

University of Alberta

**Attributes of Effective Psycho-Educational Assessment:
Teachers' and School Psychologists' Perceptions**

by

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Abstract

Using a basic interpretive approach (Merriam, 1998, 2002) and in-depth interviews, this qualitative study explored school psychologists' and teachers' perceptions of effective psycho-educational assessment. School psychologists and teachers are the two professionals who play central roles in the psycho-educational assessment process (Eckert & Arbolino, 2005; Gutkin & Conoley, 1990; Gutkin & Curtis, 1999). To date there have been a limited number of studies conducted that have explored teachers' perspectives on the usefulness of psycho-educational assessment process, and the findings have been inconclusive (Gilman & Gabriel, 2004; Hagborg & Aiello-Coultier, 1994). School psychologists have been trained to execute a psycho-educational assessment that typically uses standard procedures (Saklofske et al., 2000; Sattler, 2001, 2002), with little consideration for teacher satisfaction (Fairchild & Seeley, 1996; Swerdlik & French, 2000). Even though there has been recurring debate on the dominance of assessment in a school psychologist's role, it continues to be a major component of school psychology service (e.g., Bramlett, Murphy, Johnson, Wallingsford, & Hall, 2002; Curtis, Grier, & Hunley, 2004). Seven teachers and seven school psychologists were asked about their experiences with and insights into psycho-educational assessment. In a standardized, open-ended interview (Patton, 1990), the participants discussed (a) general insights into effective psycho-educational assessment, (b) specific experiences with a recently completed psycho-educational assessment, and (c) personal recommendations on how to improve the psycho-educational assessment process for both school psychologists and teachers. The analysis of the interviews revealed three major themes: (a) reflecting on the assessment process, (b) working as a

team, and (c) comprehensive assessment—hoping to change lives. The participants' positive regard for psycho-educational assessment is interwoven throughout the findings and was noted especially when assessment is viewed as a comprehensive undertaking that focuses on developing a plan to improve a student's educational experience. Implications of the findings as they relate to previous research as well as recommendations for training and practice are discussed.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The General Context of the Inquiry

As we enter the 21st century, school classrooms are becoming increasingly more complex. Elementary teachers are currently faced with meeting the needs of students with a wide range of abilities. According to 2005-2006 statistics, school jurisdictions across Alberta identified up to 13% of the student population as disabled (Alberta Education, n.d.). The scope of disabilities ranges from mild hearing impairments to extensive developmental delays. The most recent statistics from Alberta Education (1993) show that more than 90% of Alberta students with special needs are placed in regular classrooms. The placement of exceptional students in regular classroom intensifies the teaching responsibilities of the classroom teacher. With the reality of inclusion, expectations of expertise and understanding of the needs of children with disabilities have increased dramatically (Canadian Psychological Association [CPA], 2007; Fish, 2002; Mureika, Falconer, & Howard, 2004). Not only are regular education teachers in an elementary classroom teaching specific grade curriculum to large classes, but they are also being asked to modify, adapt, and develop instruction for children with special needs, consistent with inclusion models (Alberta Education, 2006b; Bradley-Johnson, Johnson, & Jacob-Timm, 1995; Gutkin & Curtis, 1999). Regular education teachers play a fundamental role in the education of exceptional children. For the purpose of clarity throughout this dissertation, I will use *teacher* to identify regular education teachers who work in a general classroom setting. Defining the term will eliminate confusion over the position of special education teacher, a post that requires specific competencies in special

education beyond those of a regular education teacher (Bowd, McDougall, & Yewchuk, 1998).

With the advent of the inclusive classroom, regular education teachers are required to develop Individual Program Plans (IPP) for any child with a diagnosed disability (Alberta Education 2006b; Alberta Learning, 2004). An IPP must be based on assessment procedures and diagnostic information from a qualified individual (Alberta Education 2006b; Alberta Learning, 2004). Specific definitions of qualified individuals are outlined in Standards for Psycho-Educational Assessment (Alberta Education, 1994). The expectations for individuals who conduct psycho-educational assessments include a minimum of a master's degree from an appropriate faculty and qualification for provincial registration with the College of Alberta Psychologists. Notably, no specific expectations concerning training in school psychology or education are outlined, and therefore, in Alberta it cannot be assumed that a psychologist working in a school is a *school psychologist*. However, for the purpose of this study, any psychologist who works with students within the context of educational matters is referred to as a school psychologist.

Because of government requirements, teachers and school psychologists are placed in roles in which each professional has knowledge and expertise that are pivotal to the development of the IPP. The teacher is the primary author of the IPP and is responsible for classroom assessments, observations, implementation of educational strategies, and documentation of IPP reviews (Alberta Education 2006b; Alberta Learning, 2004). The school psychologist's function is to conduct specialized assessments and develop recommendations (Alberta Learning, 2004). The terminology

that labels the specialized assessment of a child varies. The terms *psychological assessment* and *psycho-educational assessment* have both been used in the literature without distinction. Within this dissertation I primarily use the term psycho-educational assessment unless another term has been specifically used in the research that I reviewed.

The psycho-educational assessment precedes the IPP. Ideally, the assessment procedures and diagnosis might guide the teacher in the development of the IPP, and the two professional roles could augment each other. Logically, it would seem that an effective assessment is an outcome that enables the teacher to productively program for the child's assessed learning strengths and needs. From a practical perspective, the information that a school psychologist provides in an assessment should guide the education of students with special needs (Gargiulo, 2003; Gutkin & Conoley, 1990). Teachers' perceptions of the relevance and, moreover, effectiveness of psycho-educational assessments may affect the implementation of appropriate interventions and, ultimately, the education of the children with diagnosed challenges. Therefore, the perspectives of teachers must be examined. Alternatively, what school psychologists perceive as beneficial will influence all aspects of the psycho-educational assessment process, and, consequently, their perspective must also be investigated. Thus, it was my intention to explore the perspectives of teachers and school psychologists concerning the psycho-educational assessment process, with specific emphasis on how they define effective psycho-educational assessment and the components (Kamphaus & Frick, 2002; Sattler, 1992, 2002, 2002) that they feel are crucial to an effectual process.

Teachers as Consumers, School Psychologists as Suppliers

Many stakeholders are involved in assessment and program planning for a child, and all may have different perspectives on psycho-educational assessments. Parents have the unique perspective of having only their child's lifetime interests as a focal point. School boards are affected by the findings of a psycho-educational assessment, particularly in terms of diagnostic placement, decisions, and hence, funding implications. Specialists, such as special education teachers, speech language pathologists, and school counselors who have an association with the child being assessed will also be interested in and may be affected by the outcomes of psycho-educational assessment. However, with the inclusion model that most schools follow, these specialists are not automatically involved. The two stakeholders who have the closest link with the practicalities involved in a psycho-educational assessment are the teacher and the school psychologist, and thus, they are the focus of this study.

Within the realm of psycho-educational assessment, the relationship between teachers and school psychologists has been depicted as similar to that between a consumer and a supplier (Brady, 1985; Evans & Wright, 1987; Fairchild & Seeley, 1996; Fairchild & Zins, 1992; Hagborg & Aiello-Coultier, 1994; Lentz & Shapiro, 1986; O'Hagan & Swanson, 1986; Ownby, 1990; Reschly & Grimes, 2002; Salvagno & Teglasi, 1987). It is surprising that there was no reference in the literature to a partnership association. In fact, Gutkin and Nemeth (1997) stated that the school psychology profession "has failed to devote sufficient attention to the team-based nature of its work and we would hypothesize that this has impeded significantly the ability of school psychologists to provide services for children" (p. 209). Furthermore, Schiappa,

Beaulieu, Wilczenski, and Bontrager (2000) suggested that school psychologists should shift from an expert model of interaction with teachers to a collaborative team model to increase their effectiveness. Curtis, Grier, and Hunley (2004) advocated for school psychology service that emphasizes collaboration with teachers as a means of responding to students' needs. Gutkin and Conoley (1990) acknowledged that

school psychologists are dependent on adult third parties, such as teachers, . . . to deliver their services. If these third parties do not act on school psychologists' recommendations in appropriate ways, their recommendations will have little if any positive impact on the children referred. (p. 210)

It is paramount that the psycho-educational assessment process influence the student in a positive manner. For this to occur, the recommendations that have been developed through the psycho-educational assessment must be functional for the teacher. The school psychologist as the supplier of the psycho-educational assessment may produce what is considered an excellent psycho-educational assessment based on professional standards and his or her perspective (Hughes, 1992). Such an assessment would incorporate appropriate assessment tools, an accurate written report, and a seemingly productive debriefing (Gutkin & Conoley, 1990; Kamphaus & Frick, 2002; Sattler, 1992, 2002). However, despite this, the teacher may still not find the report useful (Gutkin & Conoley, 1990). If the psycho-educational assessment does not affect a child's education in any way, several questions must be asked: Why are children being assessed? Is the goal of assessment to diagnose and obtain extra funding for a child? If so, why are teachers considered the primary consumers of assessments? Does diagnosing and funding equate to meeting the learning needs of a child? The problem appears to be a paradox and requires further examination.

Several researchers have recognized that teachers are the primary consumers of psycho-educational assessments (Brady, 1985; Evans & Wright, 1987; Fairchild & Seeley, 1996; Fairchild & Zins, 1992; Hagborg & Aiello-Coultier, 1994; Lentz & Shapiro, 1986; O'Hagan & Swanson, 1986; Ownby, 1990; Reschly & Grimes, 2002; Salvagno & Teglassi, 1987), and school psychologists as suppliers of psycho-educational assessment are endeavoring to influence teachers to enact their programming suggestions (Conoley & Gutkin, 1995; Gutkin & Conoley, 1990; Saklofske et al., 2000); therefore teachers' perceptions of the usefulness of those suggestions is key (Davidson & Simmons, 1991; Schiappa et al., 2000). Davidson and Simmons reported that teachers frequently indicated that the information that they receive from psycho-educational assessments is not workable and argued that it must become more meaningful to teachers. Schiappa et al. concurred that teachers have asserted that school psychologists do not understand the practical implications of teaching in regular classrooms. Determining what teachers perceive to be pertinent in a psycho-educational assessment is imperative: "Consumer feedback is essential when determining how well services have been delivered and how effective they were" (Fairchild & Seeley, 1996, p. 46). The teacher and school psychologist have a connection that is ultimately linked to the child. Teachers receive the psycho-educational assessment that school psychologists produce. School psychologists are the suppliers of psycho-educational assessments, and I will also examine their perspectives on what they produce and their perceptions of effectiveness. School psychologists have the expertise and knowledge to determine the content of a psycho-educational assessment, and from their perspective, what they perceive as effective will influence their product. Exploring and sharing school psychologists'

perceptions of what constitutes effective assessments may help educators to develop insights, and vice versa. The viewpoints of these two vital stakeholders must be explored to benefit the child and ultimately assist in creating the foundation for a positive working relationship. Should it not be expected that teachers will be able to utilize the information from school psychologists to meet some of the educational needs of assessed students? Furthermore, school psychologists could benefit from understanding what teachers require and what their priorities are. The awareness of each profession's perspectives may advance the value and significance of school psychology practice, with the hope that an effective team can develop in which both partners are respected for their unique expertise and knowledge.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this dissertation was to investigate teachers' and school psychologists' perspectives on what an effective psycho-educational assessment entails, to clarify what each profession values in the assessment process. This investigation is qualitatively based and utilized the basic interpretive qualitative approach (Merriam, 1998, 2002). I interviewed the participants in an attempt to gather their personal experiences with psycho-educational assessments. I queried them on their overall insights into the psycho-educational assessment process, their experience with a specific psycho-educational assessment and their personal opinions of how to improve psycho-educational assessment. The interviews focused on the assessment process, with specific emphasis on (a) the tests utilized, (b) the written report, and (c) the verbal dissemination of findings (debriefing). Within the construct of the assessment process, I also sought their perceptions on referral issues and recommendations. I explored implementation,

which is the action taken based on the process, in the context of the overall insights into psycho-educational assessment. Essentially, I asked the teachers and school psychologists to describe their perceptions of an effective psycho-educational assessment.

Overview of Chapters

This chapter positions this study within the general context of the psycho-educational assessment milieu. It creates the grounds for chapter two, an in-depth examination of relevant theories and research in the field of school psychology. In particular, it discusses the areas of school psychology and psycho-educational assessment and focus on the two key professionals involved—school psychologists and teachers. The third chapter presents the research methodology and method, and chapter four delineates the research findings, which reflect three main themes: (a) reflecting on the assessment process, (b) working as a team, and (c) comprehensive assessment—hoping to change lives. The final chapter discusses the findings in relation to the school psychology literature and highlights new insights. This chapter also lists recommendations for practice and suggests areas for further study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

To contextualize the perspectives of the focal professionals—namely, teachers and school psychologists—who have a vested interest in the assessment process, this literature review will explore an array of interrelated factors. First, I examine the theories that bear on the effectiveness and efficiency of the psycho-educational assessment process. Then, I describe the assessment process from the initial identification of its need to the final dissemination of its findings. Next, I review the research on the types of assessment tools and uses of assessment results, which I follow with a summary of the data on the actual and preferred role of school psychologists. Finally, I discuss the research on teachers' views of the psycho-educational assessment process. This review will establish that a qualitative investigation of teachers' and school psychologists' perspectives on the attributes of effective psycho-educational assessment was appropriate because it is the methodology that helped me to collect insightful perceptions.

The literature noted that little work has been done on the effectiveness of psycho-educational assessment in schools and that what has been done varies widely in quality (Andrews & Gutkin, 1994; Gutkin & Conoley, 1990; Gutkin & Nemeth, 1997; Knoff, Hines, & Kromrey, 1995). In particular, psycho-educational assessment research that incorporates data from teachers is exceedingly insufficient and dated (e.g., Brady, 1985; Davidson & Simmons, 1991; Hagborg & Aiello-Coultier, 1994; Salvagno & Teglassi, 1987; Wiener, 1985). The majority of the available research was completed well over a decade ago (Gilman & Gabriel, 2004). The gap in the research could reflect the movement in school psychology away from an assessment role towards a consultation

role (Guli, 2005; Reschly, 2000; Reschly & Wilson, 1995; Sheridan, Eagle, & Doll, 2006; Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000; Wilkinson, 2005; Zins & Erchul, 2002). Whatever the reason, this dissertation addresses this void in the literature.

Theories of Effectiveness

Discussion of selected established theories with regard to the effectiveness of psycho-educational assessment may provide insight into the parameters that are currently thought to influence the assessment process. School psychologists function in a social environment; they rely on their interpersonal skills to influence teachers' attitudes and perceptions (O'Keefe & Medway, 1997, Medway & Cafferty, 1999). Social psychology literature has some applicable theories on how school psychologists can become more effective in their occupation. Gutkin and Nemeth (1997) suggested that social psychology may "shed light on the approaches that might increase our [school psychologists] professional effectiveness" (p. 196). These theories provide some understanding of the interactions and relationships that are instrumental in the process of a psycho-educational assessment. The theory of social power (Raven, 1965), the elaboration likelihood model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) and the cognitive approach of perception model (Sears, Peplau, & Taylor, 1991) seem to be applicable frameworks. Subsequently, I briefly discuss each theory.

The Social Power Model

Erchul and Raven (1997) identified Raven's (1965) social power model, a modified version of French and Raven's (1959) original theory, as an applicable theory that may explain some of the interaction that takes place between a school psychologist and a teacher. Raven defined social power as the potential for influencing a person's

beliefs, attitudes, or behavior. His framework for social power consists of six bases:

(a) coercive power: perception of punishment if noncompliant, (b) reward power: ability and readiness to reward compliance, (c) legitimate power: structured power because of hierarchy, (d) expert power: possession of knowledge and expertise results in compliance, (e) referent power: compliance based on identification with field, and (f) information power: influence due to relevance of information. Raven defined power as potential influence and used his six bases to characterize how one individual may influence another.

Coercive, reward, and legitimate power bases are not applicable to the typical school psychologist/teacher relationship because each of these power bases assumes that a hierarchical structure exists that situates teachers in a position that is subservient to that of school psychologists (Martin, 1978). However, this is rarely the case because school psychologists usually hold staff or contracted positions (Brown, Gibson, & Bolen, 2000) that do not include supervisory duties. In Alberta, for example, a teacher is accountable to the school principal, who is accountable to the school board (Alberta Learning, 2002). Consequently, in most cases school psychologists are not in a position to wield coercive, reward, and legitimate power bases.

Martin (1978) described expert and referent power bases as opposing avenues of influence. Expert power relies on the school psychologist's superior expertise over that of the teacher. Compliance with suggestions is strictly centered on this principle. If a teacher comes to understand why a school psychologist's suggestions are effective, then the power base evolves into information power. Referent power is the influence that occurs when a teacher identifies himself or herself as being part of the same group as the school

psychologist. This identification can be facilitated if the school psychologist points out similarities between them. This power base suggests that teachers will “adopt opinions, attitudes, and behaviors similar to those [of] people with whom we [they] identify” (Raven, 1965, p. 374). Influence is contingent upon identification, not understanding. The first five bases of social power are believed to have minimal long-term effects on the behavior of a teacher because they are “socially dependent upon the influencing agent [the school psychologist]” (Erchul & Raven, 1997, p. 139).

In contrast, information power appears to have the most compelling link to the effectiveness of persuasion within the teacher–school psychologist relationship. This power base postulates that influence emerges as the result of understanding the information presented because the content of the message is useful and relevant to the situation. Essentially, the teacher chooses to follow the suggested course of action because he or she judges it as the most productive option. Information power is generally more permanent because it results in cognitive restructuring (Erchul & Raven, 1997; Raven, 1965). Information power relies on the strength of the message, whereas the other power bases depend on the characteristics of the school psychologist.

Examination of school psychologists’ and teachers’ perceptions of the effectiveness of each social power base’s ability to influence teachers has produced some insightful findings. Erchul, Raven, and Ray (2001) surveyed 101 school psychologists, and their results indicated that school psychologists view using information and expert power as the most effective approach for gaining teacher compliance. This study was followed up by research that examined both school psychologists’ and teachers’ perceptions of the effectiveness of each power base (Erchul, Raven, & Whichard, 2001).

Erchul, Raven, and Whichard surveyed 134 school psychologists and 118 teachers, and both professions rated information power as the most effective power base for school psychology consultation. Then Erchul, Raven, and Wilson (2004) explored 134 school psychologists' perceptions of the effectiveness of each power base to determine gender bias. Both male and female school psychologists rated information and expert power bases as more effective in making reluctant teachers comply with their requests. These findings suggest that school psychologists consistently perceive information and expert power bases as effective, whereas teachers favor information power.

