collaboration are provided by instances of utilizing this at their schools, with their peers or school psychology interns, and also with district administrators. In looking at the collaboration of participants with individuals or teams at their respective schools, all of the participants recall that often during the "student study meetings," people often look to them for their recommendation or suggestion. The following statements illustrate the experiences of the participants and their views:

> I think an important part is that you're open to other peoples' expertise and opinions and ideas, but also try to maintain the focus of the right thing to do for the student and for the school and for your team.

SP 5 identified being open to other people's views in teams and utilizing the collaborative skills when working in teams. Furthermore, she noted the importance of being aware of one's skillset and not "pretending" to be an "expert in everything." SP 5 shared her own beliefs about why school psychologists should be collaborative.

> When we talk about the concept of a multidisciplinary team, we're talking about a puzzle. It is impossible and it's inappropriate to expect any one person to be the entire puzzle… I don't think we should be pretending to be experts in everything. That's to the detriment of our teams, that's to the detriment of the students, and I think that's where the collaborative piece and the multidisciplinary team component comes into play, because we shouldn't be experts in everything

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Within the school setting, the "importance" of working with parents, teachers, administrators, and even outside community agencies and others was conveyed by most of the participants. SP 1 noted that she "will try to collaborate with [private therapist or analyst]…but to me, it makes more sense for all of us to be on the same page, work together…that helps with the families." Similarly, SP 2 indicated that he "try and personalize with parents…we've worked together. We talk. It's important to work with others in your team." Similarly, SP 3 notes that she "collaborates with administration and with the guidance counselors…and work with them to try to ensure that best practices are occurring…" Lastly, SP 6 notes that "consults with teachers a lot and talk heavily with [the] reading interventionist at school…we consulted a lot…I kind of stepped and described some understanding I had on reading and different ways to progress monitor and how everything should alight with intervention and support for students…"

Moreover, participants also shared experiences where they utilized these skills with their peers. SP 1, SP 3, SP 4, SP 5, and SP 6 noted that they consistently consult with their peers on cases or assessment practices, especially in situations where it's a case that they typically don't come across. Often times, it will be about a "certain situation or questions" and where participants recalled sharing their "suggestions" or "ideas" and other times, it maybe "sitting down and having lots of conversations about the data." There have been some situations where participants "easily utilize everyone else's expertise to affect change at more a smaller level at [their] schools." SP 5 indicated specifically a situation where she "went directly to my supervisor" to dialogue about amending and developing a new procedure to assess a sub-group of students. Furthermore, she notes that "without question having had that person in leadership

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at the district level inevitably allowed us to really move forward with a process that could have taken years to establish." This indicates that each of the participants shared the necessity of collaboration as part of their experiences.

Professional Expertise. Another theme that emerged when participants conveyed their leadership experiences was through the utilization of their professional expertise. Participants conveyed their ways of acquiring of new knowledge and also a level of confidence their practice, sharing their expertise with others, and utilizing it to make an impact to facilitate a change in their environments.

SP 1, SP 3, SP 4, SP 5, and SP 6 shared that they have attended the NASP national conferences in the past and all except SP 5 attended the recent one that was held in Orlando, FL. Additionally, researching and reading the best practices, learning new instruments, and sharing that information with their peers and others at schools were things that they reported as having done. Participants shared that they "integrate" and "share" things learned from their professional development attained through the conference to "improve assessment practices" or to "provide additional ideas" to others.

Along with attending NASP conferences, participants also noted their experiences in sharing things that they have had some additional experiences with. SP 4 noted that she:

> teach[s] the interns at the beginning of the year the KABC-II. That's not something that all the psychologists utilize, and unfortunately many of the psychologists don't, because it's something that's new and different for them, so that's a reason why they don't use it. Becoming an expert and very well versed in certain instruments, you can share that out with others.

SP 2 notes that he has taught teachers and administrators once a month for the past several years through the PCM class. When asked to elaborate, he noted, "I am a PCM instructor…that's professional crisis management, and that's…a technique for restraint, to prevent injury, so for very aggressive children are like regular education autistic, EBD, what have you. And I've taught hundreds at this point." Similar to SP 2, SP 3 also shared her past experience in a previous school district where she was able to "develop a professional community" and "led that up and facilitated" to "build a stronger MTSS model in our community based on things we were seeing in our schools…" Lastly, SP 6 also recalled her experiences of "providing trainings for private school teachers," however this was something that she did at the previous school district. In conjunction to developing and sharing their knowledge on various topics, some even utilized their professional expertise to "build awareness of better practices" with teachers and their peers.

Along with their professional expertise, the participants reflected their own confidence in their skills and in their beliefs when they communicated with others. SP 2 indicated that "you have to learn to be comfortable with what you do and to feel confident that you know what you're doing and you're doing the right thing." Similarly, SP 4 conveyed they importance of doing one's best, even with time constrictions.

> There hasn't been one evaluation this year that I have completed that I haven't been proud of. It's just hard to accomplish that. So yeah, but I feel like completing an evaluation that I would want done on my kids to answer the questions that they come seeking. And if I can't help to try to answer those questions with the test kits that I have that I can obtain, then I'm not doing my jobs, so try your best.

In conjunction to having the confidence and understanding one's skillset and experiences, SP 5 highlights that they take time as she states, "I think that voice that professional voice, is a really

important thing for people to evolve and establish, and I think it takes time. I think it takes the

capacity to own what your skill set is." Having that "professional voice" is something that others

also observed as shared by SP 5

> its interesting because somebody commented to me one time that when I'm talking about the things that I'm professionally competent in, that I have a very different voice and a very different demeanor. It becomes to me when I'm really engrossed in those things, kind of that concept of flow where you are connected, you are present, you are feeling your audience, you're feeling the material that you're presenting, and you're knowing that what you are saying is coming from an area of informed background.

Similar to SP 5, all of the participants shared their level of confidence that comes across when

they talk about things that each of them feels competent in and that is something that is noted by

others.

   Student-Oriented Needs. An additional theme that emerged when participants discussed

their leadership experiences was individualizing the needs of students in regards to conversations

with team members. SP 1 noted that "…each child is not the same and you can't treat them all the

same…" in regards to supporting the individual needs of a student through a behavior plan. At

times, there may be "pressure from administration" to quickly assess a student to place them in a

different setting. SP 2 noted that he has "enough experience" and "[does not] get intimidated" by

hearing "this kid has to be out and that kid has to be out" as he notes, "that's not how I run things."

Similarity,

SP 3 also noted that she recognizes it is important to "advocate for what you think is best for

kids…," where the school or administrator "may want to go in a different direction." Along with

advocating for individual student's needs, participants also shared experiences of advocating for a

group, such as the school psychologists or a sub-group of students. In regards to garnering supports for school psychologists, SP 4 noted that along with an administrator, "we advocated very hard to attend NASP conference this year, so that's something very rare that they [district] will actually allow temporary duty to do something like that…" Consequently, a decision was made by the district level administration to pay for the registration fees for 10 of the school psychologists to attend the conference. Furthermore, SP 4 notes that she is "constantly advocating for them to allow us to be more efficient in our jobs…" In terms of advocacy, SP 5 noted that she is "very passionate" about being about to "provide equitable service" to a population of students that "has lower levels of income." SP 5 noted, that "I feel like it just becomes an advocacy and passion type of scenario to be able to really truly service and meet the needs and advocate for our learners." SP 5 also asserts that "obviously, we advocate for every student, but this happens to be the population that I am drawn to in terms of advocacy."

Expert Problem Solvers. Another theme that was shared by the participants was how they described themselves in scenarios and situations where they were able to utilize their problem solving skills to deal with situations. All of the participants shared experiences where they were utilized as a resource to solve a problem facing an individual student, classroom, or used as a strategy in a group to get the team to consensus. SP 3 recalls her experience in a leadership role as a school psychologist lead at her previous school district and noted that she would "often have the same people asking for help when they didn't have the highest referrals," and she shared "ideas on how they could go about their job different in a way, so that they don't feel overwhelmed." She also noted that she "really enjoyed that role." Additionally, SP 4 shared a time where she was able

to "help another school psychologist complete the ADOS" since it was something she was "trained" on and it was "best practice." She noted that was a result of "being able to have that little bit of extra training," she was "able to help others with what is considered best practice." Since the ADOS is something that only a few select school psychologists have been trained, SP 4 shared being "available" when that assessment was warranted. Along with helping individuals, some of the participants shared how they were able to develop practices that impacted a larger group of students and teachers.

SP 5 noted that her experiences of implementing a process that "changed" how school psychologists were evaluating a sub-section of the population of students.

> When I joined this county, there really was no process put in place. It was haphazard and it was, nothing was written down. I think there was a general understanding, but there was not a process, there was not a flowchart, there was not a sequence for people to follow to make sure that we were really attempting to engage across the board in best practice with our [*deleted the group to maintain confidentiality*] --learners

SP 5 noted that she was able to "transfer skills then to this county and within my first year, basically lead and push through the creative of a system or process to make sure that we were really considering the whole child for [deleted] students. Similar to implementing a process at the district level, SP 6 shared utilizing some of her problem solving skills to "facilitate communication" among "team members." SP 6 recalled that "there was some conflict with our team members" and that it could "have been handled" if they were "direct with each other, but things escalated from that just within our team." This resulted in SP 6 collaborating with another peer, and they were "trying to problem solve through it in objective ways" and decided to "meet as a team to talk about

it." However, due to "scheduling conflicts" it would have been "difficult to meet as a team." According to SP 6,

> I decided to create a Google Doc survey to have people respond to that first, and then meet as a team to go over the responses and them problem solve, and defined some things we want to this year, or for next year.

SP 6 was able to identify a problem and then utilize a skill that she had to develop a way for the team to come together. SP 6 noted that as a result, team members were able to have an open "dialogue" and "identify practices or things" that had to be modified, so that they did not impact the "service delivery."

Communication Skills. Another theme that emerged was the practice of utilizing effective communication skills across all the setting that they work in. Participants noted the importance of using communicating skills when working with individuals and groups. SP 1 shared an experience where a "teacher" that she "respects" recently brought a case to a student study meeting that was "not appropriate" as the student was "making progress when looking at all the data…he has all S's [satisfactory] and all DE [Discovery Education] scores were going up." However, SP 1 noted, "I am not going to tell her, What are you talking about?" but SP 1 noted that she was able to share why "it wasn't a good referral" and wanted the teacher to leave with the understanding that "the team listen to me and they gave me ideas of what to do next." SP 1 reflected on this experience that she was able to take on a "leadership role in that aspect." Along with communicating to teachers, participants noted the importance of communicating with parents of students. Participants SP 2, SP 3, SP 4 and SP 5 indicated how to share results in a meaningful way to parents.

First of all, they are walking in a room with about eight people around the table and its intimidating. The second thing is that the reports are often so technical that they don't mean anything to the parents. So, you have to make it meaningful to them and also meaningful to the teacher for that matter…the numbers themselves are meaningless until, you as a school psychologist can breathe some life into them, so when you have a conversation with a parent or with a teacher outside of the assessment, just about what they are concerned or dealing with, then when you get back at the table and you review results, there is familiarity. I think that parents and teachers appreciate people, who listen to them. (SP 2)

I always try to make sure that the families leave having a thorough understanding as to what the child's strengths and weaknesses were, how that's impacting them, and what they can do to try to help them in addition to the teachers. (SP 3)

I do feel I have reasonably good presentation skills, very good writing skills, so I feel like I'm able to utilize those leadership capabilities or qualities to be able to communicate the information effectivity to the various audience that I maybe working with, whereas it's at the consultative level or the direct level with parents. (SP 5)

I think some of the resources that I suggest to parents or how I go over my reports - I talk a lot during meetings, and I probably steal the spotlight from people too much, but I feel like I can clarify things for people… that helps parents understand and feel more at ease after I clarify things and give them resources, so I know they're more comfortable leaving the meeting - understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the student, and what all of this means after that, which affects student performance with the services we deliver and how they help their student at home. (SP 6)

As the above statements illustrates, each of the participants described the importance of using effective communication skills in the various scopes of their practices.

Universal Structures accounting for leadership experiences

Research sub-question 3 asks, "What are the universal structures accounting for leadership experiences of school psychologist?" As reflected in the above quotes from the various participants, each of them indicated the importance of utilizing communication skills in conveying information from the assessments. When looking at the universal structures of how the participants all experienced the phenomenon of leadership the following were themes that

were noted for all: consultation and collaboration, professional expertise, expert problem solver, and communication skills. Participants also described situations and provided examples to illustrate their experience. Although the participants recalled different experiences in exercising leadership through the various way, there was not a universal structure of how each of them experienced this phenomenon. All of the participants illustrated experiences of doing the "what;" however, they differed in "how" they experienced it.

Within the area of consultation and collaboration, participants noted that they exercised leadership in this area. Participants differed in how they collaborated and consulted with others. Some of them did this at their schools (individually with teachers and teams), some did it with their peers (school psychologists), and others also did it at the systems level across the district (collaborating with administrators to impact systems level change). None of the participants utilized these skills in the same manner, although what they did was the same.