In view of the findings of recent research, using information power to effectively interact and influence teachers seems to be the most viable base. The perceived effectiveness of information power needs to be examined further in light of any possible limitations. The information power base requires that school psychologists explain their findings to teachers. For teachers to comprehend the conclusions and recommendations presented, they must possess a certain level of background knowledge (Erchul & Raven, 1997). But if they lack this level of knowledge, their ability to understand school psychologists' findings may be limited. This power base is also grounded in the assumption that good recommendations result in compliance. This assumption does not take into account the vast number of factors that may play a role in the employment of recommendations in a classroom. In sum, this theory provides school psychologists with some guidance in presenting their findings to influence and create positive long-term change.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model

The elaboration likelihood model (ELM), a theory of attitude change (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), may further elucidate how effectiveness can be influenced in the psycho-educational assessment process. The ELM provides a framework for the antecedents and consequences of attitude change. Within this framework is a continuum of persuasion. At the high, more complex end of the continuum is the central process in which the consultee (teacher) is engaged in cognitive thought, contingent upon the consultee's ability and motivation to grasp information. In simplified terms, the consultee begins evaluating and analyzing the information. This action then instigates the process of integrating this new portion of knowledge into the existing schemata. This end of the continuum takes time as engaging the teacher in thought involves discussion and reflection between the two professionals. At the low end of the continuum is the peripheral process, which involves no restructuring or integrating of information but elicits a response that is a simplistic reaction that does not require contemplation, such as the identity or status of the source. Presentations or discussions that occur at this end of the continuum are time efficient because the suggestions are not queried, and the consultee does not have to take the time or make the effort to integrate information into professional schemata. Even though there is an efficiency advantage, this route is not as favored as the central route because its effect is considered short term (Petty, Heesacker, & Hughes, 1997).

Petty et al. (1997) reviewed the ELM and suggested that it may influence effective school psychological services; namely, consultation. Consultation in school psychology is the process of a school psychologist's providing assistance to a teacher

(Erchul & Martens, 1997; Mureika et al., 2004). Within the indirect service of consultation, the school psychologist does not work directly with the child. The school psychologist and the teacher have direct contact that may involve the school psychologist's offering suggestions and recommendations, but it is the teacher who will or will not enact the school psychologist's proposals, for it is the teacher who will work directly with the child. The situation that arises requires that the school psychologist persuade the teacher (consultee) to implement his or her recommendations (Conoley & Gutkin, 1995; Gutkin & Conoley, 1990; Saklofske et al., 2000). This persuasion focuses on effecting a change in attitude, behavior, and/or belief systems to correspond with the school psychologist's recommendations. The ELM proposes that the central process will result in a long-lasting persuasion because it involves cognitive restructuring. Strategies to engage a consultee in the central process include the use of nontechnical language and the presentation of arguments in a clear and concise manner. It is also critical that the school psychologist make the information personally relevant to the consultee and include a measure of consultee accountability in decisions, such as recommendations. A school psychologist's goal in consultation is favorable persuasion to encourage the teacher to enact the recommendations. Engaging the consultee cognitively in a discussion of potential problems has been suggested as an effective persuasive strategy. Such a technique allows the school psychologist to answer the consultee's concerns with appropriate responses. This model assumes that the recommendations are appropriate and useful in a classroom environment. Although this assumption may not always be accurate, this model does provide a forum for discussion and accentuates interaction between the school psychologist and the teacher. This forum allows the teacher to raise

concerns about the appropriateness of recommendations. Overall, the ELM compels the school psychologist to generate cognitive dissonance in the teacher and facilitates the discussion between the two professionals to bring about purposeful change.

Andrews and Gutkin's (1994) investigation of the ELM focused on how the variables of the model affect teachers' responses to psycho-educational reports. The researchers asked 88 student teachers to read one of eight versions of a psycho-educational report; the versions varied only in the recommendation section, which included strong or weak arguments for student placement. Their findings indicated that reports that included recommendations with a sound empirical and research context (strong arguments) influence teachers positively. In essence, recommendations based on facts rather than personal opinions are more effective. Andrews and Gutkin concluded that the ELM shows promise in increasing school psychologists' ability to influence teachers because it generates an understanding of how to formulate recommendations that teachers will value: "Consultant opinions, given directly or through reports, do not dictate what a teacher does. Rather, it is what the teacher makes of such opinions that determines how the child is then taught and with what degree of success" (Davidson & Simmons, 1991, p. 248). Fundamentally, ELM emphasizes the important roles of both professionals and demonstrates how school psychologists can engage teachers' thought processes through their presentation approach.

A Cognitive Model of Perception

The emphasis on the cognitive process of combining personal perceptions is the basis of social psychology (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Perceptions are the ways in which individuals respond to the stimuli that their senses pick up. In this context, the term

perception is described as the process of organizing the different senses' input into a meaningful gestalt (Lindesmith, Strauss, & Denzin, 1991). The teacher and the school psychologist actively perceive information from all senses and blend it into meaningful impressions.

Sears et al. (1991) summarized four general principles that influence perception and take into account the peripheral stimuli that may influence a perception. The first principle is the context of the situation. The teacher and the school psychologist perceive information exchanged/given in relation to the school environment, the child's situation, and their own individual personal circumstances. The language that they use is fundamental in terms of expressing individual contexts, styles of verbal interaction, and basic social protocol. Each factor plays a role in creating the context of the situation, and consequently, each case is unique.

The second principle addresses a chief feature of perception—attention. Individuals do not attend to all impressions equally; selected impressions are salient. Attention to the information given can be manipulated through the focus of the information and presentation style but cannot be controlled. Use of a sensitive term such as *mental retardation* may become a prominent cue that shapes a perception.

The third principle is the categorization of stimuli. The individual classifies the impression into a category. People are often categorized into stereotypes; consequently, the personal characteristics, ethnic background, or profession of the individual can lead to a categorization. This point is related to an individual's past experience and personal judgments.

The final principle relates to the organization of the cognitive concepts into a schema, which is the knowledge that teachers or school psychologists already have with respect to the personality, role, or expected behavior of the other. The expectation that this experience will be comparable to previous ones may direct the perception.

These four diverse principles may influence teachers' and school psychologists' perceptions of an effective assessment to various degrees, depending on each individual's previous experiences. Perceptions in turn create perspectives. Logically, the meaning (perception) that individuals gather from an event directly contributes to their experience (perspective). These principles may be considered within the context of the findings of my study, they may illuminate why an effective assessment can be perceived idiosyncratically.

Psycho-Educational Assessment

According to Deno (2005): "Assessment occurs when a decision has to be made and someone wants information to inform that decision" (p. 10). School psychologists are in the unique position of having considerable training and expertise in assessing children's cognitive and academic abilities (psycho-educational assessment), which thus, makes them indispensable in educational institutions (Canter, 1997; Hyman & Kaplinski, 1994; Merrell, Ervin, & Gimpel, 2006; Naglieri, 1996). Psycho-educational assessment is comprised of more than merely tests; it is a process that also involves a multifaceted approach of gathering, analyzing, and communicating information (Elliot, 1996; Merrell et al., 2006; Reschly & Grimes, 2002). Individuals gather information primarily through assessment tools that encompass but are not necessarily limited to norm-referenced tests, interviews, observations, and informal assessments (Sattler, 2001, 2002). Psycho-

educational assessments generally result in a diagnosis (Hyman & Kaplinski, 1994) that can help to secure funding (Alberta Education, 1996) and/or provide educational programming (Alberta Learning, 2000). The aims of conventional classroom assessments are the following: (a) to determine students' strengths and weaknesses, (b) to monitor students' progress, (c) to assign grades, and (d) to ascertain instructional effectiveness (Popham, 2005). Hence, teachers' typical assessment routines are very practical and connect continually to the daily necessities of the classroom, whereas school psychologists generally assess a child only once to address an identified concern. School psychologists and teachers appear to view assessment somewhat differently, and these views all contribute in one way or another to teachers' and school psychologists' perceptions of effectiveness. Subsequent sections will include a discussion of the medical model of assessment, expand on the specific elements of the psycho-educational assessment process, examine the types of assessment tools, and discuss the uses of psycho-educational assessments from the perspectives of both school psychologists and teachers.

The Medical Model of Psycho-Educational Assessment

The medical model of psycho-educational assessment, which Hyman and Kaplinski (1994) described as the traditional model, emphasizes (a) assessment, which is the use of tools to explore and analyze the challenge; (b) diagnosis, which is the label that names the challenge; and (c) remediation, which is comprised of the strategies used to support the student in solving or coping with the challenge. From the mailing list of the National Association of School Psychologists, Hyman and Kaplinski sent out 1,000 questionnaires to randomly selected members, 56% of whom responded. The results

revealed that 74% of responding school psychologists felt that the medical model presents a unique assessment role for themselves, and 57% felt that, given sufficient time and resources, the medical model could be effective. The school psychologists surveyed reported that the final component of the medical model, remediation, has generally not been given enough attention and is inadequate. This remediation component is applied in the classroom, and the researchers concluded that facilitating the results into educational strategies needs to be duly considered. The medical model closely resembles the assessment process typically applied in Canadian and, more specifically, Alberta schools (Alberta Learning, 2000; CPA, 1996, 2007; Saklofske, Schwean, Harrison, & Mureika, 2007; Saklofske et al., 2000).

The Psycho-Educational Assessment Process

The psycho-educational assessment process consists of the steps involved in constructing a psychological profile of a student's cognitive and academic abilities. These steps are fundamental in enacting a psycho-educational assessment (Kamphaus & Frick, 2002; Saklofske et al., 2000; Sattler, 2001, 2002) and provide a foundation for what is proposed as the standard procedure. Saklofske et al. stated that typical Canadian assessments

are designed to provide an in-depth understanding of the child's ability, achievement, and behavior. Specific recommendations for the child, teacher, and/or family will emanate from the assessment. Parent, child and teacher meetings to discuss the findings, recommendations, and plan of action are also part of the typical assessment process. (p. 333)

Devising a process establishes a somewhat consistent order of events that facilitates the roles and procedures within that process. From province to province in Canada there is little deviation from the process described above (CPA, 2007; Saklofske et al., 2000).

Shea's (1985) articulate description of the psycho-educational assessment process explains the practice via several sequential steps: (a) evaluating referral questions, (b) selecting assessment procedures, (c) administering tests, (d) scoring tests, (e) interpreting results, and (f) communicating results. Evaluation and clarification of the referral question is of significant importance because it is the referral question that guides the process. The referral question and the student's personal profile direct the selection of assessment tools. Whether they be tests, interviews, a review of the documentation, or any other combination of available assessment procedures, the purpose of the assessment process is to answer referral questions with as much pertinent information as possible. Administration of the tests that have been chosen requires that the examiner carefully follow guidelines. Scoring tests entails determining scores dependent upon responses and turning raw scores into standardized scores and other related measures, a task that can be laborious and time consuming. The mechanics of scoring are very sensitive to human error and therefore must be carefully monitored for accuracy. Three important questions are considered pivotal in interpreting the results: (a) Are these test scores valid? (b) What does the testing add to the understanding of the child? and (c) How should the referral question be answered? Answering these questions requires knowledge, expertise, and judgment. Written reports are the typical form of results communication, and effective communication is exemplified in a report that any reader can easily understand. Within this school-based report a clear picture of who the child is, why the assessment was performed, what was found, and the recommendations that were proposed should be apparent.

Shea (1985) described the psycho-educational assessment process in response to the stereotype of testing as school psychologists' one and only role. Her purpose was to generate the awareness that the assessment process goes beyond the technical aspects of testing and is key to enabling a school psychologist to develop an integrated portrait of a child. This aspiration of understanding suggests that school psychologists do not want to be implementers of tests; they want to be professionals who play an important role in the education of children (Deno, 2005; Elliot, 1996; Guest, 2000).

Knoff (1986) expanded upon the psycho-educational assessment process and included the element of the school psychologist's ability to interact with children and other consumers of assessment results. His amplification of the process initiates and highlights the dimensions of influence, persuasion, and interpersonal skills. Gutkin and Conoley (1990) originally characterized assessment as an indirect service. Although it is children whom school psychologists directly assess, it is teachers who primarily work with the assessed children in the classroom. Hence, in the assessment role the school psychologist must effectively work with the teacher to influence a child's educational experience (Gutkin & Curtis, 1999).

Types of Assessment Tools

The assessment tools are a vital component of the psycho-educational assessment process (Kamphaus & Frick, 2002; Sattler, 2001, 2002). Several types of tools can be employed to explore the learning profile of a child. Observations and interviews involve the subjective interpretation of interactions (Kamphaus & Frick, 2002; Sattler, 2001, 2002). Standardized, norm-referenced tests are considered the traditional types of assessment tools; they measure performance in a fixed format and compare the results

with a peer population (Kamphaus & Frick, 2002; Sattler, 2001). Curriculum-based measurement (CBM), curriculum-based assessment (CBA), and performance assessment (PA) are newer methods of evaluation that are being recommended as alternatives or supplementary modes of measurement to traditional tools (Elliott & Fuchs, 1997; Shapiro, Angello, & Eckert, 2004). These newer methods of evaluation include making “connections among curriculum, instruction and assessment” (Elliott & Fuchs, 1997, p. 224). The content of the assessment tool is based on the relevant curriculum, and progress is individually assessed by comparing previous and current achievement. The results from the evaluation indicate what has been achieved and what needs to be taught. The purpose of these newer methods of evaluation is twofold: to measure progress and to direct instruction (Bradley-Johnson et al., 1995; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1993; Shapiro et al., 2004). Shapiro et al. questioned why only 54% of school psychologists use some CBA despite the inclusion of graduate course curriculum on this topic in 90% of training institutions. They concluded: “CBA plays a much stronger role in the problem-solving process where assessment is more directly linked to intervention (p. 255). The suggestion that school psychologists utilize these alternative tools reinforces the need for psycho-educational assessment to be related to classroom curriculum and provide direction for teaching approaches. This relationship to the curriculum indicates a need for reciprocal communication between school psychologists and teachers.

In Eckert, Shapiro, and Lutz’s (1995) study, general and special education teachers evaluated the acceptability of two psycho-educational techniques—CBA and published, norm-referenced tests. The 224 teachers who participated in this study were required to read data from one of the two assessment models and fill out an acceptability

rating profile form. Overall, the teachers, whether they were special- or regular-education focused, rated CBA as highly acceptable—higher than published, norm-referenced tests. The results of the Eckert et al.'s study suggested that teachers value assessment strategies that use curriculum materials for testing, and they concluded that teachers' favorable view of CBA might directly benefit their participation in developing interventions based on such results. It is interesting to note that the researchers did not address the matter of teachers' familiarity with CBA. Teachers are trained in this assessment technique and regularly utilize it in classroom practice (Bowd et al., 1998).

Wilson and Reschly's (1996) analysis of a 1991-1992 national survey of 251 school psychologists determined the type of assessment instruments most often being utilized. The results of the survey identified structured observations as the number one assessment technique practiced. Structured observations consist of recording behaviors via a systematic method. The next in rank were a variety of standardized, norm-referenced tests. Achievement tests rounded out the top 10 instruments that school psychologists use. CBA and CBM were the least-utilized instruments; in fact, only 18% of school psychologists reported using them. Furthermore, merely 22% of school psychology programs provide training in these psycho-educational assessment instruments.

Unfortunately, there appears to be a discrepancy between the type of assessment that teachers value (alternative tools) and what school psychologists are providing (traditional tools). Encouraging results from Bahr's (1996) study established that school psychologists classified as reform minded are employing CBA; moreover, these school psychologists have indicated a desire to increase their utilization of CBA. In this study,

reform-minded school psychologists spent more time on therapy and conducted 25 or fewer new assessments per year, substantially different from their peers, who completed over 100 assessments per year. This criterion suggests that reform-minded school psychologists have significantly different job descriptions that may be influencing their assessment practices.

Uses of Psycho-Educational Assessment

The next logical step in the exploration of effective psycho-educational assessments is to determine how they are employed. Davidson and Simmons (1991) surveyed 130 teachers and found that they perceived psycho-educational assessments as having two functions. First, the teachers considered psycho-educational assessments in very practical terms, and the majority rated programming as the primary goal. The secondary goal that they identified was placement, which generally refers to location and/or funding requirements. Davidson and Simmons emphasized that teachers are looking for educational support in the form of workable recommendations that will enable them to assist children. Even though teachers have prioritized education strategies as the most important goal of psycho-educational assessments, Reschly and Grimes (2002) reported that placement is the most predominant *use* of assessment results. Sheridan and McCurdy (2005) concurred: “The degree to which the assessment methods inform service delivery within these settings [classrooms] is often secondary to the placement decision” (p. 44). Furthermore, Reschly (1997) had previously affirmed that assessments, specifically IQ tests, provide access to special-education funding and services, but the results are generally not translated into classroom interventions. Gutkin and Curtis (1999) concurred that this type of assessment purpose results in limited impact

on the child's functioning. Their statements seem to indicate that the school-district requirement—placement—is the principal purpose of assessment. Therefore, what teachers want from assessments and what assessments are actually used for do not coincide. The question that emerges is, Do programming and placement decisions conflict with each other, or can both uses be satisfied with the same psycho-educational assessment? Rosenfield and Nelson (1995) contended that both objectives can be met by linking assessment results to classroom intervention by using authentic assessment tools (CBA, CBM, and PA) in conjunction with teachers' contributions. Alberta Learning's (2000) provincewide review of special education services identified the issue succinctly from the perspective of education stakeholders: "When assessments are required, they should be conducted for the purpose of providing information for teaching and learning, and for developing appropriate education programs and individualized program plans—not to code students or procure funding" (p. 22).

Deno (2002, 2005) proposed that the purpose or use of psycho-educational service is problem solving. He explained within the broad context of problem solving that assessment is an essential component and should be a process of gathering information to solve a problem (referral question): "To view the function of assessment as contributing to problem-solving helps to develop the rationale for the heavy emphasis given to assessment procedures in school psychology" (Deno, 2002, p. 39). Merrell et al. (2006) concurred with the notion of "assessment as a problem-solving process" (p. 181). This process emphasizes assessment that determines a student's current level of functioning (academic, behavioral) and his or her potential level of functioning. The goal is to devise interventions to assist students in reaching their potential. Problem-solving assessment is

“directly linked to intervention” (p. 181); conversely, in traditional assessment “the goal is typically to make a diagnostic decision” (p. 181). This recommended reconceptualization of assessment linked to intervention may be more amenable to school psychologists as well as respond to teachers’ requests for programming plans (Davidson & Simmons, 1991).