In regards to professional expertise, all of the participants had a wide-range of ways in how they exercised leadership. Some noted that they worked with school psychology interns and practicum students (SP 1, SP 4, SP 5, and SP 6), whereas others did not, but rather provided support to others through their individualized skillset attained (SP 2, SP 4). Additionally, two of the participants taught school psychology graduates students at the university, whereas those that were not affiliated with a university did not. Furthermore, some participants shared experiences of attending NASP conferences and communicating information to others, whereas some did not participate in that. For example, SP 2 did not share anything indicating attending the NASP conferences and SP 5 noted how it feels to attend NASP conferences:

I think it's really hard for me to go to state and national conferences, particularly the national conferences, because you are reminded of the ideal level of practice and the broad range of things that we could really be doing to make huge long term impacts on our students, as a whole, not just on an individual student, but at a systems level

Half of the participants noted that a few of their leadership opportunities in providing trainings and additional supports (SP 3, SP 6, SP 2) in their roles occurred at another school district, as they had "more opportunities there."

When looking at leadership experiences of participants utilizing their expert-problem solving skills, there was a wide range of how they experienced it. Some participants noted using it in a situation to impact a whole class (SP 1), whereas some have worked with teachers or others individually (SP 2, SP 3, and SP 6). Conversely, others have had opportunities to utilize those skills to work with a group (SP 3, SP 4, SP 5, and SP 6).

In looking at communication skills, each of the participants also shared a variety of ways in how they utilized it. SP 1 noted using her communication skills to work with teachers, interns, and school based team, whereas SP 2 utilized it in working with school teams and families, not interns. However, SP 3 shared experiences of using it in her school settings and with her peers. SP 4 noted using communication skills with district administrators due to her role as a lead and also uses it with her peers and school teams. SP 5 shared experiences of using communication skills to "push" a "process" at the district level also using it within her schools. SP 6 recalled using it in her own schools and to communicate to her peers.

All of the participants in this study shared scenarios where they were able to utilize leadership skills in different areas. However, there was not a universal or consistent manner in the conditions, situations, or settings in how all the participants described their experiences.

Opportunities for School Psychologists to Exert Leadership

As research sub-question 4 asks, "What are the opportunities for school psychologist to exercise leadership?" each of the participants shared different ways they were able to utilize opportunities of school psychologists to exert leadership. Although the participants may have differed in the settings that they may have utilized this opportunity, each of them noted that they took advantage of opportunities. Participants noted that they have utilized leadership opportunities in their schools, especially when they notice a need for students who will need some additional support. SP 1 noted that she was "really lucky this year, because [her] caseload is so small." Therefore, she was able to provide social skills training with her intern to a group of boys for eight weeks. SP 2 noted that he has taught a course in "Professional Crisis Management" and also "… taught a module that the county is offering on functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans." When inquired as to how he was able to teach the course, he noted that he was asked to due to his "previous experience with behavior." SP 3 noted that she feels, "every day is an opportunity for leadership. It just depends on how you want to go about it." When asked to elaborate, SP 3 noted:

> I think every day, how we interact with teachers, or children, or parents, or colleagues. I think there's an opportunity to utilize those kinds of skills, and you don't make it a positive and productive kind of interaction and experience [chuckles], or it's just an okay experience, or a negative experience. So I would like to think that I go by to make it more a positive experience utilizing the skills that I have built through the years.

SP 4 recalled her experiences of working with interns and being a resource to her peers, whereas SP 5 noted that she felt her skills and expertise was "better tapped here" at a systems level, and

she was able to facilitate change within the assessment practice for a specified group of students.

SP 4 also noted that she believes:

> that consistency in practice where you're not doing a great job one day and a not so great job the next day. I think quality of your work, you know, being known to be someone that produces at a high level, at a level that benefits the student to the maximum extent possible within the limits that we discussed before. So, ethical practice being able to follow through. I think being efficient is critical. I think that organizational skills are critical. I think that having that area of expertise is critical and really owning it and knowing that what your training other in is appropriate and best practice. That goes again to the concept of knowing - from our training - knowing the limits of your professional competence. What are you good at? That's what you lead in. You need to lead in that which you know.

Lastly, SP 6 noted that she "initiated a newsletter among the psychologists." When asked as to what prompted it, she noted "that spotlighting individuals" and "sharing articles" and "even something simple like whose birthday it is would help us to build community" and "get to know each other, which would in turn just build us as a group of professionals in the area."

Although all of the participants conveyed areas where they utilized leadership opportunities, many of them reflected the narrower scope of practice and the lack of time to fully exercise leadership in other areas. Specifically, SP 1 noted "I think the main challenge is the workload. There [are] probably a lot of things that some people want to do and they don't have the opportunity to do it, because they are constantly testing or in meetings." Although, SP 1 has shared her leadership experiences, she also underscores the "challenge." SP 2 further supports this by noting that in his prior experience he used to support more families. SP 2 noted, "Unfortunately, I got the opportunity to support families a whole lot more when I wasn't working in this [district]" and he noted that he doesn't get to exercise a broader role. SP 2 noted,

I don't get the opportunity, I used to do counseling, and unless there's a crisis and there have been where I've been sent out specifically to deal with certain issues with kids, I don't get to do counseling like I have in the past.

SP 3 noted that "more of her leadership roles across the board have occurred in [previous district]. I feel like I am a great tester here. I do a lot of that, but I don't feel highly utilized here," Further, she noted "maybe that's why I haven't been [laughter] able to come up with a lot of fine leadership qualities because I have not used them this year." SP 4 also noted the awareness of this and noted that a recent book study that was facilitated on mental health supports was not received with "positive feedback" from the school psychologists. She noted that it maybe be

> just because of the way that [deleted district] service delivery from psychological services perspective is, there's no time. In a perfect world, we would love to do some, to increase our mental health support, but with the way that our caseloads are, and our evaluations and our expectations to do these evaluations within X amount of days, it doesn't leave a lot of time for mental health type stuff.

Along with SP 4, SP 5 also noted her concerns as she noted her concerns about the expectations of completing so many assessments and indicated concerns as noted below.

> Historically, I think that school psychologists within the public school system have really been held to and have upheld a very high standard of practice doing really truly comprehensive assessments that give us the broad range of skills of a student at a level really sincerely on par with that that can be provided in a private setting through private practice. I think that little by little particularly in the last couple of years, that's being eroded, unfortunately due to volume, due to the added expectations, and due to the sheer number of students that we're expected to evaluate. You cannot produce an A plus assessment in the time that's needed for a C assessment, you know, a mid- level or mid-range assessment.

SP 5 shared that she "wish that [she] had the capacity to be able to utilize it in a more of a direct role with parent," but noted that due to the way "assignments are made, [she] is not able to go to the meeting for the individual students." SP 5 noted that this "information gets disseminated

through the assignment school psychologist." SP 5 also further elaborated the district emphasis on "complying with deadlines."

> I think the prioritization comes down to compliance. There's 60 calendar days, and that becomes the priority, the assessment piece. So unfortunately, I think that our desires or our capacity to do community outreach, to do parent trainings, to be mentors within a community, I think it becomes very limited. I thought about doing work with parents particularly with our [specified] population here at this school and teaming up. But the fact of the matter is that then you're looking at your deadlines and ultimately, the external evaluation of my goodness as a school psychologist comes down to whether I'm complying with deadlines.

Similar to the other participants, SP 6 also noted the priority of assessments in her role.

> I have two kind of intense schools with a very high caseload, so I have a lot of referrals and students to test, and my days are often just very packed with barely getting in my evaluations. So, I don't feel like I'm able to utilize my leadership abilities as much as I would like - or as much as I'm able to - just because the nature of the nature of the job at the moment… It's tough. I have a very busy schedule of testing students, day-in and day-out. I do feel like I have leadership qualities that I could better utilize if I had the time to.

Essence of the Experience

Once the textural-structural descriptions emerged and the various themes emerged, the overall essence of the experience was generated. In this chapter, the lived experiences of school psychologists exercising leadership were described. The participants brought to life the meaning of their experiences by providing detailed description and by describing various events. All of the participants had prior experiences that enabled them to take on additional responsibilities, in conjunction to supporting their assigned schools. The school psychologists were able to utilize different skillsets across various domains of practice in working with teachers, administrators, parents, peers, and others at the district level. However, participants with experiences from working at other school districts, four out of the six, experienced feeling constrained within the

narrow descriptions of their roles and identified the desire to broaden their roles. However, those that had solely worked in the current school district focused their efforts on providing efficient services through the assessment practices and looked for ways to hone in their skills by learning new instruments for assessment and worked with their peers as a resource. Some of the school psychologists provided inclinations concerning their leadership role and did not view their role as a leader in teams, whereas others realized the perceptions that were associated with their role. All of the participants opted to utilize opportunities within their schools by collaborating and working with others to build and support others in order to ensure appropriate supports for students. This group of participants shared their expertise across a broad range of areas.

The essence of their experience is acknowledging that lack of time to broaden or use their broader skills that they've had training and experience in. Participants all acknowledged their desire to broaden their roles in the district and wanted to provide more direct supports of mental health, support with implementation of academic and behavior interventions, and support families by providing trainings and being a resource outside their current role. Despite the lack of more opportunities to exert leadership, each of the participants is still exercising and utilizing leadership in their current roles and is viewed by the district level administrators as a leader.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

The study examined the lived experiences of school psychologists utilizing leadership in their roles. The purpose of this chapter is to convey the results of the overarching research question, "What are the lived experiences of school psychologists exercising leadership in their roles?"

This chapter will include an overview of the research and interpretation of the current literature related to leadership and school psychology. This chapter will also include a brief summary of this study and how findings from this study corroborate and contradict prior research. The chapter will conclude by discussing the impact of information gleaned from this study, limitations, future research opportunities, and overall implications of the current research.

Introduction

The literature is replete with examples of the centrality of leadership in regards to the educational experience of students. Studies delineating leadership models, attributes, and skills, as well as those that describe the impact of leadership on education, abound. Although it is clear from the literature that teacher quality is at the forefront of factors that impact school improvement, school leadership also plays an essential role (Kowalaski, Lasley, & Mahoney, 2008). In an unprecedented era of accountability for educational outcomes, the study of leadership, in all of its forms in a school setting, has never been more important.

School psychologists find themselves charged with addressing a broad range of issues impacting education today. According to the National Association of School Psychologists'

(NASP) Principle and Legislative Language Recommendations for the Reauthorization of Elementary and Secondary Education Act/No Child Left Behind Act (ESEA/NCLB), Gorin (2011) identified school psychologists as a critical stakeholder in being a resource to support the efforts at educational reform. Furthermore, in *School Psychology: A Blueprint for Training and Practice III* (Ysseldyke et al., 2006), leadership is emphasized as an essential component of being an effective school psychologist.

Despite the emphasis on leadership in the effective provision of school psychological services, there have not been sufficient studies conducted regarding the leadership characteristics of school psychologists (Augustyniak, 2014; Shriberg, 2007; & Shriberg et al., 2010). Further, heightened accountability for schools increases the need for school psychologists to utilize effectively their skills and expertise to support the learning of all students.

The importance of leadership to the role of a school psychologist, coupled with the lack of literature exploring the leadership of school psychologists, led this researcher to seek to understand the experience of those school psychologists who are exerting effective leadership within their scope of practice. Although there are national standards for the practice of school psychology, there is not a set of national standards or state standards of leadership that was specific to school psychologists. The Florida Principal Leadership Standards, a robust and established set of standards utilized for administrators, guided the subject selection process. The Florida Principal Leadership Standards are used by the Florida Department of Education as a set of criteria by which leadership capacity can be measured (FLDOE, 2015). While these standards are usually used to determine the effectiveness of a school administrator, several of the standards

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that were germane to the role of a school psychologist was utilized as a basis for nominations.

Nominations from district administrators were deemed to be appropriate as there are five district

administrators that oversee school psychologists in different areas of the school district. There

were six school psychologists who participated in this study that were deemed to be "effective"

and "display leadership".

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to understand, discover, and describe in rich detail the

lived experiences of school psychologists exercising leadership within their role. The research

methodology utilized in this study was transcendental phenomenology. Six participants agreed

to participate in this study. Individual interviews were conducted, and the interview was

transcribed to construct text data from the interviews. Participants were provided the full

transcript of the interviews and given opportunity to modify or elaborate their responses. Data

were analyzed using Moustakas's (1994) transcendental phenomenology. In response to the

main research question, "What is the lived experience of school psychologists exercising

leadership in their roles?" four sub-questions were used to gather supporting data for the main

research question. Different themes emerged for the four research sub-questions.

Sub-question 1 explored the contexts accounting for leadership experiences of school

psychologists. Participants shared their experiences in utilizing leadership at the district level,

and individual school level, facilitating their practices to support their peers, and in working with

teachers and parents. Sub-question 2 explored the domains of practice that account for

leadership experiences of school psychologists. In response, participants shared experiences that

allowed the following themes to emerge: consultation and collaboration, professional expertise, student-focused needs, expert problem solvers, and communication skills. Research sub-question 3 explored the universal structures accounting for leadership experiences of school psychologists; participants provided responses that emphasized the importance of consultation and collaboration, professional expertise, being an expert problem solver, and effective communication. Lastly, as research sub-question 4 asked about the opportunities for school psychologists to exercise leadership, each of the participants shared distinct ways they were able to exert leadership.

Discussion of Findings

The exploratory question that guided this study was, "What is the lived experience of school psychologists exercising leadership in their roles?" Findings from each of the sub-questions help to shed light on this question as specific themes emerged to document their lived experience. Discussion of these themes in the following section will situate the findings of this study in the larger bodies of literature related to school psychology and educational leadership.

Contexts of Leadership. Participants noted opportunities in which they exerted leadership as a part of the traditional role of a school psychologist. Specifically, at the district level, participants provided examples of delivering trainings in behavior strategies, utilizing expertise to modify practices of a specified group of students, and working with district administrators to impact change for a wider group of individuals. Further, participants also shared their experiences of providing support to school psychology interns, practicum students, and to their peers. Examples of volunteering in areas for which they were prepared to be a resource included assisting

with assessments, sharing conversations about specific cases and providing scenarios where best practices exist. Lastly, participants provided scenarios or situations where they exercised leadership within their assigned schools. Participants were able to communicate and collaborate with teachers, parents, and other staff to provide more support or often advocate for the needs of the student.

Most of the examples offered by the participants were closely related to assessment. However, the strong ties to assessment found in these examples underlie an inability of the field to move beyond the "traditional diagnostic/consultative/intervention framework" (Augustyniak, 2014, p. 16) that a wide-scale exertion of leadership would require. Repeatedly, in their examples, this study's participants demonstrated that an unavoidable context of leadership for a school psychologist is that it occurs largely outside the scope of traditional job expectations. This point is well described by SP5 who notes

> for whatever reason, in certain places, I think you become pigeonholed, and then when that becomes the role, it's very difficult to evolve from it, because of the pressures of compliance with dates, so we're limited [in our capacity to display leadership]. I think it's really hard for me to go to…national conferences, because you are reminded of the ideal level of practice and the broad range of things that we could really be doing to make huge long-term impacts on our students….Then you come back and you have a list of a hundred kids that are due yesterday, so that's what you do….if we had a broader role, I think you would see more leaders…

SP3 notes it more succinctly: "I feel like I'm a great tester. I do a lot of that." The essence of leadership for school psychologists is that it is an ancillary component of their job rather than a primary function. In this age of high-stakes accountability, this finding devalues the professionalism and expertise which school psychologists could bring to school improvement efforts.

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School psychologists in this study attempted to redefine their roles by building on their personal strengths and utilizing their professional expertise. Even though the participants had an understanding of others' perceptions and expectations of the role of a school psychologist, all of them utilized circumstances they encountered to impact positive outcomes for students. Shriberg et al. (2010) underscores that leadership within the field of school psychology as the ability to attain positive outcomes for students in schools and systems. Leadership was indicated as an integral skill for school psychologists (Ysseldyke et. al, 2006) and one that can be exercised through multiple domains. Harvey and Struzziero (2008) also noted that the level where practitioners function is "context dependent."

A strong sense of self-efficacy appears to be a consequence of school psychologists' leadership occurring as an ancillary component of the job. Because the participants did not consider their examples of leadership as a primary function of their job, the examples were conveyed as something done in addition to job expectations. As such, participants noted that their leadership experiences were strongly related to areas of professional strengths, almost as if their strong belief in their abilities gave them the confidence to step outside the traditional role to a more challenging place of leadership. SP3, for instance, felt that she could do the traditional components of her "job in her sleep" and, therefore, has sought other opportunities for leadership, through things like mentoring, development of MTSS models, Professional Learning Communities, and advocacy for students.

The contexts that account for leadership among the participants varied according to their distinct roles each were fulfilling for the particular time, settings and conditions for which their

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leadership experiences were reported. As all of the participants reported undertaking additional roles and responsibilities beyond their "traditional" role, it is unsurprising that the settings varied. The school psychology literature clearly indicates the importance of school psychologists being able to utilize their skill set across settings due to their working in different areas (Burns, 2011; NASP, 2010a; & Ysseldyke et al., 2006).   Additionally, the role of school psychologists has evolved to extend beyond that of the test administrator, particularly due to changes in the eligibility guidelines for students with Specific Learning Disabilities.

Domains of Practice. The domains of practice that account for leadership were shared and allowed the following themes to emerge: consultation and collaboration, professional expertise, student-focused needs, expert problem solvers, and communication skills.

Consultation and Collaboration. Participants provided narratives of collaborating and working with individuals or with group members, as well as working with district administrators. Likewise, participants indicated the importance of working together to solve problems that impacted a student, a teacher, school psychologist, groups of students, or a particular population of students across the district. Similarly, Harris et al. (2013) found that effective leaders in schools are those that have the capacity to form collaborative cultures by creating relationships. This was illustrated by SP 1 where she noted:

> I will try to collaborate working on a plan with that private person get their input, also show them what we have in mind and kind of work together. I know some schools would rather say this is our thing, that's your thing - but to me, it makes more sense for us all to be on the same page, work together. And I think that helps with the families as well, so they know, "Okay, it's not them against us. You guys want to incorporate us into what you're doing.

Fullan (2011) describes five elements of a collaborative culture: focus on a few goals, forming a strong central team to guide work, collective and individual capacity building, and collaborative competition. In like manner, participants exemplified several of these elements as they worked with others to facilitate appropriate services for students and also utilized opportunities to develop and increase their knowledge and skills. SP 4 underscored the importance of collaboration and highlighted the importance of being aware of having the "expert knowledge on certain topics, but not always" and where at "many times [she] looks to [the] social workers…they can have a lot of valuable input." The significance of working together to accomplish a goal was noted:

> You know you're part of a team. You have to work together. You're trying to achieve one goal, and it's not for you or me to be right. It's what does the student need? What supports do we need to put in place? What do we need to do to get from point A to point B? And being a member of that team and being flexible and not being [rigid], a lot of people are very rigid in their practice.

The NASP *Model for Comprehensive and Integrated School Psychological Services* (NASP, 2010a) delineates consultation and collaboration with educators and others as an important role and function of school psychologists in Domain 2 and Domain 7. The ability of school psychologists to consult, collaborate, and communicate with a broad range of individuals, groups, and a system is explicitly designated as professional practice that permeates into all aspects of service delivery (Domain 2). Furthermore, family-school collaboration is also articulated under school-wide practices where school psychologists can facilitate school and family partnerships and interactions with community agencies for the enhancement of "academic and social-behavioral" outcomes for children (Domain, 7). Findings from this study indicated

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that participants applied their skills in collaboration by bringing in multiple stakeholders into

relevant discussions (Goleman, Boyatzis, & Mckee, 2002; Gruenert, 2005; & Ho, 2002).

Professional Expertise. In demonstrating their professional expertise, participants

recalled numerous experiences indicating their confidence in their practice and demonstrated it

by their behaviors to support students and their schools. Also, participants conveyed different

ways of acquiring new knowledge to their practice, shared their expertise with others, and

utilized it to make an impact to facilitate change in their environments. Most of the participants

noted attending the NASP national conferences and staying up to date on practices and

information impacting their role as a school psychologist. Whereas, others developed their

expertise in understanding with a sub-population of students with specific disabilities or utilized

their previous experiences in other school districts to enhance the process within their current

school district. Regardless of how and what settings they utilized their professional skills and

expertise, participants exercised leadership by placing the needs of students first. Each of the

participants displayed confidence in their capability and communicated their level of confidence

within the various roles they employed.

The confidence of their work was illustrated by statement from SP 4 where she conveyed

the importance of doing one's best—even with the time constrictions:

> There hasn't been one evaluation this year that I have completed that I haven't been proud
> of. It's just hard to accomplish that. So yeah, but I feel like completing an evaluation that
> I would want done on my kids to answer the questions that they come seeking. And if I
> can't help to try to answer those questions with the test kits that I have that I can obtain,
> then I'm not doing my jobs, so try your best.

Along with having the confidence in one's skillset, the importance of demonstrating it

consistently was noted by SP 5:

> I think a very high level of ethical practice is critical. I think that consistency in practice
> where you're not doing a great job one day and a not so great job the next day. I think
> quality of your work, you know, being known to be someone that produces at a high
> level, at a level that benefits the student to the maximum extent possible within the
> limits…

Furthermore, participants utilized their confidence in themselves and in their levels of knowledge

in various areas of expertise to construct their professional role and utilized it to make an impact

in their settings. SP 2 highlighted the importance of self-efficacy by noting, "You have to learn

to be comfortable with what you do and feel confident that you know what you're doing and

you're doing the right thing."   All the participants noted the importance of doing their best for

students. SP 2 most exemplified the importance by noting:

> …that's what makes a strong leader, somebody who will go above and beyond but doesn't
> believe they're going above and beyond... I had a friend who once said, "When you're
> doing your least, it's somebody else doing their most." So, at your worst, it has to be
> someone else's best…

Ysseldyke et al. (2006) highlighted the importance of school psychologists demonstrating

competencies to improve the academic and cognitive skills of students, data-based decision

making, providing mental health services and in issues related to diversity. Clayton's (2014)

findings indicated that those leadership had to have the knowledge and skills and aptitudes to

support schools. SP 5 conveyed how she felt when she was able to the importance of having that

"professional voice" and how that is observed by others:

> its interesting because somebody commented to me one time that when I'm talking about
> the things that I'm professionally competent in, that I have a very different voice and a
> very different demeanor. It becomes to me when I'm really engrossed in those things,

kind of that concept of flow where you are connected, you are present, you are feeling your audience, you're feeling the material that you're presenting, and you're knowing that what you are saying is coming from an area of informed background.

Also, individuals that move into the field of school psychology aspire to help and support others as acknowledged within the school psychology literature (Fagan & Wise, 2007). Findings from this study indicated the desire of participants who wanted to be utilized a support in their roles. SP 4 exemplified providing professional development to her peers and school psychologist on new assessment batteries that are not as familiar to others. SP 4 stated she supported others by taking time to helping school psychology interns to share information and how she perceives her peers can also support others.

> [I] teach the interns at the beginning of the year the KABC-II. That's not something that all the psychologists utilize, and unfortunately many of the psychologists don't, because it's something that's new and different for them, so that's a reason why they don't use it. Becoming an expert and very well versed in certain instruments, you can share that out with others.

Whereas SP 2 notes providing professional development with behavior strategies for others. He noted "I am a PCM instructor…that's professional crisis management, and that's …a technique for restraint, to prevent injury, so for very aggressive children [within] regular education [classrooms], EBD…I've taught hundreds at this point." Similar to SP 2, SP 3 noted where she was able to "develop a professional community" and "led that up and "facilitated" to "build a stronger MTSS model in our community based on things that we were seeing in our schools…" SP 6 also illustrated providing support to others by recalling on her experiences of "providing trainings for private school teachers."

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Student-Outcomes. Participants communicated their feelings and beliefs about placing the

needs of the students, which was indicated by SP 3 by noting "each child is not the same" and not

letting "pressure from administration" impact their decisions in order to "advocate for what [they]

think is best for kids." SP 5 noted "being passionate" about being able to provide "equitable

services" to a population of students that has "lower levels of income" and utilized that as her basis

for behaviors to facilitate change. SP 5 explicitly noted:

> I'm very passionate about being able to provide equitable services to our ---population.
> Unfortunately, I think that ---population is also a very noble population. It's also often a
> population that has lower levels of income. And so I think it's a population that for the
> most part doesn't have the access to private practice levels of service and assessment.
> And so I feel like it just become kind of an advocacy and a passion type scenario to be
> able to really truly service and meet the needs and advocate for our [deleted] learners.
> Obviously, we advocate for every student, but that happens to just be the population that I
> am most drawn to in terms of advocacy.

Similarly, a few of the participants recalled ways they attempted to communicate on how to

refine better "services" of school psychologists to district administrators. SP 4 conveyed that

"I'm advocating for them [special education administrators] to allow us to be more efficient in

our jobs." Further, she noted

> I try to utilize my position to definitely keep the school psychologist in [deleted district
> name] as much as possible on the fore front of any new service delivery plan, I shouldn't
> say technology because that's really such a small piece, but with new research and new
> policies or procedures, anything that's coming up. So, I try to keep the group up to date
> with new instruments, new theories, evaluation, and things like that, so I try to share that
> with the group. I try to coordinate any vendors that are coming out that can do in-
> services, so getting other professionals to come out and share their experiences and their
> expertise with the group. I tried to do that whenever possible, not that it's possible too
> often, but I do try to do that.

Others utilized their skills and knowledge to be a resource to their peers so that they utilize better

strategies and practices to impact their services to their schools and students. In conjunction to

utilizing their professional expertise, participants shared their experiences of being expert problem solvers.

Findings from this study indicating that the participants' leadership behaviors were exercised to ensure student outcomes is aligned to the framework in the NASP Comprehensive and Integrated School Psychological Services by providing direct and indirect services to enhance the results of students (NASP, 2010a). Although, school psychologists in this study focused their efforts on student outcomes, they were spending most all of their time in various activities that supported student with disabilities or those presumed to have a disability, as opposed to being involved in practices that impacted a broader range of students. School psychologists are situated in systems where there are they have various responsibilities and expectations and in this school district and they have a primary responsibility to conduct comprehensive assessments that yield results to support student study teams to support students who may need services through special education. Findings from this study are consistent with previous findings where school psychologists were spending at least half of their times towards eligibility (Hosp and Reschly, 2002).

In looking at the leadership in schools overall, leaders of successful schools always, focus on the individual development and achievement of their students (Harris et al., 2013). Findings in the study are consistent where participants utilized their professional expertise to build the capacity of others to support students, and this is consistent with findings from (Harris & Lambert, 2003).