In addition to the different uses that teachers and school districts have for psycho-educational assessments, Gutkin and Conoley (1990) identified compounding factors in the application of teachers’ psycho-educational assessment recommendations:

(a) teachers’ perceptions of the quality of recommendations, (b) teachers’ motivation, (c) whether teachers want the child to remain in their classes, (d) teachers’ ability to translate recommendations into actual behavior, (e) teachers’ interpersonal relationships with school psychologists, and (f) professional demands. Hence, even if the recommendations are workable, a variety of circumstances may interfere with their application. Once again, it is apparent that it is important for school psychologists not only to produce valid and reliable assessment results, but also to influence teachers’ behavior (Conoley & Gutkin, 1995; Gutkin & Conoley, 1990; Saklofske et al., 2000). Very little is known about how psycho-educational assessment results, either verbal or written, influence teachers’ perceptions and potential ensuing behaviors (Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000). It is also notable that how teachers influence school psychologists’ behavior has never been examined. Hence, one of the primary goals of this study was to investigate experiences from the perspectives of both professionals.

The Role of School Psychologists

The role of the school psychologist has been a topic of considerable debate (Bramlett, Murphy, Johnson, Wallingsford, & Hall, 2002; Curtis et al., 2004; Fagan & Wise, 2000; Graden, 2004; Reschly, 2000; Reschly & Wilson, 1995). There are conflicting perspectives on (a) what school psychologists are doing, (b) what school psychologists want to be doing, and (c) what the consumers of psychological services want school psychologists to be doing.

Two surveys in 2002 revealed that school psychologists spent over half of their time doing psycho-educational assessments and that they spent the other half in other functions, such as consultation, interventions, counseling, conferencing, and research (Bramlett et al., 2002; Hosp & Reschly, 2002). This result is consistent with the findings of past research (Fagan & Wise, 2000; Hutton & Dubes, 1992; Hyman & Kaplinski, 1994; Reschly, 2000; Reschly & Wilson, 1995). In Reschly and Wilson's extensive survey of 1,089 school psychologists, they reported that 50% of school psychologists spent more than 75% of their time in special education-dominated service. The results also revealed that school psychologists' preferred role was considerably different from their current role. They advocated for a future goal of reducing assessment to about a third and increasing the time spent on direct and problem-solving interventions. These changes would be a significant transformation in their job description. Hyman and Kaplinski warned their colleagues in school psychology that "the loss of our assessment role places our very jobs in jeopardy. Assessment is the core contribution that got us into schools, has kept us there and allows us to expand into other roles" (p. 13). Reschly concurred and added that special education legislation and funding are fundamental to the

upsurge in school psychology employment. Nonetheless, given that school psychologists spend the majority of their time in the assessment role assisting in special education services, does it not seem logical that the effectiveness of this work needs to be examined?

Gilman and Gabriel (2004) surveyed 87 school psychologists, 1,533 teachers, and 90 administrators to gather their perceptions of the role and function of school psychology services. Their results indicated that teachers and administrators want school psychologists to undertake more assessment responsibilities in addition to expanding their role as consultants to teachers. However, the majority of the school psychologists felt that their assessment and consultation responsibilities should remain the same but that their counseling time and work with parents should be increased. These findings are consistent with those of past research. Teachers and school psychologists have contradictory views on the role and function of the school psychologist. School administrators and teachers consider assessment duties the primary role of school psychologists (Evans & Wright, 1987; Franklin & Duley, 2002; Hagemeyer, Bischoff, Jacobs, & Osmon, 1998; O'Hagan & Swanson, 1986; Peterson, Waldron, & Paulson, 1998). School psychologists have another perspective of their role. O'Hagan and Swanson (1983, 1986) surveyed teachers and school psychologists through a questionnaire that sought their opinions on the role of school psychologists. They found that school psychologists saw themselves as agents of change in education, whereas teachers saw their role as assessing and placing students: "The service roles claimed by the psychologists were out of step with the expectations of the school" (O'Hagan & Swanson, 1986, p. 12). These two roles do not have to be mutually exclusive. While

fulfilling the special education requirements of testing and placing students, school psychologists are also in the distinctive position of being able to observe the pattern of needs in schools to enable them to identify areas that can be enhanced and then provide that enhancement. O'Hagan and Swanson (1983, 1986) also reported that teachers did not agree with school psychologists' assertion of superior special education knowledge. Peterson et al. (1998) indicated that teachers do not understand the potential roles of school psychologists and promptly classify them as assessors. Additionally, they found that teachers do not readily confer with school psychologists for educational advice, which thus reiterates the differing perceptions of the role and expertise of the school psychologist.

It has been established that the majority of school psychologists' time is spent in assessment activities in accordance with teachers' desires, but instead of concentrating on improving the effectiveness of this aspect of their position, school psychologists want a change. It is puzzling why the school psychology profession is advocating for this change in role. It seems logical that school psychologists could expand their current role of assessment to include follow-up consultation. This suggested expansion could facilitate teachers' understanding of school psychologists' expertise and potential roles.

General Effectiveness of Psycho-Educational Assessment

I have reviewed many aspects of psycho-educational assessments; it is now fitting that I examine the research pertaining to the effectiveness of psycho-educational assessments. Davidson and Simmons (1991) surveyed 130 teachers through an open-ended questionnaire. The data collection took place over 18 months via graduate programs and teachers' conventions. The most crucial question that it asked was, Is the

assessment process typically productive? Teachers responded equally with a direct response of “No” and a favorable conditional response of “Yes, but” Elaboration on the negative and conditional answers included concerns with assessors’ lack of understanding of the school environment, a scarcity of practical recommendations, and the apparent frustration and resignation over the perceived uselessness of psychological services.

Brady (1985) published contrary results in an isolated study that evaluated 73 elementary teachers’ satisfaction with psychological service through a questionnaire to obtain case-specific information. Brady categorized psychological services under five headings: contact before assessment, assessment and diagnosis, written and oral communication, recommendations and interventions, and personal and professional variables. The results indicated a high level of satisfaction with the services, the main concerns being the time lags between referral and assessment and the availability of school psychologists. This study was unique because it examined each teacher’s recent experience with a specific case rather than reflecting on their overall impressions of psychological services. Brady suggested that this case study method may be more accurate because teachers were required to focus on their appraisal of identifiable components of psychological services.

Adding to the complexity of determining what constitutes effective psycho-educational assessment is Clandinin and Connolly’s (1996) research, in which they asserted that teachers’ professional knowledge shapes effective teaching. Therefore, it may be assumed that teachers will determine what will work effectively in their classrooms. This is the premise of personal practical knowledge that Clandinin (1985)

examined: The knowledge that teachers bring to their classrooms is “connected with the personal and professional narratives of [their] lives”(p. 383). Consequently, this may imply that teachers will determine the impact of the psycho-educational assessment from their personal practical knowledge regardless of the school psychologist’s contribution. This insight may also suggest that school psychologists have no avenue to influence classroom practice. But, from a more optimistic angle, perhaps it indicates that school psychologists need to build relationships with teachers in an attempt to become a part of teachers’ professional narratives.

The findings from Fairchild and Zins’ (1992) survey offer supplementary insight into the effectiveness issue from another standpoint. They found that 67% of practicing school psychologists collected accountability data, which are the pieces of information (e.g., the number of assessments completed) that determine the adequacy of job performance. Of the accountability data collected, only 37% applied to the process of the service. Fairchild and Zins described the process data as the information that pertains to consumer satisfaction. They expressed the concern that school psychologists are complacent as a result of their unique ability to administer IQ tests and are indifferent to their effectiveness from the consumer’s perspective. This complacency may also reflect school psychologists’ ignorance of the social aspects of their position; specifically, that their role involves a social relationship with teachers (Conoley & Gutkin, 1995; Erchul & Martens, 1997; Erchul & Raven, 1997; Gutkin & Conoley, 1990; Medway & Cafferty, 1999; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). As a result of Fairchild and Seeley’s (1996) findings, they advocated for accountability procedures to shape the practice of school psychology. Swerdlik and French (2000) acknowledged that, as psychological services evolve in the

21st century, there will be a need for individual school psychologists to assume responsibility for assessing their effectiveness. This information suggests that school psychologists need to examine their attitude towards consumer satisfaction.

Written-Report Effectiveness

Two avenues that school psychologists utilize to share the results of a psycho-educational assessment are reports and debriefings. Reports are a somewhat permanent approach to conveying information derived from a psycho-educational assessment (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Kamphaus & Frick, 2002; Ownby, 1997; Sattler, 2001, 2002; Wiener, 1985). The psycho-educational report is a written document that records the assessment and “is one of the primary vehicles available to school psychologists for influencing educational personnel” (Andrews & Gutkin, 1994, p. 322). The report is generally kept in school records and is read by most professionals who are involved with the child. Students with exceptionalities tend to collect an immense number of written reports of varying degrees of comprehensibility and length (Davidson & Simmons, 1991; Wiener, 1985) that may have a significant impact on how the child is perceived. In fact, for a considerable amount of time these reports may direct the education services that the child receives or alternatively have no impact at all.

Davidson and Simmons (1991) examined teachers’ perceptions of written reports and found that “the type of assessment conducted and the information provided was routinely described as irrelevant and not useful for class practice” (p. 249). Teachers in this previously mentioned study commented that their purpose in having a child assessed was to get a picture of a child in terms of strengths and weaknesses and to identify problems to assist in developing programs. They were generally unsatisfied with the

report's ability to help them. Suggestions for assessment improvement included classroom observation and informal collaborative assessment, as well as the use of language and strategies that relate directly to the classroom and curriculum.

Wiener's (1985) landmark study of teachers' comprehension of various report formats is, unfortunately, an isolated publication that has not been replicated. She asked 81 teachers to read one of three report formats and to respond to a questionnaire to assess their comprehension of the information presented. Her research determined that teachers most effectively understand reports that include the following variables: (a) organization in terms of functional domain, (b) behavioral descriptions of strengths and weaknesses, (c) detailed depiction of the child's learning style, (d) detailed and workable recommendations, (e) explicit answers to the referral question, and (f) a longer, comprehensive report. Weiner outlined some very specific variables that do not appear to have been incorporated into the content of subsequently written psycho-educational assessment reports (Davidson & Simmons, 1991; Salvagno & Teglasi, 1987).

Salvagno and Teglasi (1987) investigated 160 teachers' perceptions of information presented in psycho-educational reports. They found that teachers favored interpretations and implications of the results above the factual findings. They rated recommendations that impart detailed guidelines and can be easily implemented as helpful. Ownby (1990) argued for reports that include expository writing that describes in detail all aspects on which psychologists have commented. He explored the rating of statements that characterize school psychologists' expository and nonexpository information and reported that the participants rated statements that show quantitative results and explain the meanings of those results as more credible and persuasive. These

research findings indicated that there is some consensus between the two professions on the need to write in a style that clearly and descriptively links results with conclusions and recommendations.

Through a questionnaire attached to reports, Hagborg and Aiello-Coultier's (1994) study explored teachers' perceptions of school psychologists' assessment documentation. Overall, they found that the majority of teachers rated the reports favorably and indicated that they liked the traditional report format. These findings have limited generalizability because only two school psychologists participated, and merely 28% of the teachers responded. Hagborg and Aiello-Coultier acknowledged this limitation and tempered their findings with the comment, "Many teachers did not value the reports enough to read them" (p. 176). Their findings suggest that teachers who are interested enough in psycho-educational reports to respond to the survey value the reports. But very few teachers responded to the survey, which possibly suggests that the majority of teachers do not deem psycho-educational reports beneficial. They also reported that some teachers do not even request copies of reports, and thus, they never read them. Another interpretation of these occurrences may reflect teachers' workloads and/or the demands of inclusion. Either way, this research does not clarify the issue of the degree to which teachers value written psycho-educational reports because the findings are ambiguous.

Assessment-Conference Effectiveness

The last component of the assessment process to be discussed is the debriefing: "It may be more appropriate to give recommendations to teachers verbally as part of a post assessment consultation, where information can be clarified and examples given. . . .

Written recommendations don't appear to be the best way to communicate with the teacher" (Salvagno & Teglasi, 1987, p. 422). Remarkably, I was not able to find any studies that pertained directly to the verbal dissemination of findings (debriefing) from a psycho-educational assessment, and therefore, through searches on school consultation, I examined the literature that is most relevant to the verbal interaction between a school psychologist and consultees. Verbal dissemination of the results generally involves the school psychologist, the parent(s), and the teacher(s). The meeting provides an opportunity to discuss the findings and plan for future interventions. The school psychologist's ability to interact with adults and relate his or her interpretation of the results is an important aspect of this component of the psycho-educational assessment process (Conoley & Gutkin, 1995; Gutkin & Conoley, 1990).

In 1986, Gutkin studied the perceptions of teachers (consultees) on the consultation experience over a period of 14 weeks in 24 different schools. He collected data from 191 teachers over a six-year period and asked them to fill out a Consultation Feedback Questionnaire. The Consultation Feedback Questionnaire provides school psychologists with constructive comments to assist them in improving their consultation skills. The results indicated that consultees' satisfaction with the remedial programs generated is closely related to the enthusiasm of the school psychologist. As well, teachers' understanding of the consultation process positively influences the achievement of the consultation goal. Most important, Gutkin reported that consultees have a strong desire to be active in the development of recommendations or treatment plans. In subsequent research, Gutkin (1996) analyzed the communication patterns of 41 school psychologist-teacher dyads and reported that indices of effectiveness are related to

“consultation [that] is more akin to a partnership in which both members have important leadership roles to perform, some of which are held jointly and others of which are unique to the individual partners” (p. 217). Both studies indicated that both teacher and school psychologist participation is important in developing and maintaining an effective working relationship.

Hughes and DeForest (1993) analyzed the consultation interview transcripts of 17 school psychologist–teacher dyads. They coded transcripts to ascertain the school psychologists’ verbalization categories. Hughes and DeForest then evaluated the coded transcripts in comparison to consultees’ reported perceptions of consultation outcomes that had been reported via another tool, a questionnaire. School psychologists were viewed as more effective if they had good interpersonal and problem-solving skills. Controlling verbalization on the part of the school psychologist was perceived as detrimental to a positive outcome. Hughes, Erchul, Yoon, Jackson, and Henington (1997) investigated effective consultation practices, and their results indicated that school psychologists who ask teachers to share their opinions and insights are perceived positively. Wilkinson (2005) evaluated the effectiveness of the conjoint behavioral consultation (CBC) from the perspectives of teachers and parents. Both consultees indicated satisfaction with the collaborative approach and joint problem solving focus. These results lend credibility to the effectiveness of a relationship that is team based.

Knoff and colleagues (Knoff, Hines & Kromrey, 1995; Knoff, McKenna, & Riser, 1991; Knoff, Sullivan, & Lui, 1995) recognized that there is a need to identify and empirically validate the characteristics and skills of an effective school psychologist consultant. Their goals were “not only to make consultation accountable to all consultees

and clients, but also to ensure that it is successful, efficient and impactful” (Knoff et al., 1991, p. 8). To attain these goals, Knoff led a team of researchers (Knoff et al., 1991), who developed a school consultant effectiveness scale, to investigate the characteristics and behaviors of effective consultants as perceived by classroom teachers. The first stage was to establish a list of effective consultant attributes from a review of the literature on consultation and interviews with experienced school psychology practitioners. The researchers then sent this version of the scale to school psychologists and experts in school psychology for their input.

In the second study, Knoff, Sullivan, and Lui (1995) examined the perceptions of 324 teachers in response to the scale. They asked the teachers to respond to the attributes and rated their importance in effective school psychological consultation. Finalization of the scale consisted of analyzing the results from the first two research studies and refining the scale. The purpose of this final study (Knoff, Hines, & Kromrey, 1995) was to demonstrate the scale’s ability to discriminate between effective and ineffective attribute items. The researchers asked 225 school psychologists to respond to the scale’s items by indicating the most or least effective attributes. They concluded that the consultant effectiveness scale could reliably be used to identify the behaviors and characteristics of an effective consultant and elaborate on effective consultation. Knoff and his research team anticipated that the scale would be used to advance the understanding of consultation; however there has been no research published yet that investigates the use of the scale. But the development of the scale indicates the need to consider teachers’ perspectives in determining consultation effectiveness. The limitation of the use of this scale is that teachers were never involved in the initial development of the attributes of an

effective consultant; they were involved only in reducing the number of attributes. This dissertation addresses the issue of effectiveness without presupposed attributes. I used a qualitative approach with open-ended questions to ask teachers and school psychologists to describe effectiveness from their perspectives.

Rationale for the Study

In education today, psycho-educational assessments are an essential part of the diagnosis, funding, and programming for children with special needs (Alberta Education, 2006b; Alberta Learning, 2004, 2000; Dworet & Bennett, 2002; Saklofske et al., 2000). Because of special-services protocol, students with special needs require coding based on formal assessment to qualify for specialized services and funding (Alberta Education, 2004, 2006b). This requirement contributes to the demand for assessment services. As a result, many school districts are contracting services. Consequently, there are two distinct employment categories for school psychologists: permanently employed and temporarily contracted (Brown et al., 2000; Fagan & Wise, 1994). After a request is received, a typical assessment process consists of three main elements (a) the implementation of a battery of assessment tools, (b) a written report, and (c) a debriefing (Kamphaus & Frick, 2002; Sattler, 2001). In this chapter I have noted that the assessment tools that teachers' value (Eckert et al., 1995) and those that school psychologists utilize (Wilson & Reschly, 1996) do not necessarily correspond. Davidson and Simmons (1991) have also reported that, from a teacher's perspective, written reports are generally not beneficial. The debriefing component has never been studied within the context of a psycho-educational assessment; therefore, the only findings that can be examined in this area come from the consultation literature, which revealed that teachers' perceive the process more positively

when they are actively involved in the discussion (Gutkin, 1986, 1996; Hughes & DeForest, 1993; Hughes et al., 1997). A few studies have addressed the productivity of the psycho-educational assessment process from the teacher's perspective (Brady, 1985; Davidson & Simmons, 1991; Hagborg & Aiello-Coultier, 1994; Salvagno & Tegiasi, 1987; Wiener, 1985). The general consensus from these studies is that teachers have mixed opinions about the usefulness of the information that they receive from school psychologists through the psycho-educational assessment process (Brady, 1985; Davidson & Simmons, 1991; Evans & Wright, 1987; Hagborg & Aiello-Coultier, 1994; Hagborg & Aiello-Coultier, 1994; O'Hagan & Swanson, 1983; Ownby, 1990; Salvagno & Tegasi, 1987; Weiner, 1985). Nevertheless, all three elements have never been analyzed in their entirety, and furthermore, teachers and school psychologists have never been asked to identify which attributes within each of the three elements they see as effective. I will attempt to address all of these components in the current study.