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Problem-Solving Skills. All of the participants shared circumstances when they were used, as a resource to solve a problem facing an individual student, classroom, or utilized effective problems solving skills to remove barriers to school team norms. Participants were able to offer solutions to their peers in regards to assessment practices, challenging situations, and facilitate communication with each other. These findings are consistent with the NASP's (2010a) Model for Comprehensive and Integrated School Psychological Services. Domain one specifies and emphasizes that school psychologists will utilize problem-solving as a framework across *all* professional activities. Further, the specialized training in comprehensive assessments of students provides school psychologists an opportunity to be an instrumental role as a resource for effective problem solving (Clayton, 2014). Findings from others calls for school psychologists to take on broader roles in areas like school safety initiatives (Borum, Cornell, Modzeleski, & Jimerson, 2010; Furlong, Morris, & Pavelski, 2000; Reddy et al., 2001), improving school climate (Ross et al., 2002), and leading with systems level of support in regards to accountability (Batshe et al., 2008; Elliott, 2007), conversely findings from this study did not support it.

Participants were able to offer solutions across a broad range of areas and it required a level of confidence in their skills, knowledge, and abilities. SP 1 an instance where she observed a classroom for students with autism that was lacking basic structure and it impacted the service delivery for students. She noted;

> there were students in the classroom with high needs, it was a self-contained classroom and the behaviors were out of control. When I would go [to her school], I would get constantly called when I was here. The teacher would call for me, I would go in and it was just chaos…I think the environment itself wasn't appropriate…I really had to push it

with getting the behavior team to help, we did her whole classroom. I asked the principal if we could get a substitute and the kids were moved to the cafeteria and we had two full days to work on her room. We restructured the furniture, printed and laminated, and did the whole classroom.

Also, they were able to identify barriers to learning and utilize resources to support the goals of the schools, which is to enhance the learning of students. These findings are consistent with standard 1 of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standard, which indicates an educational leader promotes the success of all students. Standard 1 delineates that leaders use data to identify goals for learning, creating and implementing plans to achieve goals, promoting continuous improvement, and evaluating the progress and revising plans (ISLLC, 2008). Leaders need the ability to facilitate, develop, articulate and implement the stewardship of a vision for learning that can be supported by the school community. Similarly, participants in the study, within the context of problem-solving, as they were able to generate solutions to problems, take action and provided directions to others.

Communication Skills. Lastly, the group of participants noted the importance of utilizing effective communication skills across that permeated across all the settings in which they worked. Participants illustrated examples of communicating with parents, teachers, and administrators in a manner allowed them to demonstrate leadership in various situations. They were able to provide usefully and relevant information to a broad range of audiences, coordinate services for students by partnering with individuals from outside agencies, and building supports for students. Participants utilized effective communications across all settings and they acknowledge the importance of using it when working with people and groups. The importance

of effective ways to convey information was exercised through how they interacted with others, as well as how they utilize it to synthesize information gleaned from the assessments.

The importance of communicating about needs of the group of school psychologists was conveyed by SP 3, SP 4, SP 5, and SP 6. For instance SP 4 noted, "…I try to also communicate with our administrators, who are really the powers that be, the decision makers…[by] letting them know what we need and trying to work with them in getting to that, and a lot of time, it's baby steps. SP 5 shared that she was able to communicate with district administrators to revise the process for assessing a sub-group of students. She noted that there was a "dialogue of ideas on what was reasonable, what was not reasonable, what had been done, what should be done, and what could be done…" was the foundation to creating a process. SP 4 noted:

> Sometimes… administration gets up into their little box, and even if they were once in a school, sometimes you forget what it is like and that they need to be brought back to reality. And I am happy to do that on occasion when its needed.

SP 6 also shared how she communicated recently regarding some upcoming changes that will impact the roles of school psychologists for the upcoming school year:

> …with changes on the horizon with our own department, I always just have ideas and I've taken the initiative to email the ideas to my current supervisor to just have food for thought. Because I'm not a decision-maker, but I feel that we should still have our voices heard with people in the trenches, so I feel that we need to at least pose ideas that are relevant. So, I have taken the liberty of emailing her my thoughts - whether she uses them or not is a different story - but at least I've given her some different ideas of systematic changes within our current practice that could help us be more efficient with our positions so that we are able to utilize our skills and talents in other areas, if there were more time. We have so many evaluations, what do we absolutely have to do, what can we refine to make it a more efficient process, and what is there still to be done.

The centrality of communication to the overall job of a school psychologist is clear when considering the amount of time spent communicating with students, teachers, parents, administrators, and other professionals. Specifically, the NASP Model for Comprehensive and Integrated School Psychological Services reflect it under Domain 2, which identifies communication as a practice that permeates all aspects of the service. The ability to communicate appropriately is noted to be an essential component of leadership can be found in a plethora of leadership literature. Leaders often exert their influence by how they present information or their message to others and therefore leadership can be also described as a communication-based activity (Hackman and Johnson, 2013). Additionally, effective leaders employ language as their most tangible tool for achieving outcomes (Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996). An individual who leads a group of individuals to a common goal is exhibiting leadership (Northouse, 2015).

SP 2 noted that when communicating results from assessment, it was important to "listen to what the teachers are saying, what the parents are saying" "breathe some life into them" and make it meaningful to parents and teachers. SP 4 also relayed the importance of communicating effectively in her role:

> I always try to make sure that the families leave having a thorough understanding as to what the child's strengths and weaknesses were, how that's impacting them, and what they can do to try to help them in addition to the teachers.

This was noted by SP 6 as she indicated that she shares "resources" and "suggest to parents" to support the student. She noted her ability to clarify information discussed at various meetings;

> …helps parents understand and feel more at ease after I clarify things and give them resources, so I know they're more comfortable leaving the meeting - understanding the

strengths and weaknesses of the student, and what all of this means after that, which affects student performance with the services we deliver and how they help their student at home.

SP 5 illustrated her confidence in her communication skills and uses them across various

settings:

I do feel I have reasonably good presentation skills, very good writing skills, so I feel like I'm able to utilize those leadership capabilities or qualities to be able to communicate the information effectivity to the various audience that I maybe working with, whereas it's at the consultative level or the direct level with parents.

Findings from this study indicate all the participants utilized their communication skills and

abilities to lead change across settings.

Universal Structures of Leadership. Participants provided responses that emphasized

the importance of consultation and collaboration, professional expertise, being an expert problem

solver, and effective communication. Although the participants recalled different experiences in

exercising leadership through the various way, there was not a universal structure of how each of

them experienced this phenomenon. Although all of the participants illustrated experiences of

doing the "what", they differed in "how" they experienced it.

Further, themes that described leadership were noted as having knowledge, being

competent, strong interpersonal skills and character, have a vision, collaboration, and influence

others (Shriberg et al., 2010). Findings from this study indicated similar themes from the

participants lived experience. In looking at *how* participants experienced leadership, the essence

of their experience reflected they utilized their strengths to support their schools or systems to

achieve the goal, which improve outcomes for students. In essence, that was their goal. Findings

from this study are consistent with the theory of transformational leadership, which emphases on

the relationships and networks formed between leaders and followers (Bass, 1985; Leithwood et al., 1999).

Transformation leadership model can foster the collective commitments and ambitions of others to the organizations to the goals (Avolio & Bass, 2004; Bass & Riggio, 2006), as it was demonstrated by the participants by their commitment to the outcomes for students. Each of the participants strove to model high ethical behavior, and their interactions were goal-oriented. Similarly, findings from this research also corroborated to findings by Lim & Ployhart (2004) where findings indicated that transformational leaders focused on the accomplishment of a goal and encouraged others to fulfill their potential and professional goals. Along with the use of the transformative model of leadership, some of the participants in this study also exercised some of the components of the transactional leadership model. This was demonstrated by their focus on increasing the efficiency of routines and procedures and worked within the organizational culture—facilitating practices to support the needs of the school psychologists, so that they can be more efficient in their roles. Despite the various roles that the participants undertook in their various leadership experiences, they all had to ensure that the things were done on time (i.e., meetings with teachers and families, assessments of students, meet various timelines set forth by the district). Although the participants shared scenarios in how they were able to utilize leadership skills, there was not a universal or consistent manner in the conditions or settings that led to their overall experience.

Opportunities of Leadership. Participants brought to life meanings from their individual experiences and shared ways they demonstrated leadership across the various domains of practice. The group for school psychologists utilized their different skill sets to support students, schools, and the district in each of their capacity. Participants noted exercising it in their schools in situations where they noticed a need some additional support for a student or a group of students. Others were able to seize an opportunity as various situations unfolded. Some of the participants noted that they did view their role as a leader, whereas others were aware of the perceptions of the role and rose to meet that expectation. SP 2 noted that when dialoging about the needs of as student, especially in a situation where teams often looked to as the leader. He noted:

> When we go, when we are sitting at student study, we have a difficult case, you question, because this is a child's educational career. Even though it's a team decision, and I really feel like it's a team decision, but everybody is always looks at us as the school psychs, so what do we do? And in that sense, we're a leader of the student study team.

SP 5 noted a systemic issue and felt their leadership skills was "better tapped" due to the need that was noticed for a particular process and noted the importance of "being known to be someone that produces at a high level." Specifically, SP 5 noted that she was able to:

> …transfer [her skills and knowledge] to this county and within [her] first year, basically lead and push through a creation of system or a series of steps or a process to make sure we were really considering the whole child of our [deleted] students… All of the things that our best practice guidelines indicate, I've tried to incorporate into the process that's used now.

SP 2 noted the importance of "not to go with what everyone else says, but to be able to think for yourself, in addition to respecting the opinions of others is important…takes [opinions] into consideration…does what is in the best for the child. Whatever it is." All of the participants

utilized opportunities within their schools by collaborating and working with other personnel to ensure appropriate support for students.

Fullan (2011) indicates leaders as those that that work with others in mutual learning. Some of the characteristics of leaders described are: (a) refuse to give up, (b) ability to understand when others disagree with them, (c) explicitly clear about where they stand, (d) work to build relationship with those that may not agree with them initially, and (e) have a respectful approach. Collaboration is essential and displaying confidence when faced with overwhelming challenges (Fullan, 2011). When utilizing the above mentioned descriptions, participants in this study shared experiences of working with others that disagreed with them and having a collaborative relationships in their practice. They also noted to be someone who facilitated relationships in their practice between parents and teachers or in team situations. Participants also underscored the importance of having positive relationships with others in their schools. Essentially, as a result of having the relationships established at their schools, they were able to have meaningful and open dialogues and have open discussions as a result of having a prior working relationship with others.

Although all of the participants conveyed where they seized leadership opportunities, many of them expressed concerns with the narrower scope of practice and the lack of time to fully exercise and utilize all of their leadership skills. All of the participants emphasized the awareness of "compliance" to meet timelines for completing assessments as an inhibiting factor in their ability to exert leadership. However, those individuals with experiences from working at other school districts, four out of the six, experienced feeling constrained within the narrow

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descriptions of their roles and identified to broaden their roles. Many of the participants who had

previous experience working in other school district compared their roles and indicated huge

discrepancy in the number of students that they have conducted assessments for consideration for

special education. Participants exercised leadership in different ways in various settings. SP 1

noted that she "think the main challenge is the workload. There is probably a lot that some

people want to do and they don't have the opportunity to do it, because they are constantly

testing or in meetings." Similar, SP 2 also indicated the same point as he noted, "unfortunately, I

got the opportunity to support families when I was working [deleted]…our time is limited…so, I

don't have as much of an opportunity as I would like." SP 3 noted that her "leadership roles

across the board have occurred in [deleted district]…I don't feel I'm highly utilized here."

Further, SP 4 also relayed the similar theme, as she noted there is "…no time…in a perfect

world, we would love…to increase our mental health support… but the way our caseloads are

and our expectations to do these evaluations within X amount of days, it doesn't leave a lot of

time…" SP 5 noted;

> I think we go again to the limits of the jobs. The reality of it is I think the system forces a
> prioritization and ultimately…comes down to compliance…I think our desires or our
> capacity to do community outreach, parent trainings, to be mentors within a community, I
> think becomes very limited…I wish I had more capacity to be able to utilize more of a
> directive service role with parents but the fact of the matter comes in that if my workload
> includes five hours a night of working from home, then the quality of work is going to
> suffer because I have a family, I have two young children and you have to balance your
> life…

Lastly, SP 6 also noted that that due to the "high caseload" in her schools that her;

> "days are often just very packed with barely getting in my evaluations, so I don't feel
> like I'm able to use by leadership abilities as much as I would like, or as much as I 'm
> able to just because of the nature of the job…my emails are sent at 10:00 at night, so a lot

of my report writing is done at home…I always get to school early by 30 minutes and I often stay at least 30 minutes, so I have an extra hours of my day at school because I have files at school that I have to review and I can't take it home…so that all I have to do is write and other stuff at home, because there is no time.

While participants may have varied in how they took advantage of the different opportunities, it should be celebrated that each of them seized it to impact positive outcomes for students (Donaldson, 2007; Kouzes & Posner, 2006).

According to Fagan and Wise (2007) now is the only time in the history of school profession where there is a wide range of roles and functions within the field, yet there is so much inconstancy. On one hand there are states that have adopted practices otherwise knows and "flexible service delivery," that are based on problem-solving model and involves very little traditional assessment and then there are places where school psychologists are still functioning in roles that have worked for decades (Fagan & Wise, 2007 p. 105). The roles and functions of school psychologists have been something that has been discussed since 1954 at the Thayer Conference and literature indicate the research that have examined this topic for decades. Merrell, Ervin, and Gimpel (2006) note this struggle persists within the profession of what the professionals are able to do and what few things they are expected to do. Each of the participants in this study conveyed their desire to provide comprehensive services, but also worked efficiently and collaboratively with others in their various contexts to use their skills and abilities to their potential.