K. Boschman (personal communication, June 18, 2002), a Director of Special Education for a large Alberta school district, stated that, currently, a significant amount of money is allocated to school district budgets for psycho-educational assessments, and an abundant number of psycho-educational assessments are being completed (CPA, 2007). Ideally, from an educational perspective, these psycho-educational assessments should result in an improved learning experience for those assessed, which may include, but is not limited to, specific instructional strategies, a particular classroom program, technical supports, additional personnel, and academic and/or social development. However, for students to benefit from a psycho-educational assessment, teachers must be able to employ the information gathered from the assessment process to enhance a student's

school experience. Zins and Elias (2006) defined effective school psychology assistance as the positive impact of services on a child's educational and mental health development. Hence, with an effective psycho-educational assessment, the teacher can influence the child's education affirmatively. With this dissertation I endeavor to answer the call in the literature for applied and qualitative research that reflects the field experiences in school psychology (Bramlett et al., 2002; Kratochwill & Stoiber, 2000; Swerdlik & French, 2000). The development of a body of research that explores what teachers and school psychologists identify as useful components of psycho-educational assessment may assist in improving the schooling experience. Perhaps the findings will provide insight into the experiences of both professional groups and develop a foundation of appreciation. I hope that the results will also contribute to guidelines for school districts in outlining psycho-educational assessment expectations for school psychologists and teachers. In turn, these guidelines may facilitate communication between teachers and school psychologists and thus, foster a team relationship.

Intent of the Study

Upon reflection, I realize that the literature has shown that the effectiveness of psycho-educational assessment is important to teachers *and* school psychologists. Teachers use psycho-educational assessment results to help plan appropriate programs (Davidson & Simmons, 1991; Rosenfeld & Nelson, 1995; Sattler, 2001, 2002), and school psychologists are recognizing that they must work with teachers to make psycho-educational assessments more effective (Eckert & Arbolino, 2005; Gutkin & Conoley, 1990; Knoff, Hines & Kromrey, 1995; Knoff et al., 1991; Knoff, Sullivan, & Lui, 1995). Research has measured the preconceived attributes of an effective psycho-educational

assessment (Brady, 1985; Davidson & Simmons, 1991; Fairchild & Zins, 1992; Gutkin, 1986, 1996; Hagborg & Aiello-Coultier, 1994; Hughes & DeForest, 1993; Hughes et al., 1997; Knoff, Hines & Kromrey, 1995; Knoff et al., 1991; Knoff, Sullivan, & Lui, 1995; Salvagno & Teglasi, 1987; Wiener, 1985). The medical model that I have discussed is the traditional model employed in assessment, and its use in practice has historically emphasized assessment and diagnosis (Hyman & Kaplinski, 1994). Perhaps what both professions are really seeking is to expand on assessment and diagnostic labeling to include an emphasis on interventions; teachers feel that they need workable recommendations (Davidson & Simmons, 1991), and school psychologists desire to be more than just assessors (Elliot, 1996; Guest, 2000). Expansion of the scope of the psycho-educational assessment process may necessitate substantial change in the current infrastructure in most schools.

In this study I asked teachers and school psychologists the following question: What are the attributes/components of an effective psycho-educational assessment? These professionals did not rate the attributes through a questionnaire, which was the principal data-collection tool utilized in the studies that I have examined in this literature review. I interviewed the participants and queried them on their experiences with the psycho-educational assessment process. I hope that this study answers Gutkin and Conoley's (1990) pleas of 17 years ago that school psycho-educational assessment research be broadened to investigate how assessment results can be structured and presented to sufficiently impact on the behavior of those to whom these results are reported. There are no instances of teachers' and school psychologists' having been asked in qualitative interviews what they find effective, and this research reveals aspects of

effectiveness that have never been considered before. The theories that I discuss offer some explanation of what may influence a teacher's perceptions and attitudes as well as how school psychologists can influence teachers, but the theories do not directly examine the attributes of effectiveness. All in all, teachers' and school psychologists' perceptions of effective psycho-educational assessment are pivotal to the education and development of the student who is assessed; hence, it was necessary to explore them.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

Methodology

Bogdan and Biklen (1998) defined *methodology* as a “generic term that refers to the general logic and theoretical perspective for a research project” (p. 31). I used the qualitative paradigm in this study to “understand . . . a process” (Merriam, 1998, p. 11)—psycho-educational assessment. Merriam’s (1998, 2002) basic interpretive qualitative approach examines “how participants make meaning of a situation or a phenomenon” (Merriam, 2002, p. 6). This approach describes a phenomenon from the perspectives of the people involved. Researchers collect data through interviews and analyze them to identify recurring themes, which results in a descriptive account of the findings. I selected the basic interpretive qualitative approach because it reflects the purpose of this study, which was to explore teachers’ and school psychologists’ perceptions of the psycho-educational assessment process. This investigation focused on the question, What are the attributes of an effective psycho-educational assessment as ascertained by teachers and school psychologists?

Method

Bogdan and Biklen (1998) defined *method* as “a term that refers to the specific techniques you use, . . . the more technical aspects of research” (p. 31). The first technique that I used in this study was the strategy of purposeful sampling to select the participants (Patton, 1990). I accomplished this goal with the use of demographic data forms (Appendixes D and E) to select appropriate school psychologists and teachers, respectively. I then interviewed the selected participants using a standardized, open-

ended design (Patton, 1990) to investigate their perceptions of psycho-educational assessment.

Participant Selection

I purposely selected the participants from the two key groups of professionals—school psychologists and general classroom teachers—based on their ability to shed light on the phenomenon of interest, effective psycho-educational assessment (Meadows & Morse, 2001; Patton, 1990). The process of selection from each profession follows.

I approached two school districts to obtain permission to carry out research within their jurisdictions, and both agreed. This process included a personal presentation to senior special education administrators to review the dissertation proposal and ethical considerations as well as a summary of the research proposal for the school board and potential participants (Appendix A). After I obtained permission, I pursued two courses of action to seek participation from the two professional groups of school psychologists and teachers.

The district's special education senior administrator helped me to secure the participation of its school psychologists (Table 1). He or she contacted the school psychologists and forwarded the research proposal summary to them (Appendix A). As they agreed to participate, the district's special education senior administrator forwarded contact information to me, and I contacted each individually. The school district's special education senior administrators facilitated the participation of both their employees and contracted school psychologists, and I contacted the school psychologists by phone to review the proposal and ethical considerations. We discussed the letter of consent

Table 1

School-Psychologist Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Years of experience as a school psychologist	Undergraduate degree(s)	Graduate degree(s)	Employment parameters	# of psycho-educational assessments completed per year
Zena	Over 46	10	BA, Social Psychology BEd, English	MSc, Psychology	School district employee	40
Ruby	Between 26 & 35	5	BSc, Psychology BEd	MA, School Psychology	School district employee	50
Guy	Over 46	20	BA, Psychology	MSc, Psychology	School district employee	120
Jane	Between 26 & 35	3	BEd, English	MSc, Educational Psychology	Private contractor	90
Brent	Between 36 & 45	6	BA, Psychology	MEd, Educational Psychology PhD, Educational Psychology	Private contractor	300
Chantal	Over 46	5	BA, English BEd, Secondary	MEd, Special Education PhD, Special Education	Private contractor	60
Kurt	Between 26 & 35	2	BA, Psychology	MEd, School Psychology, Education Measurement, & Evaluation	Private contractor	294

(Appendix B) and the demographic data form (Appendix D), and I gave copies of each to the school psychologists either by fax or at the interview.

I examined both district-employed and -contracted school psychologists' perceptions. My purpose in including school psychologists from these two employment

statuses was to account for variations that may impact on the effectiveness of psycho-educational assessment and discover commonalities within this variation. This maximum variation sampling strategy, according to Patton (1990), looks for “information that elucidates programmatic variation and significant common patterns within that variation” (p. 172). The criterion sampling strategy (Patton, 1990) determined the inclusion of school psychologists in the purposeful sample (Patton, 1990). This criterion was comprised of registration status in Alberta and completion of at least 30 school-based psycho-educational assessments in the previous year. I interviewed seven school psychologists who encompassed three district employees and four contracted school psychologists.

The district special education senior administrators also facilitated the teachers’ participation. I gave them a copy of the research proposal summary (Appendix A), the demographic data form (Appendix E), and the letter of consent (Appendix C) for review with the generalist teaching staff. I then received the contact information for teachers who were willing to participate, and the demographic data forms and letters of consent were either faxed to me or collected at the interview. I conducted four teacher interviews through this process.

I selected three other teacher participants through chain sampling. I asked the school teaching staff, “Who has good insight into psycho-educational assessment?” I contacted three recommended teachers and gave them the research proposal summary (Appendix A), the demographic data form (Appendix E), and the letter of consent (Appendix C). They agreed to participate, and the demographic data forms and letters of consent were either faxed to me or collected at the interview.

I selected the teacher participants (Table 2) according to the criteria outlined on the demographic data form (Appendix E). This criterion sampling strategy (Patton, 1990) helped me to select teachers by determining their status as generalists and confirming that they had completed a psycho-educational assessment for one of their students within the past six months. I interviewed seven participants, all but two of whom were from different schools, and all of whom were generalists—teachers with less than three special education courses who teach the majority of the curriculum to a specific group of students. My reason for seeking generalist teachers' perspectives on the effectiveness of psycho-educational assessments is tied to the inclusion philosophy that currently seems to be dominant in schools. In broad terms, inclusion is the physical placement of students with special needs in a regular classroom. The reality of this philosophy is that teachers with little or no training in special education are the primary educators of students with special challenges. Hence, it was imperative that I explore this group of teachers' insights into the effectiveness of psycho-educational assessment.

Interview Process

I used a standardized, open-ended interview to gather perceptions. Patton (1990) framed this approach as a highly focused interview that minimizes interviewer effects with the use of a carefully constructed interview guide that consists of questions in a specific order for the purpose of eliciting the interviewees' perceptions in their own terms. This minimizes the possibility that the researcher's response to given answers will influence forthcoming answers.

Table 2

Teacher Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Years of teaching experience	Grade currently teaching	School setting and population	# of students assessed per year
Tessa	Over 46	18	6	Urban 450	2-3
Bob	Over 46	25	8 and 9	Rural 550	2
Brooke	Between 36 & 45	17	8 and 9	Urban 650	1
Monique	Over 46	21	2	Urban 650	2
Brenda	Between 36 & 45	17	3	Urban 270	5
Susan	Over 46	9	Kindergarten	Urban 260	1
Victoria	Between 26 & 35	7	2	Urban 170	1-2

I used a bank of interview questions in a preliminary research project to determine which questions would garner the most informative responses. I interviewed two teachers, who fit the criteria for this study and used a variety of questions to query the attributes of effective psycho-educational assessment. I then selected and revised the questions that most effectively tapped into perceptions. I designed and sequenced the revised questions to gather insights into assessment components, the perceptions of a specific assessment, and suggestions for improving the psycho-educational assessment process. The interview guides are included in Appendixes F and G.

As I received the contact information, I arranged interviews at the participants' school, district office, or another appropriate location at the time of their choice. The interviews were between 40 and 60 minutes in length and were spread out over a 12-month period.

Treatment of Data

I analyzed the data through a process that Creswell (1998) described but that I modified for this study. First, I described my personal and professional experiences. As the research evolved I reflected on the analysis of the data as well as on my own life experiences as they relate to the topic of psycho-educational assessment. I found that, as my educational and work experiences changed, so did my perceptions. Second, after completing each interview, I found a quiet place and wrote down all of my initial impressions as well as any changes that would make the next interview more productive. Before I submitted an interview tape for transcription, I listened to it and recorded my impressions/thoughts. Third, a stenographer transcribed the audiotaped interviews into text format, incorporating both text and nonverbal behavior into the transcripts. The transcription process took place over six months. I listened to three interviews and verified the accuracy of the transcripts. Wherever the stenographer could not understand something on the tapes, I listened to them and recorded or interpreted the dialogue. Fourth, once I received each transcript, I read it using a highlighter and writing impression notes along the margins. Then I transferred the electronic transcripts to QRS-N6, a computer program that helps to organize selected phrases, codes, and themes and track and store data analyses.

I read through each transcript, highlighted phrases, and collected them under appropriate codes or for common meaning. Some transcripts I read several times, and I analyzed all of the teachers' transcripts first and then the school psychologists.' Fifth, I compared approximately one third of the interview transcripts and discussed them with another analyst. Through this comparative process, I confirmed codes and initial themes,

four of which evolved: (a) assessment components, (b) team, (c) effective attributes, and (d) ineffective attributes. In discussion with the other analyst, it became apparent that the effective attributes revolved around the concept of enhancing the psycho-educational assessment process to make a change in a student's life experience. The ineffective attributes encompassed missing elements that had been discussed in a positive light in the other three themes.

In conclusion, I discussed the codes and resulting themes with approximately one third of the participants and encouraged them to respond to the findings. This process was not linear and spiraled as the interpretation of the data necessitated.

Verification

I verified the findings by using four procedures: (a) triangulation with multiple analysts (Patton, 1990); (b) member checks; (c) rich, thick description; and (d) clarification of researcher bias (Creswell, 1998). I analyzed approximately one third of the data from the interviews with the assistance of another analyst to reduce potential bias (Patton, 1990). We met every four weeks over a four-month period. Member checking is the process in which the researcher asks each of the participants to judge the accuracy and credibility of the interpretation of their interviews. Six of the 14 participants who equally represented each profession participated in the member-checking process. The process of asking selected participants to confirm my interpretations involved individual conversations. We reviewed the themes that emerged from their interviews and they conveyed their perceptions of the themes' accuracy. This process ensures accuracy and thus credibility because it certifies the truthfulness of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Rich, thick description is a quality of writing that details the participants'

experiences and perspectives and allows readers to make their own decisions on the transferability of the data to other situations and occurrences; therefore, readers determine the generalization of the data.

Bracketing

I clarified researcher bias through bracketing, which involved my commenting and reflecting on past experiences, orientations, and prejudices that may have influenced the research approach and the interpretation of the data. The bracketing process continued throughout the evolution of this research.

A qualitative researcher analyzes data by examining specific statements and searching for all possible meanings (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998, 2002). Bracketing, or *epoche*, is the method that researchers use to reflect on and reveal their preconceived notions or ideas about the phenomenon (Creswell, 1998; Field & Morse, 1985). This method assists in addressing personal bias to objectively explore the perceptions of the participants (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 1990). Bracketing is an ongoing process, and researchers must continue to bracket their own prejudices as they arise.

My Experience

At this point, reflecting back on my research project, I am continuing to recognize and examine all my biases and prejudices. I will outline my biases as they have developed from my experiences as an educator, a contracted school psychologist, a district school psychologist and my most recent experience working in schools as a director of special education.

I graduated with a Bachelor of Education Degree and an Early Childhood Diploma in 1989. For the first few years of teaching, I had limited training and

experience in the realm of special education; nevertheless, I always had a minimum of one integrated student with special needs in my classroom. I remember receiving confidential files that contained numerous reports from various professionals. As I read the reports, I felt bewildered by the use of jargon and the complexity of the information. The first time that I received the results from a psycho-educational assessment that I had initiated, I was fortunate enough to have had the school psychologist explain the findings before I received the written report. I do not recall the experience as being negative or positive. In fact, I do not think the psycho-educational assessment made any impact on how I taught the student; it simply confirmed what I already knew about the student and affirmed the teaching strategies that I had been implementing. I believe that it was after this experience that I decided to expand my understanding of children with special needs and special education because I felt that there had to be more that I could be doing for that particular student.

After completing a few courses in the area of special education, I began to realize the value of psycho-educational assessments as well as assessments from other professionals such as speech-language pathologists and occupational therapists. When I received the results of assessments, I made an effort to discuss the findings with the examiner and link the information provided to my classroom strategies. I found that examiners positively viewed my efforts to understand assessment results. However, I cannot recollect examiners actively checking for my understanding as they disseminated the results.

As I was working on my master's degree in special education, I became a special education consultant and a level B assessor. In my role as a special needs teacher/

consultant, I was responsible for completing academic assessments for students who appeared to be challenged by the curriculum. As the examiner, I attempted to write reports that colleagues and parents could easily understand. I also began to realize how challenging it is to explain psychological terms in conventional language. I asked for and received feedback from teachers and parents on my written reports and used that feedback to strengthen my report-writing style.

While I completed the residency component of my doctoral studies, I worked in schools as a contracted provisional school psychologist. In this role I developed another perspective on the process of psycho-educational assessment. I felt valued by teachers with whom I was able to confer. When teachers asked for teaching strategies that they could incorporate into the classroom, I readily complied. I was surprised when I had to justify my time to one principal who had to approve the hours that I spent at the school. I was frustrated when a teacher continually watched the clock above my head as I debriefed an assessment. Overall, my experiences as a school psychologist have been positive, but I have also been troubled by the apathy of some teachers and their unwillingness to change their teaching strategies to assist a struggling student. I understand that the realities of inclusion are vast, but I also believe that, as professionals, teachers must attempt to meet the needs of all students in their classrooms.

I worked as a district psychologist and a behavior specialist while I completed my chartering intern hours. In this position I was a school psychologist employed by a school district. I found this position to be very rewarding. Teachers' demand for my services was high because they seemed to appreciate my perspective as a former teacher. I was frustrated at times because I was booked six weeks ahead of time and thus was unable to

respond to emerging issues in a timely manner. I was the only school psychologist serving 15 schools, and I found that, as the school staff came to know me, they called for assistance more often.

I then became a director of special education. In this position I thought that I could implement the psycho-educational assessment system that I suggested in this research. I initiated inservicing for special education teachers that addressed level B assessment qualifications. I worked with a committee to develop referral forms to facilitate productive psycho-educational assessment. These forms required that teachers and parents not only create specific referral questions, but also document the strategies that had been implemented thus far. I was unable to employ school psychologists full time, but I did contract qualified school psychologists and assigned them to certain schools. Teachers commented positively on the evolution of psycho-educational service. Some teachers continued to regard psycho-educational assessment as an avenue to obtain additional funding, and they expressed frustration when they were required to implement a variety of teaching strategies before referring a student. In this position I realized that there are many elements of effective psycho-educational assessment, and bringing these elements together will require the support and understanding of teachers and school psychologists.

As a teacher I have rarely experienced frustration with the psycho-educational assessment process. This may be the result of the effective psycho-educational assessments in which I was involved and/or my understanding of educational psychology. Most of my dissatisfaction came from the limited strategies that were presented to assist the student who was being assessed. I felt that there had to be some research-supported

strategies that could help my students; I was disheartened by the lack of answers. I have also responded to other teachers' bewilderment after the completion of a psycho-educational assessment and their disappointment in the process. Many teachers stated that they felt that the assessment process had not helped them program for the student who was being assessed.

As a school psychologist I was impressed by the dedication of many teachers and disillusioned by the attitude of some teachers. The vast majority of teachers will modify and adapt the classroom environment and teaching strategies to support a student. They want to work with school psychologists to plan programming, and they value the psycho-educational assessment process. Some teachers' perception is that the purpose of psycho-educational assessment is to attain funding or move a student into a special education program. I was concerned with the perception that labeling a student equals assigning a teaching assistant. I strongly believe that having a teaching assistant does not mean effective programming. I think that effective programming should be the goal of psycho-educational assessment and that a psycho-educational assessment can be effective if the school psychologist and teacher understand each other's purposes and needs. Two-way communication is essential between these professionals to enhance the student's educational experience.

Ethics

I have given thoughtful consideration to protecting confidentiality and following ethical guidelines as I described in the letter of consent. Setting guidelines that will assist in developing a relationship with participants and enables them to feel confident in

expressing their perspectives without negative consequence is of extreme importance. Discovering their honest perspectives was the essence of my research.

Confidentiality

I used pseudonyms in all written documentation to protect the identity of the participants and any other persons who were identified in the interview. I asked the transcriber/stenographer to sign a letter of confidentiality that stated that all data are strictly confidential and that the text had to be returned to me or erased. The audiotapes and transcripts are stored in a secure location.

Informed Consent

I obtained informed consent by meeting with individual participants and asking them to sign a letter of consent. During the meetings I clearly outlined the parameters of the study and the possible impact of the results. I considered identifying the attributes of effective psycho-educational assessment from teachers' and school psychologists' perspectives beneficial to all stakeholders. The participants were motivated, if not passionate, in expressing their perspectives. When I contacted them, either by phone or in person, we reviewed the letter of consent, confidentiality, and their voluntary participation, and I informed them that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any point with no prejudice. If the participants were inclined to proceed, we arranged the date, time, and location of the interviews.

CHAPTER FOUR:

FINDINGS

Three main themes emerged from my analyses of the participants' interviews about their perceptions of the psycho-educational assessment process. The first theme, reflecting on the assessment process, pertains to how the assessment components are effective or could be influenced to be more effective. The second theme, working as a team, evolved from the notion of how team collaboration positively impacts on or could impact on the psycho-educational assessment process. The final theme is that effective assessment is a comprehensive assessment with the hope of changing lives. Essentially, the participants explained that an effective psycho-educational assessment needs to exceed the collection and presentation of quantitative findings.

As this chapter unfolds, I will describe each theme through the voices of the participants. I will identify each individual as either a school psychologist (sp) or a teacher (t). It is important to note that both the school psychologists and the teachers found the psycho-educational assessment process valuable; however, each participant identified factors that could be altered or added to improve it. I will convey the findings from the school psychologists' and teachers' interviews through the three themes. Within each theme the participants' perspectives and perceptions are consolidated under related concepts with headings and subheadings. The first theme, reflecting on the assessment process, commences the presentation of findings.

Theme 1: Reflecting on the Assessment Process

As delineated in Chapter 2, the literature clearly described the process of completing an assessment as beginning with a referral question that then guides the

selection of assessment tools. Subsequent to this step is the administration and scoring of tests. At this point, data gathered are translated into results that are communicated to the stakeholders in the process (Shea, 1985), and a written report results. The participants in this study talked about these steps and identified effective components that are not well articulated in school psychology research. These perceptions are presented in the theme of reflecting on the assessment process, which I have structured in the following sequence. To begin with, the participants described referral practices by focusing on two key areas of concern: ensuring that the referral question had been thoughtfully composed in unambiguous terms and establishing the practice of a key stakeholders' meeting to exchange their insights into the presenting student difficulties as a means of guiding the psycho-educational assessment process. Next, perceptions on the effectiveness of assessment tools are depicted; and last, insights on the communication of results are delineated through two different avenues: written reports and debriefings. Jane's (sp) comment exemplifies the collective perceptions of effective components that are expressed in this theme:

I think it starts with a good referral concern and then proceeds with gathering information on the student's background, reviewing the cumulative file, understanding what has been already completed, and including classroom and resource room testing. The testing results do not tell me everything; I also do my own academic assessment. Then the assessment must be completed in a manner that produces valid and reliable findings. I also include family and developmental history. It culminates in how the results and recommendations are going to be presented appropriately for the child in his learning environment.

The Referral Question

All school psychologists identified the referral question as the basis of the entire psycho-educational assessment process. Kurt's (sp) statement exemplifies this perception: "If there is no referral question, there is no reason to do an assessment. The

purpose of assessment is to do your best to answer the question.” Ruby (sp) added: “If it’s a really good referral question, . . . if the teachers really understand what they really want and need, then the referral process works better.” Therefore, for school psychologists to effectively answer (a) referral question(s), it must clearly state what is desired from the assessment process.

Most teachers reported that their reason for assessing a student is to get direction from the school psychologist on how to program for the student. Victoria’s (t) emotional plea reflected this goal: “I just want to know what I can do for the child. Tell me. Give me specific strategies of what I can do to help and assist students in meeting their needs.” However, the school psychologists commented that many referral questions are poorly formulated and do not reflect the outcomes for which the teacher is looking. The need for an articulate referral question is exemplified in Brent’s (sp) comment on an unproductive circumstance as “an assessment scenario where you do not understand the referral question or a situation where you really do not grasp what the purpose of the assessment is.” He felt that vague or misleading questions cannot be appropriately answered and result in a dissatisfying outcome.

To achieve (a) clear question(s), stakeholders must articulate with each other their desired outcome and reach a common purpose. Brent (sp) stated his preference of “having everyone on the same page about what they are hoping to gain from the assessment process.” Many participants described a good referral question as resulting from a joint effort between the parents and the school as together they look for solutions to a student’s problem(s). Bob (t) stated: “Identification of a problem by both teacher and parents is effective when you have those two groups working together.” The participants

considered the idea of parents and teachers collaborating on identifying the assessment purpose as pivotal in ensuring that assessment outcomes are perceived as responsive and functional. Agreeing upon a common assessment purpose creates an opportunity for the school psychologist to provide the assistance sought.

The Pre-Assessment Conference

Both school psychologists and teachers agreed on the importance of adding a pre-assessment conference to enhance the psycho-educational assessment process. Ideally, the teachers, parents, and student would meet either collectively or separately with the school psychologist to discuss their individual perceptions as a means of guiding the assessment process. Brent (sp) stated: “Get the stakeholders together and say, ‘This is where we are going with the assessment; these are the concerns. What direction do you want to see this assessment go in?’” Bob (t) also advocated for the pre-assessment conference in acknowledging this meeting as an opportunity to develop working relationships among stakeholders: “Once a personal contact has been made, you will have much more success.” The participants defined the intent of this initial meeting as both clarifying the purpose of the assessment and beginning to establish cohesive relationships.

The importance of having a pre-assessment conference to disclose concerns and then agree upon a common assessment purpose is illustrated in an experience that Brooke (t) described. She recalled that one mother had initially contributed her insights into her child’s behaviors through a questionnaire. The school psychologist considered her perspective as he proceeded through the assessment process. Once the report had been written, a debriefing was held in which the mother verbally stated her perceptions of her

child, which were significantly different from those that she had previously acknowledged on a questionnaire: “Mom finally was honest about the behaviors that the child had at home, and this would have changed the entire . . . focus of the assessment.” Had this information been disclosed at a pre-assessment conference, could one assume that the assessment process would have taken a different course? Brooke (t) concluded: “I think we missed the pre-interview, the pre-assessment opportunity to clarify what we wanted to find out, information beyond what was written down on the referral documentation.” This experience demonstrates the notion that, when there is not an opportunity to communicate perceptions in person, misunderstandings are more likely to occur.

Tessa’s (t) belief that sending forms home for parents to complete does not launch the assessment process in the most effective manner reinforced the concept of personally meeting with stakeholders, particularly parents. She wondered whether “the school psychologist could sit down with the parents beforehand and have the opportunity to understand their concerns. Give the parents a chance to explain the issues” to make the process more focused. Brent (sp) expanded upon the concept of understanding the presenting concerns and expressed his belief that this initial communication is the foundation of genuine informed consent. He felt that it is imperative that parents have not merely signed a form, but that they, in fact, also truly understand the goal of the assessment: “By informed consent I mean . . . someone has taken the time to explain the purpose of the assessment.” A pre-assessment conference could foster parent comprehension. Similarly, Bob (t) believed that engaging parents in the process might help them to accept the assessment results and assist their children in attaining their

maximum potential. He felt that, to create parent “buy in,” there needs to be “established communication with parents” prior to commencing any testing. Bob (t) stressed that parents need to be supportive, informed stakeholders in the psycho-educational assessment process.

Brooke (t) and Chantal (sp) suggested that the participation of older students in the pre-assessment conference could facilitate their understanding of the assessment purpose and subsequently increase the quality of students’ participation. Brooke (t) declared: “I would love to see what the student thinks.” She worried that students view assessment as something that is being done *to* them rather than something that is being done *with* them: “When there is a connection made with students, then they can understand why the assessment has been undertaken.” Student participation in the pre-assessment meeting could also clarify the procedures for them. Brooke (t) defined this meeting as an opportunity to “try to take the mystery away from the tests.” Chantal (sp) believed that “students don’t see psycho-educational assessment as something that’s there to help them. I think they need to be included more.” If students understand the value of assessment by participating in a pre-assessment meeting, could it ensure that they will exert their best effort?

These initial conversations and enhanced communications could focus the assessment and guide the school psychologist in choosing certain assessment procedures that would respond to clearly defined referral issues. Brooke (t) summarized this procedure as the school psychologist’s coordinating the focus of the assessment with the stakeholders rather than its being directed solely by a few lines on the referral form.

Essentially, the pre-assessment meeting means that the assessment process is guided by

common understandings and thus does “not require[e] a school psychologist to do the assessment in isolation.”

The Assessment Tools

The school psychologists identified the next effective practice once the psychologist has received the referral and completed the preliminary pre-assessment procedures as selecting appropriate tools to answer the referral question(s). They explained that the referral question dictates which tools and assessment strategies will initially be utilized. Ruby’s (sp) statement exemplifies this perception: “My expectation of an assessment is to have a good referral question. I then use that question to select the appropriate testing procedures.” The school psychologists stated that this initial selection of tools is not static because of the practice of refining assessment procedures as information evolves. Jane (sp) commented that, as she talks with teachers, the conversation “tweaks me into thinking I should use this tool as well.” The school psychologists reported that they choose from an array of tools ranging from formalized standardized tests to informal observations. Kurt (sp) defined ineffective assessment as “the implementation of the same battery of tests, regardless of the referral question,” which reinforces the importance of selecting suitable tools based on referral issues.

Formal and Informal Tools

The school psychologists and teachers had somewhat differing insights into the usefulness of formal and informal assessment tools in an effective psycho-educational assessment process. The school psychologists believed that each category of assessment tools, formal and informal, could uncover distinct information and that any tool that will bring to light a student’s profile should be used. On the other hand, the teachers

emphasized the importance of informal tools to contextualize the data obtained from formal assessment procedures. The perceptions of each professional group follow.

The school psychologists, specifically Brent (sp) and Kurt (sp), suggested that all assessment procedures have value and that a balanced approach of utilizing both formal and informal tools results in a comprehensive student profile. Brent (sp) commented: “I think there is good information that comes from the formal testing, but at the same time, watching how a student completes a task is key.” Formal, standardized tools are generally employed to analyze very specific areas of skill or criteria, whereas informal strategies help to collect data on naturalistic behaviors. Kurt (sp) concluded:

I think some school psychologists tend to almost overvalue the tests we give. They are important, but it is also essential to place a lot of value on the school’s perspective: What are the teachers reporting? What are the teachers observing?

The school psychologists conveyed respect for the information that various assessment procedures provide.

The teachers were adamant that any effective psycho-educational assessment must consider the implications of the classroom environment. They indicated that informal tools, such as observations and interviews, contextualize results from standardized tools. Susan’s (t) statement illustrates this notion: “When a school psychologist parachutes in and parachutes out and makes snap judgments based on very little observation,” he or she does not have all of the pieces of the student’s puzzle. The teachers expressed concern over assessment practices that consider only results that are obtained in an artificial environment. Brooke (t) explained that a student’s abilities and skills are the strongest in a novel room with no distractions and undivided attention from an adult: “Sometimes when I read through the report, it makes me angry because it does

not reflect the child at all; it is all the testing situation.” The teachers advocated for testing procedures that reflect both the reality of the classroom and the student’s strongest academic and cognitive performance. Zena (sp), a former teacher, agreed:

The initial assessment has to include a dialogue with the teacher as well as take into account the environment, the school atmosphere. The classroom atmosphere is such a huge variable, and it is often left out. I think that is essential, and that is the part that I would want to always see in an assessment.

The assessment techniques discussed below are the tools that the participants in the study identified. Any assessment procedures that are not commented on were not evident in the data.

File review. Some school psychologists pointed out that the assessment process begins with a broad view of all student information and that, as data are collected, the focus narrows. Data collection in an effective assessment is initiated by reviewing previously gathered documentation. Chantal’s (sp) comment demonstrates the purpose of analyzing student-file contents: “It is really important to have that information, to complete a file review, because you are looking for patterns. I have noticed that a lot of people do not include the file review. I believe that it is really necessary.” Furthermore, Ruby (sp) stated: “It is helpful to develop some insight into the strategies that have already worked and other strategies that have not worked particularly well.” The school psychologists acknowledged that an empty or sparse file could result in a diagnosis being postponed or missed.

School psychologists rely on school staff to record events or concerns and to make this recording a priority while they are engaged in daily demands. Bob, a veteran teacher, recognized that recording anecdotal notes or maintaining behavior checklists is a responsibility of school staff that they often overlook: “I really strongly suggest to all

teachers that they have to document daily anecdotal notes. It has to be there in the student's file. Otherwise there is no picture of what is happening with the child." Jane (sp) also insisted on the need for anecdotal records. She understood that a student's presentation in a testing environment is not necessarily representative of daily behavior, and therefore, she relies on anecdotal notes to convey day-to-day functioning. She described an experience: "This child presented as incredibly compliant. . . . I would have never known that he could behave so differently in other situations. . . . The anecdotal records indicated some significant challenges." She also wanted "anecdotal records to be accessible. I am surprised that many teachers do not document their observations." If teachers' observations and experiences have not been documented through anecdotal notes, then they are not available for the school psychologist to utilize as assessment data.

Both school psychologists and teachers considered anecdotal records essential in developing an accurate picture of the student's functioning. The participants concurred on the importance of teachers knowing how essential their documentation is, given that school psychologists require these data to fulfill diagnostic criteria as well as to assist with program planning.

Observations of students. Both professions commonly identified observation as a highly effective assessment procedure. They perceived observation as the most reliable strategy for truly understanding the student's learning profile within the context of the classroom.

The school psychologists appreciated the opportunity to observe functioning in the natural environment. Ruby (sp) commented on her perception of observation as a data-collection tool: "I find that it is an extremely effective tool in understanding

students. I am able to observe what strategies the child is using in the classroom setting.”

The teachers liked the second-opinion aspect as well as the enhancement of school psychologists’ ability to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the student’s day-to-day behaviors. Tessa (t) explained the value of observation to her: “It permits another set of eyes to see how we might be triggering some behaviors or how we could prevent some incidents from occurring.” She sought another opinion to validate her own perceptions and to give alternative programming ideas. Furthermore, Victoria (t) stated: “I think what comes out on paper [questionnaires] does not necessarily reflect what I am seeing in the classroom. . . . I think coming in and observing is better.” She believed that observation helps a school psychologist to develop a more comprehensive appreciation of a student’s functioning.

All participants recognized that a valid observation takes time, and they defined two different aspects of the time factor. The first is the need to conduct an observation for which the school psychologist can allot the necessary period of time to observe a variety of circumstances and behaviors. Susan (t) cautioned that an observation must be a length of time that goes beyond a 10-minute “drop by”; otherwise, it is of no consequence. She described a situation in which the recommendations were ineffective because they did not consider the student’s functioning within the classroom environment: “School psychologists who come in and observe for ten, fifteen minutes, and then devise recommendations that they say will help the child” are actually not producing practical suggestions because “these recommendations do not realistically reflect how that child functions in the classroom.”

Kurt (sp) also stressed the need for school psychologists to find the time to conduct an effective observation: “In terms of classroom observations, I do not find that they are all that effective because we cannot sit there long enough.” He suggested that, to use observation as an assessment tool, a school psychologist must find the time to see a minimum number of behaviors.

Brooke (t) described the second aspect of the time factor as the need to allot adequate time for students to adjust to a new adult in the room: “If the school psychologist could stay long enough for the student to get comfortable, . . . when students get used to someone, then their behavior does not change.” Most participants considered the effectiveness of observation as an assessment tool as contingent upon time.

In addition to allotting enough time for the observation procedure, one school psychologist also suggested that creating a scenario in which the student does not notice the observer would enhance validity. Jane (sp) was able to avoid superficial behaviors by completing classroom visits before the targeted student was aware of her role. She reflected: “It was very effective because the student did not realize that I was there for him.” Three teachers recalled situations in which students’ behavior changed with the addition of a new adult in the room and felt that students are able to sense when they are being observed and will restrict their typical behaviors in an attempt to camouflage the concerning issues. Although the teachers value observation as an assessment tool, they acknowledged that it is “very difficult to get an accurate observation. Whenever someone new comes into your classroom, your students will behave differently.”

On the other hand, Brooke (t) recognized that some students cannot control their behavior for any length of time regardless of whether an observer is in the classroom or

not. These particular students can be prodded into typical reactions by known triggers: “I could push him into a behavior; . . . it was not hard to make him react.” Therefore, with the collaboration of the school psychologist, she would use this strategy to ensure that the student demonstrated the troublesome behavior. Even though Kurt (sp) felt that, typically, school psychologists do not have time to complete lengthy observations, he conceded that the effectiveness of an observation depends on the presenting behavior given that certain characteristics are always apparent. The probability of observing a concerning behavior depends upon many factors.