Implications of Findings

The critical need for leadership among school psychologists is acknowledged by the National Association of School Psychologist standards, however how to demonstrate this skill

has not been clarified. In looking at relevant literature to understand leadership, there are about two to three studies that have looked at leadership among school psychologists which underscores the importance of future research. This study contributes the experience of school psychologists in the field who are exercising leadership. First, this study is the first of its kind in the field of school psychology. Second, this study sought out participants that were viewed to demonstrate it by their administrators, who've had opportunities to supervise and observe them in their schools and within the district. Participants in this study exercised leadership in various context according to the individual roles taken on, aside from the "traditional role" and displayed it using many of the domains of practice. Further, they also seized various opportunities that arose from their settings to improve the outcome for students. Although, participants conveyed the various ways they were able to employ it, it also was apparent that leadership by school psychologists is under-utilized due to contextual constraints. School psychologists also need to view themselves as leaders in their roles and break down the itinerant (school visitor) stigma that many schools have. Often times, school psychologists are perceived as the special education "gatekeepers" and are not essential members of the leadership team.

Limitations

The limitations of the results are based in the methodology utilized for this study and on the criterion sample. Phenomenological methods use small sample sizes to focus on the descriptions of the lived experience of participants. Participants identified as leaders were from one school district were utilized for this study. The participants were from a sample of those perceived to display leadership by their supervisors. Additionally, this researcher's limited

experience in the use of the phenomenological method is noted. Furthermore, researcher biases

and assumptions may have influenced the data, however, bracketing, member checking, and

discussions with external member were employed to minimize researcher's biases and influences

(Creswell, 2005; Moustakas, 1994).

Recommendations

Cultivate Leadership Skills. School psychologists should therefore bear the responsibility

of cultivating their leadership skills to meet that required competency. They can do this by

expanding their skill sets and knowledge, and identify the opportunities that they come across to

exercise leadership in their roles. School psychologists should take advantage of professional

developments provided by school districts, FASP, and NASP to be current with the trends and

needs of schools. They should utilize opportunities to collaborate and work with other

professional's in their schools or within their districts. The demands facing schools today calls

for working to improve the academic and behavioral needs of students and requires school

psychologists to build partnerships to foster success for all students. Furthermore, school

districts should reexamine how they can better align the needs of the students in their schools

with the services that can be provided by the school psychologists. As the behavioral needs and

academic needs of students increase, those at the district level organizations should provide

opportunities for school psychologists to be members of district leadership in various areas.

Identify common goals with school-based leadership. School psychologists ought to have

candid conversations with school leaders to determine the needs of the school. Once common

goals are established, school psychologists can move towards creating platforms for meeting the

needs of the students and families. The following ideas may be beneficial: (a) presentations

during pre-planning week on a school-generated topic to support teachers, (b) psych-corner

parenting workshops based on surveys provided to parents at schools to identify needs, (c)

monthly newsletter that can be provided to parents on topics ranging from progress monitoring to

executive functioning strategies.

   Solicit Guidance and Direction from FASP. Findings from this study indicate that

participants would also benefit from further guidance from the state organization. As a state-

level subsidiary of NASP focused explicitly on the contexts and constraints relative to the

practice of school psychology specific to the state of Florida, FASP occupies a unique position.

Being aware of statutes and policies specific to Florida that play a role in the ability of school

psychologists to exert leadership in their daily practice, FASP must also play a role in

determining the conditions that allow them to do so. FASP should be school psychologists'

state-level advocates for policies that mitigate the barriers faced by those professionals who

desire to exert leadership in their settings. That advocacy should include the promotion of

leadership as a recognized and required competency for school psychologists.

   Solicit Guidance and Direction from NASP. Findings from this study indicated that

participants would benefit from further guidance and direction from NASP. Although NASP

(2010a) implies the importance of leadership in providing comprehensive services, the field

would benefit from their explicit inclusion of leadership as a practice. A paradigm shift is

needed: school psychologists need to view themselves as leaders. As the national organization

governing professional standards for school psychologists, NASP needs to be at the forefront of

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pushing for this change. Emphasizing the importance of leadership needs to begin with pre-service school psychologists and be carried into the daily practice of school psychologists on behalf of all students. NASP has the ability to help bring about that change. The field needs more from them.

Suggestions for Future Research

The review of the literature indicated that there is minimal quantity of studies of leadership within the field of school psychology. The scarcity of research in this area warrants future research that should be conducted on this topic. It is important to understand experiences of school psychologists within the context of educational reform and how the group counties to advocate for the needs of students.

Future research might explore and identify the experiences of school psychologist across districts in a state or also look at it at the national level. They could also examine it from the perspective of school psychologists on what they perceive is leadership in school psychology, as this study did not have them define leadership. Also, researchers might want to explore leadership behaviors and its perceived impact by obtaining input from school personnel that work closely with the school psychologist or obtain input from parents. These directions could help to build literature on identifying specific variables and how leadership by school psychologists' leaders to effective school psychology and inform the practice. Moreover, while exploring the impact of leadership or the impact of their training was not the goal of this study, it is noteworthy of further investigation. Although, NASP (2010a) suggests that school psychologists take on broader roles to support students and schools, little is known on how to

navigate systems in various roles. This need underscores the importance for upcoming research

to inform school psychologists who would like to be an active participant in school improvement

and be a change agent in their school district. Finally, future research could replicate this study

with school psychologists in other school districts across Florida or the nation.

APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1**
        FWA00000351, IRB00001138

To: **Julie Joseph**

Date: **January 27, 2015**

Dear Researcher:

On 01/27/2015, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review:	Exempt Determination
Project Title:	Exploring Leadership Experiences of School Psychologists in Supporting Schools: A Phenomenological Study
Investigator:	Julie Joseph
IRB Number:	SBE-15-10934
Funding Agency:	
Grant Title:	
Research ID:	N/A

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the Investigator Manual.

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 01/27/2015 08:08:54 AM EST

IRB Coordinator

APPENDIX B: LETTER TO ESE ADMINISTRATOR

Date:

Dear ESE Administrator,

My name is Julie Joseph and I am a school psychologist supporting two schools in cluster 1. I am currently working on my doctoral dissertation through the National Urban Special Education Leadership Initiative at the University of Central Florida. I have been granted permission by the office of Accountability, Research, and Assessment to conduct my research study within [deleted district name] County Public Schools. The title of my research study is *Exploring Leadership Experiences of School Psychologists in Supporting Schools: A Phenomenological Study.* This study is designed to discover, understand, and describe in rich detail the lived experience of school psychologists exercising leadership. For this study, leadership will be defined as a process by which an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.

For this study, I am looking at the lived experiences of school psychologists who are utilizing leadership skills in their roles to support students, families, teachers, and schools. With the increased demands and educational accountability and the ever changing needs in our schools, this study is looking to identify the practices of individuals who are effective and displays leadership skills in their roles of supporting schools. The Florida Principal Leadership Standards are used by the Florida Department of Education as a set of criteria by which leadership capacity can be measured. While these standards are typically used to determine the effectiveness of a school administrator, the following also seem particularly germane to the role of a school psychologist:

- Student Learning as a Priority: Effective school leaders demonstrate that student learning is their top priority through leadership actions that build and support a learning organization focused on student success.
- Instructional Plan Implementation: Effective school leaders work collaboratively to develop and implement an instructional framework that aligns curriculum with state standards, effective instructional practices, student learning needs and assessments.
- Decision Making: Effective school leaders employ and monitor a decision-making process that is based on vision, mission and improvement priorities using facts and data.
- Communication: Effective school leaders practice two-way communications and use appropriate oral, written, and electronic communication and collaboration skills to accomplish school and system goals by building and maintaining relationships with students, faculty, parents, and community.
- Professional and Ethical Behaviors: Effective school leaders demonstrate personal and professional behaviors consistent with quality practices in education and as a community leader.

As such, when you are identifying people to nominate for participation in this study, please select those 2-3 school psychologists with whom you work who most exemplify the above standards.
Please note that the information that you provide will allow me to select and identify school psychologists who may potentially be invited to be part of this study. From your selection, I will identify at least 5-8 school psychologists whom I will ask to be voluntarily part of this study. Please note that the study will be conducted outside official work hours and information provided will be kept confidential. Names of each of the participants selected for the study will be kept confidential and information will not be conveyed to each other about the identity of selected participants.

The results of this study will provide valuable information to school psychologists, especially for those that aspire to utilize their leadership skills to further support schools. Additionally, information obtained from this study may help to develop practices that might improve the current ways school psychologists can foster the needs of students, teachers, families, and schools.
Thank you for your willingness and support in my doctoral dissertation work.
Sincerely,

Julie Joseph
School Psychologist/Cluster 1
Doctoral Candidate
National Urban Special Education Leadership Initiative
University of Central Florida

APPENDIX C: EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH

Title of Project: EXPLORING LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS IN SUPPORTING SCHOOLS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY.

Principal Investigator: Julie Joseph

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Suzanne M. Martin, Faculty Supervisor, Department of Child, Family, and Community Sciences, University of Central Florida College of Education and Human Performance

Purpose of Research: The purpose of the research is to discover and understand in rich detail the lived experiences of school psychologists exercising leadership. You were nominated by an ESE Administrator as someone who is "effective and displays leadership" in your current role as a school psychologist. Those school psychologists that were deemed to be effective and displaying leadership will be interviewed to understand in rich detail about their experiences in their current roles.

Study Procedures: You are invited to an in-depth interview as part of a research study regarding your experience with this phenomenon and to understand your involvement in supporting students, teachers, families, and schools. Whether you take part is up to you. Interviews are expected to last less than one hour and will take place in a quiet room at your school or a place that will be preferable for you. In order to participate in this research, you must be willing to be audio recorded, so that the researcher can transcribe the interview for analysis of data. Interview questions will focus on your experiences as a school psychologist and the practices that you utilize in your current role. *At any time, you are able to discontinue participation in this study.*

Confidentiality: Every effort will be utilized to ensure confidentiality of your participation in this study. Each of the participants will be given a code that is developed by the principal investigator. The names and the codes will be kept in a server that is password protected by the principal investigator and separated from all study materials. Each of the documents that the researcher will utilize henceforth will only utilize codes to identify each of the materials belonging to each of the participants henceforth. Once the study is completed and data is analyzed, the list with the subject's name and code will be destroyed. The notes from the researcher and the audio files will be kept under a lock in the principal investigator's home and will only be destroyed once the dissertation has been completed. When discussing the results of the study, the researcher will not utilize the name or any other information that will enable anyone to identify the subject. It is possible that the researcher may need to share information with personnel from University of Central Florida, who may need to verify that the research was conducted correctly. In the case that this may occur, then those individuals are bound to the same confidentiality requirements bound to the principal investigator of this study. When

the researcher reports on this study results, she will not use names or any other information that may enable readers to identify the participants.

Study contact for questions about the study or to report a problem: If you have any general questions or concerns, please contact: Julie Joseph, *Graduate Student, National Urban Special Education Leadership Initiative* at (954) 682-8620 or by email at JulieJ@knights.ucf.edu. Please also feel free to contact this study's major professor, Dr. Suzanne M. Martin of the Department of Child, Family and Community Sciences, College of Education and Human Sciences, University of Central Florida, (407) 823-4260 or by email at Suzanne.Martin@ucf.edu.

IRB contact about your rights in the study or to report a complaint: Research at the University of Central Florida involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (UCF IRB). This research has been reviewed and approved by the IRB. For information about the rights of people who take part in research, please contact: Institutional Review Board, University of Central Florida, Office of Research & Commercialization, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246 or by telephone at (407) 823-2901.

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol

The purpose of this study is to discover, understand, and describe in rich detail the lived experience of school psychologists exercising leadership. Due to the fact that you are noted to be someone who is exercising leadership skills in your current position, you are in an exceptional position to provide information that could help other school psychologists cultivate their leadership skills in their schools.

The interview has been designed with 6 open-ended questions to guide our conversation however, there is flexibility built in to allow for follow up questions as needed for clarification. Your responses will be combined with responses of other school psychologists who met the same screening criteria as you. The answers that you provide will remain confidential, as I will be the sole individual who will have access to the data in any format that will associate your answers to you personally.

With your permission, I will record the audio of our interview utilizing Livescribe Smartpen. The recording from this interview will be saved to a flash drive and be kept safe a locked file cabinet in my residence until the end of the dissertation process, where it will be destroyed. Along with the recording, I will also take hand-written notes during the interview, which will be kept along with the audio recording.

Through this process, I will identify you as School Psychologist _____ based upon the alphabetical placement of your first name. If at any point in the interview, you have questions, please feel free to ask me. Also, if you need a break between questions, please let me know so that I can pause the recording and we can reconvene after a short break. Do you have any questions before we start the actual interview?

Main Research Question: *What are the lived experiences of school psychologists exercising leadership in their roles?*

Research Question 1: What are the contexts that account for leadership experiences of school psychologists?