Monique (t) suggested that some observations would be more effective if the teacher selected the time of day and the activity to be observed. If Monique (t) were to guide the observation schedule, she would have the school psychologist observe “two aspects of social interaction, . . . on the playground and in the gym.” She reported an ineffective observation in which the school psychologist observed a student during a highly interactive activity that accentuated his strengths instead of a more stressful activity that involved writing, which would have provided a more productive observation.

The participants identified the positive impact of classroom observation on the psycho-educational assessment process as the increased ability to develop classroom-friendly recommendations. Zena (sp) illustrated the impact on her practice of utilizing her observations of a student within the classroom to create her recommendations. She suggested that the experience of being in this classroom enhanced her insights and thus permitted her to develop recommendations, that not only reflected the needs of the child, but could also be provided within the classroom context. Zena (sp) explained: “I went in to do the initial observation; I noted some behaviors. My suggestion was to give the child

a sponge ball while he . . . was sitting at circle time. It is those basic strategies that will keep him settled.” As a result of observing a student in his classroom environment, Zena (sp) was able to make a practical suggestion to the classroom teacher that was easy to implement, thus enhancing the student’s functioning.

The school psychologists and teachers both identified observing a student in his or her natural environments as an effective method of collecting essential information. The participants recognized that observing a student in specific situations allows a school psychologist to witness revealing behaviors. However, they also identified a crucial element in the observation process as the need to allot the appropriate amount of time to complete a valid observation. They also discussed observation of a student in terms of the positive influence of this experience on the development of recommendations and considered observation an informative assessment tool when given the appropriate amount of time.

Interviews. The second assessment procedure that the teachers endorsed as highly effective is the interview. Bob (t) stated: “If it is an interview versus a questionnaire, I feel the conversation is much more valuable.” The teachers stressed that sharing information in an informal manner should become part of the assessment process and should not be left until the debriefing. This practice allows essential details and perceptions to be revealed, and this information can be clarified, which thus leads to an enhanced understanding of the student’s profile. This is more effective than collecting the information solely through a questionnaire. Brenda (t) stated that any time spent with the school psychologist would be more helpful than just relying on a questionnaire: “There is more to be shared; even a fifteen-minute conversation” would be an improvement.

Additionally, Bob (t) believed that “in an oral setting . . . you’re able to explain a little further and give more situations, . . . examples related to the circumstances.” The teachers advocated for a larger role in the assessment process given their expertise and professional experience with students. They identified interviewing as an opportunity for teachers to contribute their knowledge and participate in making sense of the assessment results. Brenda (t) recalled an experience: “I did talk with the school psychologist briefly, but there was more to tell.” She believed that “teachers are the eyes and the ears that have worked with that child” and should be given the opportunity to thoroughly communicate their insights.

Tessa (t) also expressed a desire to have discussions with the school psychologist: “I see that child on a day-to-day basis in structured and unstructured times. I would love to sit down and just talk with the school psychologist that is going to assess one of my students.” In Tessa’s (t) opinion, the most influential change that could be made to improve the effectiveness of the psycho-educational assessment process would be to ensure “input from the teacher.” Zena (sp), a former teacher, agreed:

Sometimes school psychologists do not even see the teacher. The child is just pulled, tested, and then sent back to the classroom. These school psychologists go strictly on what is on the referral form for information about the behavior. There needs to be a dialogue. I think it is going to be more effective for the teacher and for the child when there is sharing back and forth.

Another factor that I identified in the data analysis that contributes to the productivity of the interview process is the need to establish a convenient meeting time and location for an interview to occur. The participants felt that time for input from teachers should be planned; a chance meeting in the hallway does not equate to legitimate participation. Susan (t) recalled a typical experience in which “there wasn’t effective

communication as to when they were coming.” When the school psychologist unexpectedly arrived, an impromptu conversation occurred; however, Susan (t) felt that it was “somewhat rushed,” and she was unsure of “the information that they want to gather.” Some school psychologists highlighted the importance of a teacher being given the opportunity to contribute professional expertise. For example, Jane (sp) stated: “As a school psychologist, I am very careful with the assessment process. I make sure to go in and include the teacher.” The teachers and some school psychologists acknowledged the importance of the mutual exchange of information in an interview.

Some participants in the study indicated that parents, the stakeholders with a principal role in their children’s lives, need to be involved to a greater extent beyond the initial referral. Their knowledge and insights into their children’s development are integral to the validity of the overall assessment. Guy (sp) recalled an experience that exemplifies the importance of communicating with parents. He had met with the mother of a student several times, sharing and gathering information continually. He explained that, after the initial discussion, her reluctance to have her child assessed began to diminish as she began to understand the purpose of the process: “I sat down right away and talked with Mom. I wanted to find out what she wanted me to look for and observe in her child.” Guy (sp) felt that meeting with this parent allowed him to develop a relationship in which the parent became a supporter of the assessment process. Although the mother was initially reticent, he contended that her acceptance of the final diagnosis was a direct result of her contribution to and participation in the psycho-educational assessment process.

One teacher participant commented that an interview with a student could be a useful component in a psycho-educational assessment. The degree to which students' perceptions are collected depend on their maturity and individual circumstances. Tessa (t) stated that it would be interesting for a school psychologist to discover a student's perspective "to see where the child thinks he is at." Student insight could prove to be invaluable. The school psychologist's questions and the student's subsequent answers could also indirectly foster the student's self-awareness.

Although the majority of the teachers made a point of advocating for the use of interviews as a tool to gather information on a student, only a few school psychologists commented on their role in ensuring that interviews take place. Kurt (sp) effectively summarized this perspective as the responsibility of the school psychologist to go "beyond the tests, to collect information from every source, . . . to make sure that he is getting all the information that is available." Overall, the participants considered psycho-educational assessments that incorporate meaningful dialogue between the school psychologist and other stakeholders throughout the assessment process more effective than assessments without others' contributions.

Standardized questionnaires. Standardized questionnaires are used to evaluate an assortment of information in a consistent manner to provide an overall indication of functioning, which is often expressed in a variety of representative cluster headings and subjects. The accuracy of standardized questionnaires such as the Behavior Assessment Scale for Children—2 (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004) or the Conners' Rating Scales—Revised (Conners, 1997) is a theme that emerged from interviews with the teachers and

school psychologists. Jane is a school psychologist who had also been a classroom teacher; her statement summarizes the perceptions of both groups:

I have had teachers skip over half of the questions because they felt uncomfortable filling out the Connors. But skipping those questions makes my scoring of that tool largely invalid because how do you score something that is not there? I cannot even use it in the report. I think as a teacher I was almost intimidated by these forms because you are constantly worrying: What is sometimes? What is often? What is never? If I say this, how is this going to come back, and how will it affect the child in the future? Am I personally liable for what I put on here? It creates a lot of distrust in what is going on, and then they are really leery to fill it out.

The school psychologists understood that questionnaires help to explore and gather data in a quantitative manner that facilitates the analysis of diagnostic criteria. However, even though school psychologists rely on the forced-choice response format because it provides the essential quantitative breakdown, the teachers expressed frustration with this type of data collection. For example, Brooke (t) explained: “You fill out this form that asks these questions, and you have to respond *always* or *never*. I put myself in the middle because nobody is always or never exhibiting any behavior.” Jane (sp) believed that “a one-day professional development seminar once a year on the assessment forms” would increase teachers’ proficiency in completing data-collection tools and increase their appreciation of what the data reveals.

In contrast, the teachers stressed the considerable amount of time that it takes to fill out these forms. Moreover, they felt that questionnaires do not reflect the situational reality of the student. Bob (t) reflected on the time-consuming nature of completing the forms and questionnaires that school psychologists require, and he relayed some of his frustrations to a school psychologist: “Some of those questions are not pertinent to the child.” He recalled that the school psychologist took the time to explain to him that the

broadness of the questionnaires is essential because the surveys often reveal unknown information. Bob (t) concluded: "Teachers have to be prepared to spend the time to fill out the entire form in order to do a good job." Brent (sp) agreed with Bob's (t) conclusion that questionnaires needed to be thoroughly completed: "There are many classroom teachers that do not necessarily appreciate how much impact their information has. . . . When they fill out paperwork, it seems like it is done in a hurried manner." Tessa (t) recognized her role in completing the required documentation: "I find them frustrating to fill out, but I also trust the school psychologist. If he thinks this is a good tool, then I will fill it out to the best of my ability." She added: "Not all people are willing to take the time to fill it out. They say, 'I have to do another one of these.' There is some resistance." Bob's (t) declaration reinforces this feeling: "I think the only assessment component that I dread is the questionnaire."

The teachers also raised a number of concerns over the validity of this tool. They acknowledged the possibility of substantial variability from teacher to teacher in the time and amount of effort put into completing the forms. Brooke's (t) statement reflects the perception of the teachers:

We hate the paperwork, so you wonder how much attention are teachers paying to these forms. As with every profession, you have the keeners and the others who have better things to do than paperwork. I think that difference is apparent in the assessment [outcomes].

The teachers suggested that there is limited usefulness in questionnaires if they are not completed thoughtfully. The school psychologists' concerns matched those of the teachers, as Kurt (sp) demonstrated:

They all take a long time. If the teacher or the parent is willing to fill it out and take the time to answer the questions, then you can effectively answer the referral

question. If they don't, or if they rush through it and don't really give you a valid measure of the student's independent functioning, then you can't really accurately make or not make a diagnosis.

It also became apparent that questionnaires can be misleading if parents are in denial about their children's behaviors or simply do not understand what is developmentally appropriate at certain ages. The teachers recalled experiences in which parents' verbal disclosures were diametrically opposed to the questionnaire that they had previously filled out. Brooke (t) recalled an example: "When we debriefed, the mother gave us all this information that was not on the form." Brenda's (t) rationalization of the reason behind this type of behavior was insightful:

Feelings run deep with children and parents. It is hard for parents to accept the reality, so they are trying to make it better than it is because it is hard to answer honestly. I do not think that they are lying on purpose.

In summary, the teachers and school psychologists acknowledged that questionnaires do have a role, but that they should be balanced with other assessment procedures to ensure a comprehensive understanding of a student's profile.

Assessment Tools: Summary of Findings

The school psychologists and teachers acknowledged that taking a balanced approach to utilizing informal and formal assessment tools is the most effective. The teachers advocated for more assessment procedures that consider the ecological aspects of the school environment; specifically, observations and interviews. The school psychologists acknowledged the vital role of questionnaires in collecting specific data for interpretation. However, both the teachers and the school psychologists discussed the time implications of completing questionnaires as well as validity concerns. Both professions discussed the productivity of different assessment tools; however, the school

psychologists stated that they strategically select assessment tools to answer the referral question(s).

The Written Report

Once the assessment tools have been utilized to gather information to answer the referral question(s), the report is written as a record of the assessment process and the ensuing findings. The written report outlines a student's profile and the corresponding strategies that can be used from year to year to remediate or cope with areas of concern. The participants expect this document to be placed in the student's cumulative file for future staff to review. Both groups of participants identified the report as a permanent product that can be used to advocate for a student's needs beyond the initial group of stakeholders.

Most teachers viewed the report as a concrete document to which they can regularly refer after the process is concluded. Monique's (t) routine illustrated teacher practice:

I usually go back to the report quite often during the school year when I do not know where to go with the child. . . . You think, I was supposed to try this. . . . It is valuable. Basically, it's something that I can go back to and peruse. I look at the recommendations.

School psychologists utilize the report to document their work and as a means to influence the student's future. They described the report as a written document that helps parents and teachers to understand a student's strengths and weaknesses. Kurt's statement (sp) articulated this belief: "It is important that everyone continues to look at the assessment, even though it does become outdated and new ones need to be completed." He added: "The report will always be in the cumulative file, so as long as the student is in the school, teachers will be able to look at this report and know that she has the ability."

Brent's (sp) experience with resistant parents emphasizes the report's purpose of relating assessment findings:

I hope the parents will appreciate what I have written and why I have written it. I told them at the case conference that I owed it to them to be honest about my concerns. I laid it out fairly explicitly in the report.

This report becomes the guide that key adults can use to help the student reach his or her potential.

Two school psychologists specifically raised concerns about teachers' use of reports. They suggested that some teachers read the report and then store it in a file, never to look at it again, and that others might not even read the report at all. Zena's (sp) observation exemplifies these concerns. She was reassured when teachers asked her questions at and after the debriefing: "Then you know they did not just shove your report in a drawer and never look at it again." Brent (sp) described a report that has not been read as highly problematic, given that it is the common denominator at debriefings. He expects teachers to read the report and ask pertinent questions. Victoria's (t) perspective was consistent with those of the school psychologists. She defined ineffective psycho-educational assessment as follows: "When there is no follow-up, the information is just lost. Nothing is done with it; it does not drive the instruction with that child. . . . The report gets tucked away in a file." The written report is a means to permanently document the psycho-educational assessment process; however, its effectiveness is contingent upon teachers reading the report and using the information.

Report Language

Both school psychologists and teachers commented on the manner in which the report is written. They appreciate language that enlightens readers on the student's

profile, whereas technical terms and convoluted sentence structure result in frustration. Tessa (t) described an ideal report: “I thought the report provided a very clear picture of this little girl. . . . As I read it, I was thinking, Yes, this really makes sense.” Well-written psycho-educational assessment reports should use layman’s terms and comprehensible explanations. Monique (t) commented: “You want it written in normal language. . . . I’ve had some reports where I needed a dictionary in order to decipher it.” Ruby (sp) linked the manner in which the report is written and the psycho-educational assessment’s effectiveness:

If they read the report and they cannot understand what the results mean because of lack of information or because the information is presented in a way that they do not understand, it is not going to be beneficial to them at all.

Report Sections

The participants identified three essential components of an effective written report: background information, summary, and recommendations. However, the fact that they acknowledged these components does not suggest that the other sections should be deleted or that they do not have their own usefulness.

Background information. Generally, most reports begin with a review of previously accumulated relevant information—the background information. Data in this section are gathered from a file review and information from demographic forms. Some school psychologists considered this section important because it contextualizes the student’s past and, in turn, provides insights into why the assessment is now being undertaken. Ruby (sp) eloquently identified one function of this section: “The background information section describes previous academic testing, so then I can offer a comparison of whether there has been progress.” Furthermore, this information can

influence how assessment data are interpreted in the report, given that past actions can indicate relevant patterns of behavior. As Brent (sp) commented: “It is difficult to interpret results based on limited background knowledge.”

The data collection for this section generally requires the participation of the school, which the participants consistently identified as an indicator of effective psycho-educational assessment. If the school does not participate in the assessment, the validity of the results becomes questionable. Brent (sp) recalled a situation that exemplifies how the lack of school contributions could impact on reliability: “I did not have any information from the school, so the receiving school is going to look at that and say, ‘I do not know if we should put in the resources based on this report.’” Monique (t) concluded: “You need to go into the background information. . . . You need to know what was observed previously and what has changed.” The background information section describes a student’s previous experiences for the purpose of linking the past to the present in the psycho-educational assessment report.

The summary. The summary section in a written report generally recaps the findings and identifies any specific diagnosis. Some participants reported that the summary segment is the first part they read because it outlines the results concisely in conventional terms. Guy (sp) described this section as “where the child’s strengths are and also where the areas of improvement are outlined.” In addition, if the assessment resulted in a diagnosis, it is generally clearly labeled and defined in this section. Bob (t) believed that “the summary is the most important component” of the assessment report because he is looking for a diagnoses. After reading the summary, readers are more readily prepared to review and assimilate the corresponding recommendations. Bob (t)

summarized the perception of best practice in the concluding components of a psycho-educational assessment: “It would first of all review all possible problems and then after that provide possible solutions for improvement and remediation.”

The recommendations. All participants identified the recommendation section as the principal component of an effective psycho-educational assessment report. Teachers value this section because it suggests how the student can be helped. The school psychologists recognized that the recommendation section presents an opportunity to design a plan that could influence the student’s future educational experiences. Both professions identified challenges to the development and implementation of effective recommendations.

The participants reported that the recommendation section is the part of the entire psycho-educational assessment process that teachers most seek because it fulfills their inclination for action. Brenda (t) stated that the recommendations are “what we are after. . . . What is it that we are dealing with, and how do we best treat this child?” Victoria (t) declared, “Personally, I just want to know what I can do with the findings and how they can help the student.” The teachers rely on the recommendation segment to answer the following provoking questions: Where do we go from here? What do I do? How can I best help this student? The explicit goal of the participating teachers is to obtain appropriate strategies to assist their students. Susan (t) articulated this premise: “The purpose of recommendations is to make sure that the instruction is tailored to meet the child’s needs.” Bob (t) emphatically stated: “Assessments that do not give direction are not effective. . . . When there’s a plan and possibilities for how you can help a child, then that’s an effective assessment.”

The teachers defined effective assessments as not only containing recommendations specific to a student's diagnosed needs, but also taking into consideration the school environment. The teachers used terms such as *practical*, *logical*, and *realistic* to describe useful recommendations. They viewed an effective plan as one that highlights potential strategies to assist students and concurrently takes into account the teachers' responsibilities within the context of their teaching assignment. Tessa (t) reflected on effective recommendations: "They are the ones that I could do in my classroom every day." However, she also expressed her dissatisfaction with some of the recommendations that school psychologists have given her in the past: "The strategies that were given to me to use were not always practical or realistic and were not always put in layman's terms." Monique (t) concluded: "Effective recommendations are ones that I can follow in a classroom. . . . They have to be able to help the child in the classroom."

Most school psychologists affirmed that devising recommendations that correspond not only with the student's assessed profile, but also with his or her unique learning environment, is the most challenging part of the assessment process. Brent (sp) explained this responsibility: "Taking the assessment results and then making specific recommendations to facilitate the student reaching his or her capacity [is key]. . . . The most effort goes into the recommendation section. . . . I see it as being the most valuable." Ruby (sp) recognized the importance of classroom-friendly recommendations: "I work very hard on my recommendations to ensure that most teachers within their classroom reality could employ them effectively and efficiently to some degree." Guy (sp) also articulated the importance of formulating appropriate recommendations:

If the recommendations that I have devised are off the wall, then the teacher will respond, "I am not going to do that; . . . it does not work for me" or "I just do not have the time." If I say "This child needs all individualized programming," the teacher will come back with "I have 30 students."

The participants did not consider recommendations effective that are not specific to the student or the classroom circumstances. Zena (sp) described ineffective recommendations as "pages and pages of standard recommendations that quite frankly nobody could possibly accomplish" and ineffective reports as "recommendations that are not useful in either the classroom or the home. . . . They are of no value if the expectations are not realistic."

The ability to formulate recommendations that are constructive is a topic on which both teachers and school psychologists commented. Guy (sp) linked his ability to write relevant recommendations to the insights he gleaned through classroom observations: "With more time observing the child within the classroom," the school psychologist's "suggestions or recommendations will be more relevant to that teacher." Essentially, by spending time understanding the classroom context as well as the teacher's instructional style, a school psychologist can create more classroom-compatible recommendations. Guy (sp) continued: "Effective assessment means you have a good understanding of the student, and with that you can develop suggestions that will make a difference in that student's life."

In considering the recommendation component of the psycho-educational assessment process, the participants highlighted the challenge of implementation. In the opinion of the teachers, school psychologists who are associated with the school system and the community are more adept at developing viable suggestions. Susan's (t) experiences illustrate some of these challenges: "I was dealing with a psychologist who

was from another city. She was not aware of what was available in our school district and what was available in our city.” Her frustration was apparent when Susan (t) recalled recommendations that reflected urban programs that did not exist in her geographical area. The school psychologists’ recommendations must reflect the school’s and community’s resources; without attainable resources, the plan disintegrates. As well, Susan (t) recalled feelings of helplessness in implementing recommendations that pertained to outside agencies. She cited the example of connecting with physicians to follow up on recommendations: “When I phone a doctor, it is very rare to have him pay any attention to me.” Susan (t) suggested that school psychologists should take a more active role in initiating the implementation of their recommendations. School psychologists rely on teachers to enact their recommendations; therefore, it is logical that school psychologists would ensure that the recommendations are attainable.

The formulation of recommendations is the final undertaking in the assessment report—writing process. It requires that the school psychologist develop a responsive plan that corresponds with students’ needs and assists them in reaching their potential. Drawing upon what school psychologists have learned about students, they can then devise a list of recommendations that consumers of the assessment will not only embrace, but also implement. However, teachers do not always implement the recommendations. Tessa (t) made the following association: “Some suggestions are much more realistic and doable. They make sense, and because they make sense, we use them.”

The teachers and school psychologists concurred that recommendations need to be realistic to ensure that they will be implemented. If recommendations are considered helpful, the impact on the student’s school experience can be long term. Brenda (t)

described her reflective practice: “I tend to go back over the report after the debriefing; it is not a document that you quickly glance over.”

The Written Report: A Summary

The participants defined an effective psycho-educational assessment written report as one that teachers read and comprehend, which thus, influences how they teach students. They also identified three essential sections of the written report—background information, summary, and recommendations—and linked the effectiveness of these sections with the degree of input from school staff. Jane, a former teacher who is now a practicing school psychologist, reflected on her work:

I write my reports in a certain way because I remember how I felt when I was reading the report. . . . There was no summary, or it was the same as the interpretative portion of the report, and I could not understand it. And then I got to the recommendations, and none of them would have been realistic in my classroom.

Overall, the participants agreed that a comprehensive report that is unique to the student and composed of the necessary professional terms and comprehensible vocabulary is useful.

The Debriefing

The participants felt that, although the recommendation section is critical, the psycho-educational assessment process is not complete until there is an interactive discussion at the debriefing, which is generally the final component of the process. They agreed that this is an essential meeting that can have a substantial influence on how the assessment results will be deployed. Ruby (sp) defined an effective debriefing as follows:

The purpose of an assessment is to understand a child’s learning style, his strengths, his weaknesses, and to assist those in the school setting in developing better programming for a student based on that information. A good consultation

makes sure that all parties involved understand the results—understand what is required, what needs to be done.

School psychologist Kurt identified comprehension of the assessment findings and recommendations as the foremost goal of the debriefing:

My favorite part of the job is meeting with the parents and teachers and being able to explain what I have found and hopefully have a moment of “Aha! That’s why he is doing that!” . . . This is an explanation of why they are struggling in this area or . . . why they are behaving this way.

Once debriefed, stakeholders can grasp the implications of the assessment report.

Another purpose of this meeting is to empower the participants to implement a responsive plan. With this purpose in mind, Zena (sp) advocated for the expansion of the debriefing:

The sharing of the information afterwards with the parents and the teachers together should be expanded. I like to see more discussion around, What do you think you could do at school? What do you think you could do at home that would help facilitate the need? The changes that we want to try to make? I think that would make assessment more effective.

Bob (t) declared: “The debriefing is the most important part . . . as everyone is working together on the same issue.” Tessa (t) stressed the importance of allotting the necessary time to meet: “First including everyone around the table and then having the school psychologist taking the time to go through the report until everyone understands it and all the questions have been asked.” The collaboration of key stakeholders with the shared purpose of helping students is the ultimate outcome of a debriefing.

The participants’ perceptions supported the importance of debriefings and the implications of not scheduling them. Some school psychologists revealed their frustration with staff and parents who are too busy to meet, especially at the end of the year. Jane’s (sp) experiences exemplified their concerns: “The debriefing process is so very

important, but it is not always the key factor in everyone's mind. . . . In June we have trouble booking assessment debriefings as teachers are tired." As well, as a teacher, she was bewildered by assessment results that are sent in report form to the school with no opportunity to discuss the diagnoses or recommendations. Jane (sp) recalled her experiences with debriefings when she was a teacher in northern Alberta: "If I had a meeting with a school psychologist, it was very brief." In addition: "Ineffective assessment is when the school psychologist flies in from somewhere and plants themselves at the school, sees the student quickly, and then leaves. The report comes in the mail and that is it." It is apparent that both professions value the debriefing as a face-to-face meeting in which information is conveyed and discussed as well as an opportunity to formulate an appropriate remediation plan.

Participants in the Debriefing

Both the teachers and the school psychologists concluded that all stakeholders—parents, teachers, and school administrators—must be invited to the debriefing. In addition, some thought that students should also be included in the debriefing. Brent (sp) described an optimum debriefing as:

Meeting with teachers, parents, other appropriate individuals, and the student if he is old enough to review the assessment findings, the purpose being that they all understand what has been done and why we are recommending these types of strategies.

Parents. The teachers and school psychologists perceived parent attendance at the debriefing as an essential factor in the overall effectiveness of the psycho-educational assessment process. They saw debriefing as an opportunity to establish a common understanding of the student's strengths and weaknesses with parents. Brenda (t) conceded: "It is difficult to write the report in layman's terms, but the most valuable point

is when the school psychologist explains it all. That is key. . . . She would turn to the parents and clarify exactly what the report meant.” With a shared understanding of the student’s profile, there is the additional benefit of gaining parent support for the recommendations. Zena (sp) described parent participation and commitment at the debriefing:

I think the debriefing should be information sharing. When a parent reads that report, they should recognize, “That is my kid.” They are much more likely to buy into the remediation plan if they believe that you have gotten to know something about their child and his or her life.

The participants acknowledged the necessary role of parents in the long-term implementation of the psycho-educational assessment recommendations.

A strategy that some participants identified to increase the effectiveness of parent participation in the debriefing is to establish a positive relationship prior to the debriefing, which reinforces the recommendation of conducting pre-assessment conferences in addition to individual interviews. Bob (t) described his insights, based on 16 years of teaching experience:

I have been in some debriefings that have not been effective. They are situations where the communication has not been established prior to the meeting. If parents come in for the very first time, they generally are not comfortable to be in a school setting. They see school as an unfriendly place, usually because they have had struggles in school themselves. When that is the case, where a parent is uncomfortable, then they are not going to be ready to listen to the report or the recommendations.

He suggested that previously establishing a positive relationship between parents and staff can deescalate this type of situation.

Unfortunately, other teachers saw establishing a relationship as challenging because some parents are not receptive to being in contact with school staff. In these

cases the debriefing may become an isolated opportunity for teachers to develop insights into the home environment. Jane (sp) described a “debriefing that was very interesting because this was a family that did not believe that there was much of a problem. The mother was fairly noncompliant, although the teachers gained an appreciation of the home circumstances.”

Another advantage of having parents attend the debriefing is the formation of clear lines of communication when the assessment results are discussed. Tessa (t) commented: “I like to hear what the parents are hearing. . . . We are trying to get them on board so we can work together.”

The teachers also felt that parents are more inclined to receive information about their children from a professional, such as a school psychologist, who they perceive to be independent of or separate from their children’s school. Tessa (t) explained her frustration with encouraging parents to hear her concerns about their child: “I feel like I am running into roadblocks. . . . I find that, when it comes from a psychologist, sometimes they listen a little bit better.” Brenda (t) recalled a debriefing that she felt is a sound example of parents who are at first in a state of purposeful ignorance but then move towards enlightenment: “There were tears; there was denial. Then came a deeper level of understanding. It was coming to the realization that this was the reality.” In conclusion, the debriefing is another occasion for school psychologists and teachers not only to involve parents, but also to encourage follow-through in the home environment.

Classroom teachers. The teachers and school psychologists emphasized that a classroom teacher’s attendance at the debriefing is pivotal to ensure that the assessment process has a powerful impact on student instruction. The school psychologists

acknowledged that they are not the professionals who implement or carry out recommendations; therefore, if the teacher is not present at the debriefing, the school psychologist's remedial plan may not be realized. Ruby's (sp) comment exemplifies this reality:

An effective assessment is an assessment that assists a student, teacher, and parent in understanding a particular student's learning needs, what that student needs to be more successful in the school setting, . . . to influence the teacher's ability to teach that student in a way that is going to allow him or her to learn the best.

The participants identified the information presented at this meeting as fundamental to planning appropriate instructional methods. Jane (sp) relied on school staff "to ask if they are questioning something or if a suggestion is not going to work . . . or how it could be modified appropriately." Another suggestion to improve the effectiveness of a debriefing was not to rush through it. Guy (sp) reported that his debriefings generally take about one hour. However, the length of the meeting varies depending on the number of questions from teachers and parents. His main purpose is to conclude a debriefing when the participants feel that all discussions have been finished.

Monique (t) raised concerns regarding the timing of debriefings: "We had a debriefing over lunch. The bell rang; we were not finished; I had to go. I left the school psychologist, the parents, and the resource teacher there." Her frustration was apparent when she spoke of being unable to participate fully in this final component of the process. From the perspective of school psychologists, the purpose of a debriefing is to convey findings and discuss implications; consequently, it is essential for teachers to attend the entire meeting.

School administration. Furthermore, the participants identified the attendance of a school administrator at a debriefing as an important factor. It is the school-based

administration team in a school environment who make and/or facilitate important decisions such as the allocation of resources and the purchasing of specialized equipment. Brent (sp) explained: “I need to know that the administrator understands his role in relationship to the larger issues.” School administrators’ appreciation of the student’s assessed profile, whether it be academic or behavioral, is crucial given the fact that the findings could have schoolwide implications. Zena (sp) and Brenda (t) suggested that, when the principal attends a debriefing, the needs of the student tend to be more suitably addressed, and there is an increased likelihood of successful implementation of the recommendations.

Students. Some members of both professional groups identified the student’s participation—contingent upon the student’s maturity—in some aspect of the debriefing as productive. Brooke (t) asserted that the assessment process is for the benefit of the student and therefore it is logical that the student understand his or her strengths and be offered coping strategies to overcome identified weaknesses. Furthermore, it would be unthinkable not to include the student: “Wait a minute! You did all this for the child, and then you gave him no tools.” Chantal (sp) shared her success with including students in the debriefing. She suggested that the discussion reassures students and allows the participants to refute any incorrectly perceived notions: “Most students that are assessed feel that they are stupid, . . . and that is not the case.” Chantal (sp) wanted to ensure that students consider the psycho-educational assessment process as beneficial and understand that recommendations are presented to help the students, which is an identified outcome of the assessment process. Some participants reported that many of these students have a

low self-perception and felt that their participation in the debriefing can increase their self-esteem. Kurt (sp) recalled an example of empowering a student:

I made a point of sitting down with that student and telling her, “This is what I found out.” I really wanted to boost her self-confidence. If I could help this student to appreciate her strengths, that could be very empowering. She could start to surprise herself with what she was capable of.

Bob (t) described a regretful situation in which the student did not participate in the debriefing. He pointed out that he was pleased that “everyone was working together on the same issue” but disappointed that the parents did not want the student to hear the results of the assessment. In the end, Bob (t) and the school psychologist encouraged the parents to convey the results to the student. He felt that it is crucial that the student “hears the message” because the results would encourage that student. Essentially, he believed that empowering this student with the knowledge of the results and then providing supportive strategies would make implementing the recommendations more feasible.

Communication at the Debriefing

All participants valued the use of clear and concise communication during the debriefing to facilitate comprehension of the findings. Guy (sp) explained that he presented testing results to the parents and teachers at the debriefing: “This is the purpose of the assessment—identification of strengths and needs: . . . ‘These are some areas that need to be improved.’ And then I explain the recommendations: ‘What can be done to build upon those strengths?’” Ruby (sp) considered understanding the results as crucial. She judges her work on the degree of insight that the stakeholders achieve: “I think they felt that they got the information they needed and could understand the results. I think they felt they got some good service from the assessment.” Ruby (sp) summarized her thoughts on communication:

When you are sitting and talking with parents, my concern, in terms of being effective versus being ineffective, is, if the people I am talking to do not understand what I am telling them, whether it is that I have been too brief or that the language I have used is too over their head, then it is ineffective; it is not helping them to learn anything.

Tessa (t) demonstrated the implications of a school psychologist's lack of effective communication skills. As a result of her experiences, she recalled "times where a child was up for assessment and I refused it or I said 'Not unless we can get some new help in here,' because I did not find him an effective communicator." Tessa (t) valued the productivity of psycho-educational assessment and decided not to engage in the process when she judged it to be ineffective.

Another implication that Guy (sp) identified is that conveying information to others in a manner that is not meaningful can be detrimental to the school-psychology profession:

It can actually be hurtful. A number of parents and teachers that I have had contacted do not want to work with psychologists any more because . . . the results were not conveyed in a manner that was helpful."

Brent (sp) reflected on communication between school psychologists and teachers:

I wonder if teachers would have different opinions on what we are talking about. . . . We think we talk in language that everyone understands, but teachers might say, "They can talk for an hour and then leave, and I still did not have any idea about what was going on."

Teachers appreciate school psychologists who are decisive and realistic in sharing diagnostic information. The school psychologists explained that they endeavor to emphasize strengths while realistically illuminating the weaknesses and probable limitations to parents and teachers. Brenda (t) summarized this concept:

You have to be realistic to the parents. I find I am so grateful to have the psychologist sit in on those meetings. If they identify something, there is backup for what I am generically speaking about. They can put it into concrete numbers or terms: “This is why this is happening in the classroom.”

The purpose of the debriefing is to convey information by allowing the school psychologist to explain the results and stakeholders to ask questions to facilitate their understanding of the findings, which is crucial to effectiveness. Brent’s (sp) statement reinforces the importance of helping stakeholders to understand the findings: “Ineffective is not sharing the assessment results in a meaningful manner, . . . doing a case conference that is not going to make sense to anyone. They walk away, scratching their heads, saying, ‘What was that?’”

The Debriefing: A Summary

The debriefing presents an opportunity to clarify the assessment results and agree upon a responsive plan. Brenda (t) stated: “When you bring all of the parties together with the testing, you see a clear picture from all angles.” The school psychologist uses this face-to-face gathering with stakeholders to assemble all of the pieces of a student’s puzzle. A successful debriefing includes a discussion of the testing results in detail, which therefore empowers the participants to grasp the student’s profile within various life contexts (i.e., both home and school). The interactive review of the recommendations to discuss both reservations and misconceptions clarifies the response plan. Some participants commented that a debriefing may be emotionally charged, but that it is effective when it concludes with stakeholders’ understanding a student’s profile and empowering and motivating the participants to make a difference in the student’s school experience. Zena (sp) described an effective outcome of a debriefing:

The assessment function is to find out more about this child. It is like solving a mystery, then assisting the people who work with the child. I think it is very important for parents to utilize the strategies. The whole school, the teachers, the aides, and the principal can be more accommodating, use a different approach if there is an understanding of the assessment findings.

Theme 1: Reflecting on the Assessment Process: A Summary

In conclusion, it is apparent from the participants' perspectives that an effective psycho-educational assessment process includes (a) a clearly defined referral question, (b) a pre-assessment conference to guide the assessment process, (c) informal and formal assessment tools to assess the student's capabilities within the classroom context, (d) a written report that articulately conveys results and subsequent recommendations, and (e) an interactive debriefing. Guy (sp) summarized the aim of undertaking the psycho-educational assessment:

I really enjoy doing psychological assessments, and the reason that I like doing them is because I think that they can really make a difference in the learning and life of the students I assess—if they are done well, if they're done right, and if they make sense for the student, the teachers, the parents, and for all others involved.

Theme 2: Working as a Team

As I gathered and analyzed the participants' perceptions, a second main theme emerged: the concept of working as a team. They defined *team* as a group of people with a common interest—a student. The school psychologists and teachers identified themselves as the primary professional team members. Very specific roles emerged from the data with regard to the responsibilities and characteristics of each profession in an effective assessment process. The participants also included as key members of the team the parents, the school, and the student. They considered all team members fundamental to the assessment process. The school psychologists' and teachers' interviews revealed

several common attributes of an effective psycho-educational assessment team. An effective team is based on reciprocal respect among the main professional members, the school psychologists and teachers. Once respect is developed, meaningful communication helps to create a relationship based on trust. A partnership between a school psychologist and a teacher increases their collective ability to develop a broader team. However, creating a team requires commitment from all stakeholders to collaborate in the best interests of the student.

School Psychologists: Role and Responsibilities

All of the participants recognized an interactive team process created by the school psychologist as the most effective. Many from both professions described the construction of this interactive team as reliant on the leadership of school psychologists and reciprocal communication between psychologists and teachers as fundamental. The school psychologists suggested that two-way communication can lead to a meaningful partnership with teachers. The teachers felt that an important aspect of the relationship between these two professionals is the school psychologist's affirmation of teachers as professionals. Members of both professions discussed the implications of psychologists' education and their employment parameters as they relate to the effectiveness of their role in psycho-educational assessment.