   1. Share with me some of your experiences of utilizing leadership skills.
   2. In what ways do you think that your leadership skills affect the way you support students, teachers, families and schools?

Research Question 2: What are the domains of practice that account for leadership experiences as a school psychologist?

   1. Please describe the various ways you use your leadership across the domains of your practice.

2. What are the practices that you utilize that can be identified as displaying leadership in your practice?

Research Question 3: What are the universal structures accounting for the leadership experiences of school psychologists?

1. How do you utilize your leadership skills across the various roles you have in your current position?

Research Question 4: What are the opportunities for school psychologists to exert leadership?

1. Describe opportunities of leadership that you have utilized.
2. What practices have you utilized or implemented to be someone displaying leadership in your role?

These are the all questions that I have for today. If I need clarification of anything you've said today, would it be ok for me to contact you by phone?

Once I have transcribed the interview, I would like to send it to you so that you can review it and add or modify the information that you provided. Additionally, once I have conducted reduction of the data and created textural descriptions of your lived experience, I will also send it to you so that you can ensure that it accurately represents your experience. Would you be willing to member check the textural description?

Thank you very much for your time. Do you have any questions before we conclude the interview?

APPENDIX E: INVARIENT CONSTITUENTS FOR CONSULTATION

AND COLLABORATION

Consultation and Collaboration

1. "And they look for you for answers, so you really want to make sure that you either know what you're doing, get the resources you need. At times, they will email me certain situation or questions. If it's something that I'm 100% sure or gone through myself, I email them back. If I'm 95% sure, I will email them back and then always check with our lead, or check with someone else to make sure I'm giving them the correct information."

2. "We have a lot of BCBA's and CARD representatives that work with our students, that might do in-home therapy that want to work on behavior plan, and I'm welcome to anyone's advice and expertise. So a lot of times, I will try to collaborate working on a plan with that private person get their input, also show them what we have in mind and kind of work together. I know some schools would rather say this is our thing, that's your thing - but to me, it makes more sense for us all to be on the same page, work together. And I think that helps with the families as well, so they know, "Okay, it's not them against us. You guys want to incorporate us into what you're doing."

3. "So a lot of times, I will try to collaborate working on a plan with that private person get their input, also show them what we have in mind and kind of work together. I know some schools would rather say this is our thing, that's your thing - but to me, it makes more sense for us all to be on the same page, work together. And I think that helps with the families as well, so they know, "Okay, it's not them against us."

4. "Besides other skill leadership qualities, I think being a part of the student study team - being a team player - is huge because there's definitely people on our student study team that look towards us as what are we going to do. And I think part of the team - and not all student study teams, but specifically on my elementary - people look towards me and my staffing specialists as, "What are we going to do, what's the next step?" We kind of run most of our meetings together. And I think an important part too is that you're open to other peoples' expertise and opinions and ideas, but also try to maintain the focus of the right thing to do for the student and for the school and for your team."

5. "And I think part of the team - and not all student study teams, but specifically on my elementary - people look towards me and my staffing specialists as, "What are we going to do, what's the next step?" We kind of run most of our meetings together. And I think an important part is that you're open to other peoples' expertise and opinions and ideas, but also try to maintain the focus of the right thing to do for the student and for the school and for your team."

6. "I do things differently, I just do things differently and I try and personalize with parents. So, when they come back to a meeting, they've seen me before. We've worked together. We talk. It's important to work with others in your team."

7. "We'll sit down together and kind of say, "Oh, gosh. This is great." or, "This isn't great. What can we do different?" Or, "Let's kind of talk about what's going on in this grade about the tier-one data, and what we're going to do different. And why is it not matching up?" And this or that and the other. So we definitely have lots of conversations about the data. And then tier-two, I kind of played more of a reading coach role at tier two."

8. "I collaborate with the administration and with the guidance counselors, the SRSs and work with them to help to try to ensure that best practices are occurring in regards to the MTSS process although my involvement with that is more limited here."

9. "I think that opportunities for leadership occur through being able to collaborate with other people who have your same skills and who are good leaders as well. I think that I have lacked that here in this year, not because there are not strong leaders and not because there are not very smart strong school psychologists, but I just think the opportunity to collaborate and build relationships is lacking. And so I think that the opportunities for me to do that have happened elsewhere."

10. "I'm able to individually look at my school, and I know that Evans, for example, is a school where we're having a little bit of difficulties with buy ins from the teachers. They have difficulty with a mindset change. So knowing that Joy has done all these presentations and stuff about mindset and things like that, I invite a pair to come out to the school, and she did a nice little in-service for an hour and a half. So I'm able to easily utilize everyone else's expertise to affect change at more of a smaller level at my schools."

11. "Change, there's a lot of people that are open to change and there's just as many people that are not. Change can be good if you do with an open-mindedness. If you don't want to change or you have that mentality of, "Oh boy, this is what we did ten years ago, and the pendulum is swinging back again, so I'm not going to change until it swings back again." Well, you know, you just now made it difficult for your teams that do enough to abide by certain rules and restrictions and you're just making it hard. So being a team player."

12. "When we talk about the concept of a multidisciplinary team, we're talking about a puzzle. It is impossible and it's inappropriate to expect any one person to be the entire puzzle."

13. "And I'm not afraid to share that information with people. Behavior is not my strength. Everybody here at this school knows that. I don't think we should be pretending to be experts in everything. That's to the detriment of our teams, that's to the detriment of the students, and I think that's where the collaborative piece and the multidisciplinary team component comes into play, because we shouldn't be experts in everything."

14. "Well, I went directly to my supervisor who I had known as a colleague in a previous county, and so I think there was a very open door policy in terms of a dialogue of ideas, what was reasonable, what was not reasonable, what had been done, what should be done, what could be done. So I think that without question, having had that person in leadership at the district level inevitably allowed us to really move forward with a process that could have taken years to establish."

15. "I think I use it a lot with the consultation. I consult with teachers a lot, I talk heavily with my reading interventionist at school - especially earlier in the year, I did a lot of that. We consulted a lot, I just kind of stepped up and described some of the understanding I had on reading, and different ways to progress monitor, and how everything should align with intervention and support for students, and gave them a lot of good resources to utilize. So, I think within the consultation role with teachers, I used my experiences and leadership there."

16. "I just feel that people work together when they're, first, happy. Happy workers are productive workers. If you're happy in your job, then you're just more productive. I think research has shown that. I enjoy trying to make people happy. And I know that I have a lot to learn, and so I rely on this group of people that I work with, even though I don't work directly with them. Those are the people that I consult with and ask advice with, so the more we are connected and understanding of each other, the more approachable you are to talk to and consult with. And I just like to be happy and friendly."

APPENDIX F: INVARIENT CONSTITUENTS CONSULTATION AND PROFESSONAL EXPERTISE

Professional Expertise

1. One of my jobs is to have the intern work as a school psych and a [deleted district name] employee, but it's also my job to give him as much information education as I can in that one year. So an important part for me is to expose them to as many cases, to as many different assessments, and opportunities to work with different populations as much as possible. So I really think to branch out and find cases for them, is important. So that they can, next year, come as a practicing school psych with all that experience, and then feel comfortable in any given situation.

2. I feel like a lot of people that are new, because I feel I'm not one of the newbies here anymore, which is weird to think. But because more people are coming into the county are unfamiliar - and they could be seasoned psychologists, but are unfamiliar with the way we practice - I hope that they know I've been there to answer questions, and a lot of people in my area are new or have been new. And I feel like they feel like they can reach out to me, ask me questions about procedures, cases, people, things like that - just because I've been here longer.

3. "I think also volunteering to help other school psychs - not necessarily just interns - learn different instruments because I know some that other ones don't and have given-- I wouldn't call them workshops. I had a workshop for one instrument and then also met with other school psychs. Like one-on-one or I've tested students so they could observe me, learn the instrument and then I'll observe them kind of thing, just so we're continuing development for everybody."

4. It was specifically at one case that was just recent, I had a school psych email me, "What do I do? We have this case. She doesn't fit in a little box, unfortunately."

5. Okay, I had a case similar and you have to be creative. This is what my school did. Talk to this person, talk to this person, see what you can do, that kind of thing. And she ended up, her team is going to be going that route… So I think also giving options, not necessarily interventions, but I guess ideas of how to be creative in serving your students.

6. "I've attended the National Association of School Psychology in New York Convention, probably maybe over the last nine years, I've maybe gone to six. So I try to attend that. I try to do that every year. That's really a good one - a) for professional development but also just see, what other counties are doing. It can be a little disheartening because I think some counties that do present, have great ideas and have the freedom and accessibility and resources to do a lot more than what we can do here. So that's tough. But trying to get the one thing that you can do or incorporate out of their whole thing, is helpful."

7. "They see me as someone who teaches a lot of the kids who end up being school psychologists. I think that a lot of the younger school psychs look up to me as a leader in that sense, because they see me in the classroom, and then they see me in the field, so they just naturally sort of look up to me."

8. "I am a PCM instructor…that's professional crisis management, and that's for children who are-- it's a technique for restraint, to prevent injury, so for very aggressive children are like regular education autistic, EBD, what have you. And I've taught hundreds at this point. I mean, I was a trainer for years, I've just ended. I've just retired from that, but I've done it up until January."

9. "You have to use your judgment and you have to build your case at the end of the day. You are the professional signing off on that evaluation. So, you have used your brain, and you are not just a robot that says yes or not. So, you have to build your case."

10. "We actually developed a professional learning community and had people wearing different roles and kind of led that up. We worked through that for several years. Facilitated that and then also, based on certain concerns that we had in wanting to build a stronger MTSS model in our learning community, based on things we were seeing in our schools, we communicated and that kind of led up talking to our administrator in the [deleted location]. It was [deleted name of person] at the time, and we started out some communication with him and then ended up having monthly meeting with him where he met with all the psychologists. We started attending-- he asked three of the psychologist to attend the principal meetings. So, we started having more communication with him and started doing some different projects with him to work more collaboratively."

11. "Attended NASP Conference and have had some good conversations with peers in regards to some of those conferences in bringing back that to schools to try to improve assessment practices. And just I've worked with teachers to try to build their skills in behavior plans and things like that, and just listening to what their concerns are in trying to address them."

12. "I try to utilize my position to definitely keep the school psychologist in --- county as much as possible on the fore front of any new service delivery plan, I shouldn't say technology because that's really such a small piece - but with new research and new policies or procedures, anything that's coming up. So I try to keep the group up to date with new instruments, new theories, evaluation, and things like that, so I try to share that with the group. I try to coordinate any vendors that are coming out that can do in-services, so getting other professionals to come out and share their experiences and their expertise with the group. I tried to do that whenever possible, not that it's possible too often, but I do try to do that."

13. "Becoming an expert, or not an expert really, but becoming well versed on a type of assessment. I teach the interns at the beginning of the year the KABC-II. That's not something that all the psychologists utilize, and unfortunately many of the psychologists don't, because it's something that's new and different for them, so that's a reason why they don't use it. Becoming an expert and very well versed in certain instruments, you can share that out with others."

14. "I've had an intern for many years now, and just being able to try to share my service delivery, the planning process, the execution of whatever the evaluation process is, the follow-up, and just trying to share my approaches, which I believe is best practice with them, and trying to encourage them to develop similar practices in their service delivery."

15. "I would say best practice. I'm a firm believer in doing what's right. So I'm constantly looking up what I believe is-- what NASP's Best Practices recommends, and utilizing those types of strategies in evaluation practices from my specific evaluations when I'm working with the students. "

16. "I would say that it was a gradual ascend. A gradual getting to where I am now, because I don't think I ever had a niche per se where I wanted to focus on, no one aspect. I was a general learner where I wanted to get better at everything equally, and so it was just kind of increasing my scale and my knowledge base equally among all different things. I would have an ASD evaluation, so I would just look at all the most recent data and literature and everything on effective evaluation. What the intervention should look like? What types of behavior plans? What are some new strategies that are going on? So I will just completely delve into that to make sure that's the best evaluation that I've ever done for ASD. Then I'll get an EBD evaluation, so I'll do the same process of doing that. Now I'm doing another ASD evaluation, so was my last evaluation the best or do we have new things? So I'm constantly always building on what I've done."

17. "I don't consider myself necessarily an expert in any of one particular area. I'm more of a global leader. But for somebody that wants to exert leadership, finding their niche, what interests them, and what are the needs of your school? What are the needs of the county? Can we tie the two together? Do reading. There's research out there. NASP has so many resources I'm constantly looking at. Their paper that comes out and their research, and trying to coordinate the two of them and find a good match - their niche."

18. "You have to use your judgment. You have to build your case at the end of the day. You're the professional signing off on that evaluation. So you have used your brain, and you are not just a robot that says yes or no. So trying to build your case and just giving everybody the resources in order to be the best professional that they can, and using their resources."

19. "I think it's really hard for me to go to state and national conferences, particularly the national conferences, because you are reminded of the ideal level of practice and the broad range of things that we could really be doing to make huge long term impacts on our students, as a whole, not just on an individual student, but at a systems level. Then you come back and you have a list of a hundred kids that are due yesterday, so that's what you do. And you give the same test everyday [chuckles] to place the kid and you're not able to follow that passion. I think if we had a broader role, I think you would see more leaders, because people would find that niche, that area where they can really build at a broader level."

20. "Somebody commented to me one time that when I'm talking about the things that I'm professionally competent in, that I have a very different voice and a very different demeanor. It becomes to me when I'm really engrossed in those things, kind of that concept of flow where you are connected, you are present, you are feeling your audience, you're feeling the material that you're presenting, and you're knowing that what you are saying is coming from an area of informed background. And I've, into a certain respect, would love to be able to have more leadership experiences, but I think that over time and as your life evolves, your life isn't just your profession, your life is everything that is about you."

21. "I think my leadership skills come from the personal experiences, and mine was a professional and personal combined interest or passion."

22. "I also developed a lot of trainings for private school teachers. So, this is an area that I enjoy, I enjoy doing professional development for other teachers. We did administration, we met with the director of all the diocese schools in the whole central Florida area, we gave frequent presentations to all of these teachers. My other colleague and I completely initiated and developed a four-part training series that was done every single week: part one - week one, part two - week two. So, every month we had this four-part series, so every single week we delivered this training to a small group of teachers, so it was a more intimate setting where teachers actually felt like they learned something, and we did that training for an entire year."

23. "I ended the year talking to the MTSS site-based team at one of my schools, because it was a big growing year for them - that was like their first year of implementation. We had a lot of team meetings to get that started, because they were very unsure of what to do, and I felt I had knowledge to share with them."

24. "I think a lot of its personality. I'm not saying I'm a natural-born leader, but a lot of those skills - I can reflect on that - have been developed throughout the years of my life. If a person is naturally withdrawn, I don't think they're going to be able to take initiative as much, maybe just due to personality - but you can always still develop that, of course. I

feel like you just have to be confident. With confidence comes knowledge. In order to be confident, you have to feel like you have the knowledge to present what you're saying."

APPENDIX G: INVARIENT CONSTITUENTS THEMES FOR STUDENT

-ORIENTED NEEDS

Student-Oriented Needs

1. "Each child is not the same and that you can't treat them all the same."

2. "There were students in the classroom with high needs, it was a self-contained classroom and the behaviors were out of control. When I would go (to her school), I would get constantly called when I was here. The teacher would call for me, I would go in and it was just chaos…I think the environment itself wasn't appropriate."

3. "This was self-contained classroom and the behaviors were out of control. The teacher used to always call me and whenever I would go in, it was pure chaos. It wasn't a good environment and I would try to work with the student, but it just wasn't appropriate."

4. "I think there was definitely less chaos, less behaviors. We saw a lot of positive from the students, even things that-- being more independent. I think independence helped because there was a system, an organized system, and they kind of started figuring out what to do on their own. So it definitely helped."

5. "Think outside the box …and you've got to use your resources that you have at your school, and this is the way we can be creative to meet the needs of your students."

6. "Your work speaks for itself. I've told people in administrative positions this. You have to go by my track, regardless of what you think of me personally. You have to go my track record, and you count up how many principals wanted me back. Go ahead."

7. "When we go, when we are sitting at student study, we have a difficult case, you question, because this is a child's educational career. Even though it's a team decision, and I really feel like it's a team decision, but everybody is always looks at us as the school psychs, so what do we do? And in that sense, we're a leader of the student study team."

8. "When we go, when we are sitting at student study, we have a difficult case, you question, because this is a child's educational career. Even though it's a team decision, and I really feel like it's a team decision, but everybody is always looks at us as the school psychs, so what do we do? And in that sense, we're a leader of the student study team."

9. "And I'm someone who has enough experience that I don't get intimidated by, "This kid has to be out, and this kid has to be--" That's not how I run things."

10. "I think that another important leadership characteristic that we have both in the school setting and then in dealing with administration is standing up for the children in terms of advocating and then in standing up for what we think is right for the profession and for-- I guess the profession is the right way to say that. And in regards to our administration and

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just ESE, when-- it's not always an easy thing to do or what other people want to hear, but often times what schools want, or want a teacher may want, or principal may want, may not really be in the best interest of the child. And sometimes we have to in a professional way fight for that child and that's not always an easy thing to do, but I think that that's what we need to do as a leader and an advocate for kids."

11. "I just think it's important to advocate for what you think is best for kids and then what just makes sense."

12. "We advocated very hard to attend the NASP Conference this year, and so that's something that's very rare that they will actually allow temporary duty to do something like that. I know that's something that was rare in the past. So those types of things. Also, when we're talking about policy, I guess, I try to make it known to the decision-makers what we need to be effective school psychologists, so trying to, "Well, this is how our reports need to be written."

13. "Because I'm constantly advocating for them to allow us to be more efficient in our jobs. I think, right now, our hands are tied with the way certain policies are written, in regards to just our evaluations, itself. I would like to see us to be a more efficient group. I would like to see kind of going along with the test kits. I know that we need these types of instruments available to us, so we could also be effective and comprehensive though in our assessments, so kind of a two-fold."

14. "I'm very passionate about being able to provide equitable services to our --- population. Unfortunately, I think that ---population is also a very noble population. It's also often a population that has lower levels of income. And so I think it's a population that for the most part doesn't have the access to private practice levels of service and assessment. And so I feel like it just become kind of an advocacy and a passion type scenario to be able to really truly service and meet the needs and advocate for our --- learners. Obviously, we advocate for every student, but that happens to just be the population that I am most drawn to in terms of advocacy."

15. "I feel like the public school system is the best place for me to be able to do that. I've done work in private practice. It's fulfilling, but it's inaccessible to certain individuals due to the financial nature of it. If the public school system remains-- if the role of the school psychologist in the public school system allows me to continue to meet the needs and advocate for that population at a level that I feel is best practice to the greatest extent possible, then I would like to remain in the public school system. I feel like that's where my skill set can be utilized, that's where I feel like I'm making a difference, that's where I feel like I have the opportunity to encounter wonderful families that want the best for their children that have a ---barrier."

16. "When I joined this county, there really was no process put in place. It was haphazard and it was-- nothing was written down. I think there was a general understanding, but there was not a process, there was not a flowchart, there was not a sequence for people to follow to make sure that we were really attempting to engage across the board in best practice with our [deleted description of student population]."

17. "A lot of it with the support teachers - the coaches and the interventionists - because they're seeing a lot of the students with the intensive needs. Within just regular classroom teachers, more behavioral support, so I'll pull in different resources that I have with them to help them understand different behavioral things."

APPENDIX H: INVARIENT CONSTITUENTS FOR EXPERT-PROBLEM

SOLVERS

Expert-Problem Solvers

1. "It's important to not go with what everyone else says, but to be able to think for yourself, in addition to respecting the opinions of other experts at the table, which is important. I definitely think that someone who just thinks for themselves and does' want to listen is not a leader. But someone who does think for themselves, but listens to the opinions of the experts, takes that into consideration and then does what is in the best for the child, or for the situation. Whatever it is."

2. "They come to you with a problem with a student, they know from experience with you that you are going to come and observe, so they feel validated in their concern. We will often talk about the behavior problem, and I will give them little checklists and I would compile the data for them. We will meet on a weekly basis just to see how it's going, we look at what data they have, what's been implemented, give suggestions back and forth and see what happens."

3. "Working with teachers to solve a behavior problem can be a challenge at times, when there may need some additional support."

4. "Because I feel confident in what I do, but I still question myself, and that's what keeps me, I think, relevant. I question, because I don't know everything, but I'm comfortable with what I do. Somebody in their third or fourth year, I think that time, doing the job, and doing it to the best of your ability helps you to cultivate a lot of that confidence. I wonder if you can learn it. You have to be able to learn to be comfortable with what you do, and to feel confident that you know what you're doing and you're doing the right thing."

5. "Sometimes, it would always be the same people asking for help, and they didn't' always have the highest referrals. Sometimes that had to be communicated in a ways that they can understand. I would share with ant ideas on how maybe they could go about their job different in a way so that maybe not to feel so overwhelmed, so that they feels supported, but yet they understood that right them there, they weren't ' toing to get the help because of the people that needed more."

6. "I really enjoyed that role. I only stopped because I foresaw that I would probably be making a shift here."

7. "She is difficult to work with. She thinks she is doing it correct and firm in her beliefs, and so you really have to have some kind of relationship with her and kind of tiptoe but still try to get what you want because it's what the kids need…so sometimes, I avoid her. I don't have the time and the energy to deal with her, but when I really have to because it's impacting a kid I go ad talk to her, over email doesn't' work." I try to find ways to

compliment or make her feel positive cause she needs that, but I do make sure that she hears that things that she need to hear and that we fix things that need to be fixed and often it's me fixing it because I know that if I leave if to her, it won't be done right. I have tried to model for her, but in the end, I think she just had been doing for so long that I am not completely possible that I will be able to change that. At times, just solving the problem yourself because it's the best thing for kids and not engaging in a power struggle."

8. "For example, I was able to help another school psychologist at her school complete the ADOS, because it's something that I am trained in. It is a best practice to do some sort of structured evaluation when at all possible if you're looking for ASD as a possibility. And sometime, we're very limited in time, and we can only do a rating scale. But in certain circumstances, you want something a little more comprehensive and so being able to have that little bit of extra training, I was able to help others with what is considered best practice."

9. "I was then able to transfer them to this county and within my first year, basically lead and push through the creation of a system or a series of steps or a process to make sure that we were really considering the whole child for our [deleted] students and with that, the [deleted] component being a critical role. Not [deleted], but everything that cascades from that looking at schooling experiences in a previous setting, looking at [deleted]…all of the things that our best practice guidelines indicate, I've tried to incorporate into the process that's used now."

10. "When I joined this county, there really was no process put in place. It was haphazard and it was-- nothing was written down. I think there was a general understanding, but there was not a process, there was not a flowchart, there was not a sequence for people to follow to make sure that we were really attempting to engage across the board in best practice with our [deleted] students."

11. "I know in this current year, with changes on the horizon with our own department, I always just have ideas and I've taken the initiative to email the ideas to my current supervisor to just have food for thought. Because I'm not a decision-maker, but I feel that we should still have our voices heard with people in the trenches, so I feel that we need to at least pose ideas that are relevant. So, I have taken the liberty of emailing her my thoughts - whether she uses them or not is a different story - but at least I've given her some different ideas of systematic changes within our current practice that could help us be more efficient with our positions so that we are able to utilize our skills and talents in other areas, if there were more time. We have so many evaluations, what do we absolutely have to do, what can we refine to make it a more efficient process, and what is there still to be done."

12. "There was actually some conflict our team members, and it could have been handled had they have been direct with each other, and so things have kind of escalated from that just within our team. So, myself and our staffing specialist talking with one of the person who

had the conflict and we are trying to problem solve through it in objective ways, and we wanted to meet as a team to talk about it. But due to scheduling conflicts and everything, that would have been difficult to meet as a team, so I decided to create a Google Doc survey to have people respond to that first, and then meet as a team to go over the responses and them problem solve, and defined some things we want to this year, or for next year."

APPENDIX I: INVARIENT CONSTITUENTS FOR COMMUNICATION

SKILLS

Communication Skills

1. "We had one yesterday actually just like that, and this teacher I completely respect. The whole team does, as well. We met yesterday. She's thinking that something is just not there, and she feels like we need some testing. I respect her opinion and I know that she feels something is wrong, and probably something is at that point. But when we're looking at all the data, all S's and all DE scores are going up, and I knew it wouldn't be a good referral at that point. But I'm not going to tell her, "No. What are you talking about? We got all [S's].""

2. "So it's not going to be a referral, but what can we do to help the student? I think that helps the teacher walk away thinking, "Okay. This was the best decision.""

3. "It wasn't a good referral, but I am concerned that the team listened to me and they gave me these ideas of what to do next. So therefore, the parent, when she was with the parent, it's not like, "What? I thought we were going to do testing?" It's more of, "This is the reason why we don't feel this is right at this time. However, we would like to do A, B, and C, and then we will meet on this date and go from there." So I think that in the aspect of me having a leadership role, kind of in that aspect."

4. "The numbers themselves are meaningless until, you as a school psychologist can breathe some life into them, so when you have a conversation with a parent or with a teacher outside of the assessment, just about what they are concerned or dealing with, then when you get back at the table and you review results, there is familiarity. I think that parents and teachers appreciate people, who listen to them."

5. "Well, I am actually listening to what the teachers are saying, what the parents are saying. There is a listening component that if I were to attach to it, would be consultation."

6. "You can't be pompous in how you share the information. The first thing is you're not going to talk down to parents. First of all, they are walking in a room with about eight people around the table and it's intimidating. The second thing is that the reports are often so technical that they don't mean anything to the parents. So, you have to make it meaningful to them and also meaningful to the teacher for that matter."

7. "You highlight their strengths, we are not saying there isn't weakness, but the parents know there are and at times, they go through a lot of tissues, because parents know this. What we've done is we've had to confirm it and now we have to make a plan for the future."

8. "We have kids all the time that come in, and they are as low as low can be. There has to be some areas that are strength. What a wonderful smile. What a wonderful attitude. What a pleasure she was to work with, or he was to work with. Those are things that seem small,

but they do mean a lot to the parent. They know that their kid is in the basement in terms of the scores, and we're not telling them anything they don't know in that sense."

9. "We would help to communicate to our supervisor about the different needs that we've seen. It was important that we were there to share that."

10. "I would like to think that my leadership skills have improved as I have built leadership skills through the years. I would like to think that as they have increased by effectives, being a school psychologists has also increased as a result of being a better leader. I think that it has made me a better listener, I think it has helped me pay attention to what others people's needs are and try to help them."

11. "I think that it has made me a better listener, I think it has helped me pay attention to what other peoples' needs are and try to help them."

12. "I mean I always try to make sure that the families leave having a thorough understanding as to what the child's strengths and weaknesses were, how that's impacting them, and what they can do to try to help them in addition to the teachers. …in our reports in orange, we would put our recommendations, so that there was always there as well, which I think was helpful."

13. "I try to be a support in terms of making suggestions for parents when I feel they need extra support as well, whether that be a referral to the social worker, or at this initiation structure, a recommendation for them to follow up with a pediatrician or a referral through the county to look if they have Medicaid counselling, or something like that. I try to be a support beyond what is traditionally our role is to be here."

14. "Sometimes… administration gets up into their little box, and even if they were once in a school, sometimes you forget what it is like and that they need to be brought back to reality. And I am happy to do that on occasion when it's needed.

15. I try to also communicate and when I am communicating with, I suppose our administrators, who are really the powers that be, the decision makers. But letting them know what we need and trying to work with them in getting to that, and a lot of time, its baby steps."

16. "There was a dialogue of ideas on what was reasonable, what was not reasonable, what had been done, what should be done, and what could be done."

17. "I do feel I have reasonably good presentation skills, very good writing skills, so I feel like I'm able to utilize those leadership capabilities or qualities to be able to communicate the

information effectivity to the various audience that I maybe working with, whereas it's at the consultative level or the direct level with parents."

18. "I've created for myself templates, comprehensive well-created templates that did initially take a long to create. But, in the long run, it saves an enormous amount of time and I feel like it allows me to provide the most information in the most efficient amount of time."

19. "I am not going to argue with a parent over an intervention that was done in the classroom, because I have no control of that."

20. "I think some of the resources that I suggest to parents or how I go over my reports - I talk a lot during meetings, and I probably steal the spotlight from people too much, but I feel like I can clarify things for people."

21. "That helps parents understand and feel more at ease after I clarify things and give them resources, so I know they're more comfortable leaving the meeting - understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the student, and what all of this means after that, which affects student performance with the services we deliver and how they help their student at home."

22. "The newsletter, the surveys, meeting with the teams. I met with the teams at the beginning of the year to set it up, and now we're debriefing, the intern things are practices that I've used to be a leader."

APPENDIX J: INVARIENT CONSTITUENTS OPPORTUNITIES FOR

LEADERSHIP

Opportunities for leadership

1. "I think with students, I do a social skills group once a week. I meet with five or six tier two, tier three behavior - second and third grade boys - and I was getting my intern to participate, so we do that together. And I'm slowly giving her the reigns of that, because she needs to feel more comfortable in doing groups for next year. So I'm giving her more of that, but I'm still attending and everything. I think too when we first got together, some of the boys weren't getting along. There's one that just kind of shuts down easily, and then he can start picking on the other students. And we have a small group, so it can be really difficult when two start to fight. He's a second grade boy but realizing that he also needs to feel validated, heard, and understood. I think when we had an issue is more how I present to him, how I let him talk, I let him express himself. And then when I-- the first time I didn't so much, instead I gave him more of a reprimand and he shut down."

2. "When I can, the best thing I think I can do, because I have behavior experience, is to do some kind of social skills group. I was able to do that three years ago, and then I couldn't because of my referral load. But again, this year at that grade, I can. I have an interest with my intern who wanted to participate. I basically asked my team here, I told them I was interested. I said, "Who do you think has the greatest need?" They told me second and third graders. Then we decided not to do ESE, to do Gen ED. And then I asked them for recommendations, reviews. And they contacted the teachers, they got me a list of names. We looked at it together, so it wasn't just me. I asked for their input on what kids they thought would be-- make a good group together that can work together. And then that's how we made the group. And then I asked some teachers, I knew there were some teachers that had concerns with certain students. So we tried to incorporate those themes as lessons."

3. "I was really lucky this year, because my caseload is so small. Since I knew that from the beginning of the year, I knew I would have more time."

4. I am a PCM instructor, or was I should say I was….Yes, that's professional crisis management, and that's for children who are- it's a technique for restraint, to prevent injury, so for very aggressive children are like regular education autistic, EBD, what have you. And I've taught hundreds at this point. I mean, I was a trainer for years, I've just ended. I've just retired from that, but I've done it up until January."

5. "I was teaching in their-- I guess the teachers need 20 credits for something like ESE, and I taught a module that the county is offering on functional behavior assessments and behavior intervention plans….It's reg-ed and special-ed. Mostly regular-ed, but both, really both. To get--, you have to have now by the state law these 20 credits, and the county have been offering that. So as part of that, I was teaching - probably two weeks ago or three weeks ago was the last time I did that."

6. "Well, unfortunately, I got the opportunity to support families a whole lot more when I wasn't working in [deleted] County. And that's because-- not that we don't support them every day, we do. But supportive in the sense that I had a lot more time working in other places to sit down with parents and with kids, which because of the caseload, and then it's a small town and we don't have a lot of people, our time is limited. So I don't have as much of an opportunity as I would like.

7. "I used to take a guy-- I worked in the projects, the worst projects in New York City, and I would just take someone with me, so I wouldn't get shot or shot alone. And I don't want to say that flippantly, because you would hear guns during the day, gun shots, and that's what it was. This is back in the very early 90s, and there was a lot of crack and all that stuff going on. We talked about assessment. I would have to do an adapted assessment, and I went to a family's home, and one of the question is, "Does the child help set the table?" There is no table. There's nothing to sit on. I'm sitting on the floor. So now, as a clinician, I have a much better sense of what the child is going home to, and why they were acting out in the morning."

8. "Every day is an opportunity for leadership. Just it depends on how you want to go about it.
9. I think every day, how we interact with teachers, or children, or parents, or colleagues. I think there's an opportunity to utilize those kinds of skills, and you don't make it a positive and productive kind of interaction and experience [chuckles], or it's just an okay experience, or a negative experience. So I would like to think that I go by to make it more a positive experience utilizing the skills that I have built through the years."

10. "Well, I would say efficiency, because I'm constantly advocating for them to allow us to be more efficient in our jobs. I think, right now, our hands are tied with the way certain policies are written, in regards to just our evaluations, itself."

11. "By becoming an expert and very well versed in certain instruments, you can share that out with others. Another opportunity is to become a somewhat of an expert on different types of evaluations. What's best practice in assessment for a deaf or hard of hearing? You have many low-incident populations. So becoming more of an expert on these types of assessments. What should this evaluations look like? What is best practice for an EBD evaluation? What is best practice for an ASD evaluation? And so becoming well versed in those types of assessments, so if somebody needs some help with a kid that comes in, is this really an ID kid, or is this really an ASD kid? We have many characteristics that overlap, so you can come in and kind of be the expert per se, in that type of assessment area and be a leader by sharing with others. I talk to [deleted name] every day, and we talk about [deleted topic], and that's an area where she has shown leadership that I'm not an expert in, but I can consult with her on a regular basis about those things."

12. "Finding an area of interest, either of an instrument, or type of assessment, or population, or consultation. [deleted name] is an expert in behavior. She can go in, share her knowledge with anybody. And speaking with [deleted name], after five minutes, you just want to buy whatever she's selling, because she knows what she is talking about. I mean, there are just so many areas that one can become proficient in, and then just share that. And that's something I didn't even talk about too, is interns.

13. When I jointed this county, there was no process put in place. It was haphazard and it was since nothing was written down. I think there was a general understanding, but there was not a process, there was not a flow chart, there was no a sequence for people to follow that we were attempting to engage across the board in best practice with this specific population."

14. "I've also initiated a newsletter amongst the psychologists. I thought the newsletter - birthday it is - would help us to build community and get to know each other, which would in turn just build us as a group of professionals in the area."

15. "I definitely want to help out my schools in more aspects, than just the traditional role of just testing and going to meetings."

16. "I do think also being sometimes isolated where you don't see another colleague for months - weeks or months - and just being in that role over and over, especially with that workload, I think that can limit that."

17. "I was really lucky this year, because my caseload is so small. Since I knew that from the beginning of the year, I knew I would have more time."

18. "Unfortunately, I got the opportunity to support families a whole lot more when I wasn't working in [deleted] county. And that's because-- not that we don't support them every day, we do. But supportive in the sense that I had a lot more time working in other places to sit down with parents and with kids, which because of the caseload, and then it's a small town and we don't have a lot of people, our time is limited. So I don't have as much of an opportunity as I would like."

19. "And with kids, I don't get the opportunity, I used to do counseling, and unless there's a crisis - and there have been where I've been sent out specifically to deal with certain issues with kids - I don't get to do counseling like I have in the past."

20. "The truth is I did that when I started. I would go to the projects, and if the parents couldn't come in, I would go to them. We don't do that enough. We stay in those little cubicles that they give us, and we don't venture out because we're scared - a lot of us. I'm not. I loved it. You get a much better sense in somebody's home of what the kid goes home to also. And

I think that's a starting point of, what do we do to then support particular families in terms of what they need?"

21. "So most of my time is spent doing assessment here, and so I'm usually testing students and writing reports to be shared in meetings with parents and teachers."

22. "I would say that more of my leadership roles across the board have occurred in [another district]. I feel like I'm a great tester. I do a lot of that, but I don't feel like I'm highly utilized here"

23. "Maybe that's why I haven't been [laughter] able to come up with a lot of fine leadership qualities because I haven't used many of them this year…I would say more of my leadership roles took place in the other school district."

24. "I would say, overall, as the group probably not a lot of positive feedback, just because of the way that [deleted district] service delivery from psychological services perspective is, there's no time. In a perfect world, we would love to do some, to increase our mental health support, but with the way that our caseloads are, and our evaluations and our expectations to do these evaluations within X amount of days, it doesn't leave a lot of time for mental health type stuff. So that book study, I think, I did not love it."

25. "Historically, I think that school psychologists within the public school system have really been held to and have upheld a very high standard of practice doing really truly comprehensive assessments that give us the broad range of skills of a student at a level really sincerely on par with that that can be provided in a private setting through private practice. I think that little by little particularly in the last couple of years, that's being eroded, unfortunately due to volume, due to the added expectations, and due to the sheer number of students that we're expected to evaluate. You cannot produce an A plus assessment in the time that's needed for a C assessment, you know, a mid- level or mid-range assessment."

26. "I wish that I had more capacity to be able to utilize it in a more of a direct service role with the parents, but just because of the way that our assignments are made, I'm not able to go to the meetings for the individual students that I evaluate. So the information gets then disseminated through the assigned psychologist."

27. "I think we go again to the limits of the job. The reality of it is I think that the system forces a prioritization and ultimately, I think the prioritization comes down to compliance. There's 60 calendar days, and that becomes the priority, the assessment piece. So unfortunately, I think that our desires or our capacity to do community outreach, to do parent trainings, to be mentors within a community, I think it becomes very limited. I thought about doing work with parents particularly with our [deleted] population here at this school and teaming

up. But the fact of the matter is that then you're looking at your deadlines and ultimately, the external evaluation of my goodness as a school psychologist comes down to whether I'm complying with deadlines."

28. "It really becomes a matter of time and resources, and we at the ground level don't have the control over that. We are thankful that we have jobs in the economy that we're in. I'm thankful for the differences that I'm able to make with individual students. On the days when I feel like, "Oh my God, I cannot give the same assessment again," I just sit and I focus on the student. I gave the same two assessments today with the student, and I had a wonderful time. She was fun and entertaining, and we had a great dialogue, and so that's what I have to focus on."

29. "I really think there would be more leaders if we could access the range of skills that we're taught, and you had a re-conceptualization of the responsibilities, not adding onto, changing. You can't just keep adding things onto [laughter] somebody's plate and when you add one thing, something else has to go."

30. "The fact of the matter comes in that if my workload includes five hours a night of working from home, then the quality of my work is going to suffer because I have a family, I have two young children, and you have to balance your life. So I think if we are allowed to practice what we are trained and what our expertise is, then we can bring that puzzle piece and it does become a truly comprehensive picture of the child. But I go back to that concept of being a master of something or being a jack of all trades and a master of nothing."

31. "It's tough. I have a very busy schedule of testing students, day-in and day-out. I do feel like I have leadership qualities that I could better utilize if I had the time to."

32. "Just the need of students, and I guess county policies or state laws, whatever, require us to do a certain number of evaluations of certain types and things like that, so you have to do at least this minimum. And the kids are just needy. I have two kind of intense schools with a very high caseload, so I have a lot of referrals and students to test, and my days are often just very packed with barely getting in my evaluations. So, I don't feel like I'm able to utilize my leadership abilities as much as I would like - or as much as I'm able to - just because the nature of the nature of the job at the moment."

33. "Yeah, I have a report in front of me, and we're clearly at my house right now. My emails are often sent at 10:00 at night, so a lot of my report writing is done at home. I always get to school early - at least 30 minutes - and I often stay after 30 minutes, so I have an extra hour of my day at school, because I have files at school that I have to review and I can't take home. So, I try to at least get all the file information into my reports, so that all I have to do is write the other stuff at home, because there's just no time."

34. "The current role is a traditional school psychologist role. If I were in a more lead position, with less schools or less intense schools, or a behavior support position, I feel like my role would different. In the pre-K office, I did straight evaluations, so I did not feel I had too much leadership opportunity over there - so this role is diverse, but yet also very packed with things I have to get done. I have a high caseload."

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