Establishing Reciprocal Communication

Both professions recognized the facilitation of reciprocal communication as one of the fundamental responsibilities of school psychologists, and the psychologists acknowledged that encouraging reciprocal communication is their responsibility and that the need for back and forth communication is crucial. Guy (sp) emphasized the

importance of reciprocal stakeholder input and deliberation: “It is not effective if within the situation I am forcing my ideas, my thoughts, or the assessment process on the child, the parents, or the teachers.” A “reciprocal kind of relationship” in which stakeholders freely challenge and discuss ideas results in authentic communication. Zena (sp) described the practice of actively dialoguing with teachers to set the stage for communication:

I spend a lot of time with teachers talking, and so as a result I think they . . . perceive me as somebody who is interested in what they have to say. Therefore they are interested in what I have to say back.

Zena (sp) understood that, to get a teacher to engage in active listening, she needs to model that behavior and that active listening is a key component of reciprocal communication. The school psychologists acknowledged the central role of their profession in ensuring reciprocal communication.

Many of the school psychologists also identified mutual communication as a means of increasing the respect for and understanding of teachers’ expertise and vice versa. Ruby (sp) believed that conversations between teachers and school psychologists build deeper knowledge of the other’s expertise: “Having more time to talk with a teacher would assist . . . that teacher in understanding what I could do to help her. It would also help me to understand what the teacher saw happening with a particular child.” Valuing the expertise of teachers is also evident in Jane’s (sp) practice of utilizing reciprocal communication to refine her assessment procedures. She begins her assessment process by meeting with teachers to review the assessment tools that she plans to use and to clarify the kind of information that she hopes to gather from using particular tools. She explained: “Now that I am a psychologist, I always make sure to go back to the teacher

and explain what tools I am using, . . . why I am using them, and what I hope to gain from using them.” She suggested that this conversation is beneficial in that it gives teachers the opportunity to influence her assessment plan. Her respect for a teacher’s professional insight is evident in her purposeful use of mutual communication. In conclusion, the school psychologists considered reciprocal communication an avenue to develop an interactive professional partnership.

The teachers had different perspectives on reciprocal communication with psychologists. Their comments related to the attitude of school psychologists toward reciprocal communication and the effect of school psychologists’ attitudes on the psycho-educational assessment process. Some teachers felt that their contributions were not encouraged, and they were therefore reluctant to openly disagree with school psychologists. Tessa (t) recalled her experience with a school psychologist who was not open to reciprocal communication. He did not welcome other perspectives and became defensive when stakeholders disagreed with his conclusions: “When we asked for clarification, he replied, ‘I’m not finished yet.’” Bob (t) also described his experiences with school psychologists who set the tone for communication: “I have been in different circumstances where some psychologists are very aloof and not prepared to communicate, . . . so therefore we had no rapport, . . . no starting point of conversation.” Tessa (t) and Bob (t) contended that the school psychologist’s degree of desire for collaborative communication with the teacher is instrumental in the effectiveness of the psycho-educational assessment process.

Brooke (t) stated her reluctance to express an opinion contrary to that of a school psychologist because it might be perceived as critical of the school psychologist’s work:

“I think there is defensiveness: They did the assessment to the best of their ability.”

Brooke (t) did not have the professional confidence that her insights would be received as constructive. Victoria (t) and Tessa (t) explained that they would “talk to the principal about it” if they disagreed with a school psychologist’s conclusions. Victoria (t) and Tessa (t) were not comfortable disagreeing with a school psychologist because they did not trust that their expertise would be valued. Consequently, they did not communicate their thoughts to the school psychologist. Bob (t) recalled an experience in which he had raised concerns over the accuracy of the psycho-educational assessment findings with a school psychologist: “You have these results; however, this child is on a roller coaster. You have not seen the entire picture of the child; you have seen only a snapshot, a two-hour snapshot.” He was disappointed when his concerns were acknowledged only in a cautionary statement inserted into the report. These teachers lamented that the school psychologists were not successful in either encouraging or accepting their contributions, which hindered reciprocal communication.

The school psychologists indicated that they were aware of differing opinions, but they were under the assumption that these perspectives would be explored through conversation until such a time as a compromise was reached. Brent’s (sp) recollection exemplifies the school psychologists’ view:

I always tell teachers, “If you disagree, stop me immediately and say ‘I do not see that.’” I appreciate that teachers are professionals and they often have a better handle on the day-to-day functioning than I get in a two-hour period.

It is apparent that both professional groups—teachers and school psychologists—recognized that school psychologists have a significant responsibility to facilitate reciprocal communication. The teachers supported the notion that reciprocal

communication is influenced, if not determined, by the school psychologist. However, the teachers reported experiences in which school psychologists did not welcome their insights and appeared to prefer a one-way dissemination of results. The school psychologists assumed that teachers bring forward their differing opinions for discussion. There appear to have been contradictory perspectives on whether some school psychologists value reciprocal communication and/or their success with facilitating open and honest discussion. This insight adds complexity to the school psychologist's role in terms of the need and/or effectiveness of fostering reciprocal communication.

Partnering With Teachers

Some school psychologists identified their responsibility of establishing working partnerships with teachers. They suggested that this partnership be created and maintained by conferring with teachers throughout the assessment process. The main purpose that they identified was to ensure that data are being interpreted in a relevant manner. Zena (sp) stated: "There needs to be more of a dialogue, sharing back and forth, 'What do you think of this?'" In addition, interpreting the results in this way respects a teacher's depth of knowledge. Guy (sp) explained: "I emphasize that the report is considered a draft because I do not know the student as well as the teacher does. . . . Here is the information that I have, but does it make sense for the child?"

Many school psychologists understood and appreciated that implementation of their recommendations depends largely on the efforts of school staff. Ruby (sp) acknowledged the importance of teachers' agreeing with the school psychologist's suggestions: "There is no sense in drilling it home because the teacher ultimately has to be the one teaching the child." Several school psychologists reported that taking a

collaborative route has made them more successful in influencing teachers and stressed the importance of providing support to teachers. Brent (sp) commented:

I am not setting the teacher up for any unrealistic expectations. For example, “You need to be doing this. You have to do this. Why are you not doing this?” It is more similar to working together to increase this or decrease that.

Brent (sp) felt assured that the recommendations agreed upon can be incorporated into the daily life of the student and do not impose extraneous demands on the teaching staff. Some school psychologists attributed their success with designing useful recommendations to understanding the classroom context by spending time working with the teacher in the classroom. Kurt (sp) remarked: “If you cannot relate to the teachers and if they look at you like an outsider who is . . . a self-proclaimed expert, . . . they are not going to want to be all that . . . supportive or helpful.”

Ruby (sp) gave another example of the importance of developing a working relationship. She spoke of teachers who have called her following the assessment process to ask for additional suggestions or consultation regarding a student’s progress, and at times they would also ask for assistance with assessments in which she had not been involved: “I believe one of the key differences is that teachers feel more comfortable contacting someone they know works right in their division, persons employed by the division to be a support to teachers.” She elaborated that teachers are reluctant to ask for follow-up assistance from school psychologists if a working relationship has not been established. Furthermore, Zena (sp) explained the significance of entering the assessment relationship from a relational versus an expert stance:

If you go in there and say, “Well, I am the psychologist, and I know . . . ,” there is no point in doing that. Teachers are really going to hate you then, and they are not going to do anything that you suggest.

The school psychologists believed that professional partnerships need to begin with establishing a working relationship that encompasses a consultative approach and collective decision making, which are crucial in an effective psycho-educational assessment process.

Affirming Teachers

Teachers often feel responsible for students' limited progress, but a school psychologist can alleviate teachers' feelings of inadequacy by affirming their professional judgments. According to Bob (t): "The testing results . . . reflected what I perceived, what I saw, and what I thought were the right things, [that] I was doing the right things, . . . and that was nice to know. It reaffirmed me." Brenda (t) expressed her gratefulness to the school psychologist for supporting her "professional judgment. . . . They can tell you that what you are doing is the right thing. School psychologists back us up because we are not the specialist." School psychologist Jane added: "It is nice to have someone come in and say, . . . 'You are doing a great job.' . . . There is only so much you can do as a teacher." In reflecting on the outcomes of an effective psycho-educational assessment, Tessa (t) concluded: "It makes me feel that I have really done my job; I am on the right track." The school psychologists and teachers both asserted that teachers want school psychologists to affirm their professional decisions and conclusions.

School Psychologists' Qualifications

The school psychologists in this study commented extensively on the positive impact of specific education and training on their role in psycho-educational assessment. They were definitive about the qualifications of a psychologist who works in educational systems. Jane's (sp) comments exemplify the feelings of her colleagues:

I have a big problem with psychologists who work in the school system but do not have the background to work with children. There are excellent counselors, therapists, and school psychologists. We specialize for a reason. I am bothered in this profession that there are professionals who dabble in a variety of things and maybe do not have competencies in all areas. . . . There is a reason why we specialize. I think that we really need to stick to our areas of specialization instead of being a jack-of-all-trades in the psychological profession.

Jane (sp) was adamant about the need for psychologists who work in school systems to have specialized knowledge. Kurt's (sp) viewpoint supports the uniqueness of the educational setting: "We are trained to do something and other people are trained to do other things. Ineffective assessment is going beyond your scope of expertise." The school psychologists also expressed their concern about psychologists who do not have specialized training in psycho-educational assessment and about the impact of this lack of training on practice. Brent (sp) commented: "I think that often we get psychologists doing assessments that really do not have an understanding of testing as a general concept." When psychologists work in schools and do not have the necessary expertise, their service reflects on school psychologists in general. School psychologists value their professional training, and the participants contended that psychologists with expertise in other areas of psychology should limit their practice to reflect their education.

Some school psychologists felt that experience in the school system adds to their credibility with teachers. Ruby (sp) acknowledged: "I think coming from a teaching background certainly helps because I have been in the classroom setting. I understand the limitations and what can really happen in terms of recommendations." She felt that her personal experience in the classroom has made her a more productive school psychologist in that she can develop practical recommendations. Jane's (sp) comments support Ruby's (sp) perceptions:

Teachers see the BEd on my card, and they love it. I think that is key. I have said to them, “I sat across the table and listened to the psychologist speak Greek to me. I knew that nothing they [psychologists] suggested would be applicable to my classroom.”

She felt that her experience as a teacher places her in a more trusted position and that teachers can identify with her.

One school psychologist commented on the responsibility of hiring qualified school psychologists. Guy (sp) thought that it is the responsibility of the school system to ensure that school psychologists be qualified. The school system is financing the process in most circumstances, and he held it responsible. Guy (sp) related the quality of an assessment process to the proficiency of the psychologist and explained that the school district administrator who hires psychologists “needs to be sufficiently skilful in knowing which psychologists to use.” The school psychologists reported that their professional credibility relates to the training and expertise of psychologists who work in schools, but they must rely on the employing school board to set professional expertise benchmarks through its hiring practices.

Employment Parameters

The teachers and some school psychologists suggested that a team relationship enhances the psycho-educational assessment process and that the cultivation of a team relationship is influenced by the employment parameters of school psychologists, which thus, has an impact on the effectiveness of a school psychologist’s role in the assessment process. According to the participants, the employment parameters include, first, school psychologists who are employees of a school district or, second, school psychologists who are self-employed and contract their services privately. Chantal (sp) outlined a common vision for school psychological services:

I think if you are doing assessments in schools as a member of the school district, you will be more available to schools. . . . If there was a group of psychologists assigned certain schools in the district, there could be collaboration between staff and school psychologists. School psychologists could easily follow up with those schools, and . . . schools would know who is coming in to do the assessments. It would be a lot better for everyone.

Monique (t), Susan (t), and Victoria (t) identified the positive effect of relationships on psychological service. Monique (t) stated:

Personally, I feel that a school psychologist needs to know what the school atmosphere is like. It would be beneficial to have the same person coming in, simply because you know the school history, you know what's happening at the school, you know what kind of school it is and how it run. Most of all, you get to know the personalities of the teachers. It would only be beneficial to have the same person coming in.

Susan (t) added: "It would be nice for school psychologists to work with a few schools so that relationships could be established." Victoria (t) explained: "I think there is a partnership when the school psychologist works for a school district and builds those relationships. In my opinion, a partnership definitely matters; it is valued. I have felt that way." Ruby, a school psychologist employed in a school system, cited an advantage that she has experienced: "I think the benefit of my position in the school system is that I can continually connect with that teacher, keeping the lines of communication open." These participants confirmed that the creation of a team can be positively influenced by a school psychologist who is a school division employee.

The teachers and school psychologists commented on the realities of contracting private-practice school psychologists. Monique (t) described a common perspective: "I find it very frustrating. I get to know one and their style, and then the next time I have a student assessed, there is a different school psychologist." The teachers also raised concerns over limitations with which school psychologists in private practice have to

contend with. Bob (t) recalled an incident in which he disagreed with the findings of a school psychologist's assessment because the results did not take the student's range of functioning or his unstable behavior into consideration:

The school psychologist listened to my concerns and said that it was very probable that the concerning behaviors were not exhibited the day of the test, but that he did not get paid to do another two hours of assessment.

Susan (t) described the service that she had received from various contracted school psychologists: "They parachute in and parachute out. They make snap judgments based on very little observation and information." She concluded that the nature of the contracted services is that they focus on completing a specific task in a limited amount of time and therefore have less than comprehensive results. Zena (sp) agreed:

Teachers feel like school psychologists fly into their schools, and sometimes teachers do not even see them. The child is pulled from the classroom, tested, and sent back. The school psychologist goes strictly to the referral form for behavioral information.

She clearly felt that this type of assessment process is ineffective. Kurt (sp) commented on the limitations of being a contracted school psychologist: "Working in private practice, I have to keep in mind that it is a business." He continued:

It would be nice not to have to think they [the school district] are not paying me to do this additional tool, so I had better not, or I do not have the time to complete this tool, so I had better not. It would be nice to be able to complete an assessment at my discretion and then bill for the measures used.

Kurt (sp) concluded: "It is not realistic, but it would be nice."

School Psychologists: Role and Responsibilities: A Summary

Participants from both professions described the role of a school psychologist as multifaceted, perceived the establishment of two-way communication as vital to building

an interactive team, and identified the role of school psychologists in facilitating that communication. They also considered the aspect of working with teachers as equal partners as crucial to gathering all pertinent information and devising a realistic remediation plan. According to the participants, the role of affirming teachers' decisions and judgments is a valuable component of a working partnership. The participants suggested that a school psychologist, who has specific training in education pedagogy and is an employee of a school district, tends to be more effective in the role and that above and beyond the specifics of the school psychologist's role is the significance of his or her commitment to the profession. Kurt (sp) described his dedication to the profession:

I am doing this because I enjoy it. I chose this profession because I feel like it is something that is valuable. I like to express that to teachers, and then they are much more willing and eager to get on the same team.

Teachers: Role and Responsibilities

The school psychologists and teachers acknowledged that it is the teacher who has the most extensive experience in responding to a student's needs. Both professional groups defined the teacher as the expert when it comes to determining which students are in need of a psycho-educational assessment. In addition, they agreed that, after the teacher refers the student for assessment, it is his or her responsibility to fully participate in the assessment process. Both groups also believed that a teacher's ability to effectively contribute to the psycho-assessment process can be improved through professional development. They identified the extent of teacher involvement in a psycho-educational assessment process as an indicator of effectiveness.

Identification of Students

The teachers characterized their role as the initiator of the assessment process. They asserted that it is their responsibility to educate a student to the best of their ability and that only after they have exhausted all of their strategies would they confer with the parents about their concerns and the need for a specialized assessment. Bob's (t) description of his process reflects other teachers' practice: "I try everything, and when nothing is working, I ask the parent to give consent for a request for specialized assessment." Furthermore, when a student is identified as needing a psycho-educational assessment, it is the responsibility of the teacher to meet with the parents, review all steps that the school has taken to facilitate learning for the student, and then explain why it is appropriate to request the services of a school psychologist. Bob (t) stated that this parent-teacher meeting is the first step toward gaining parents' trust and confidence in the process and that, with it, there is a greater probability of parent commitment to psycho-educational assessment outcomes. Brenda's (t) belief, that it is a teacher's responsibility to be diligent in selecting students to ensure that appropriate cases are referred, was common among the teacher participants:

My aim is not to overburden the psychologist with testing that is not required. . . . I do not ask for assessments unless I have gone through all of the other channels and I am sure that there is something. To be honest, every time I have had a child go in for assessment, they have found something and have backed up my suspicions.

Some school psychologists expressed appreciation for the work that teachers do prior to submitting the referral package and attributed the productiveness of an assessment to this preliminary work. Ruby's (sp) comment illustrates this gratitude:

I think if a school has worked at trying to determine what works or does not work with a child, has done some initial assessment at the level B, has tried . . . some different strategies, and has tried those strategies long enough to really understand whether they work or not, . . . then the assessment process works better.

A fundamental component of the preliminary work that teachers do is the documentation of the teaching strategies that they have used. As previously stated, teachers' commitment to determining the appropriateness of a psycho-educational assessment by utilizing their professional expertise first and then methodically assembling information enhances the efficiency of the process.

Commitment to the Process

The teachers characterized their commitment to the psycho-educational assessment process as conveying their professional knowledge concerning a student as well as allocating the time to participate in the assessment process. The school psychologists identified the importance of teacher interaction with students in the context of the classroom and stressed that the information gathered from this interaction is crucial to the assessment process. Furthermore, they believed that it is essential for teachers to be given not only the opportunity to communicate information, but also the responsibility to convey their insights. Brent (sp) explained: "I stress to teachers the importance of asking questions and clarifying anything they do not understand." The direct experience that teachers have with students and their pedagogical understandings are indispensable contributions to the assessment process. Chantal (sp) emphasized the importance of valuing a teacher's knowledge:

I am not going there to say that I am the expert and to tell them what needs to be done. I only spend two or three hours with a child, so it is . . . the teacher who knows more about the child. They share with me, and we work together for the benefit of the child. That is the approach I take going in.

The school psychologists pointed out that it is their responsibility in a teacher—school psychologist relationship to encourage forthright conversation throughout the assessment process. Jane (sp), who takes this responsibility very seriously, was determined to

make teachers a part of the process instead of just the individual who looks in from the outside. I try not to do this. . . . I do not want to be the be-all, end-all. I am not the be-all, end-all. The classroom teacher is the person who is there every day and knows far more than I do walking into that assessment.

She suggested that teachers should be involved in the psycho-educational assessment process at every stage and demonstrates her belief by continually discussing the assessment, as it progresses, with teachers.

The school psychologists emphasized that it is the teacher's responsibility to allocate time to the psycho-educational assessment process beyond the completion of referral forms. Teacher commitment to the process must be maintained by reading and responding to paperwork as well as attending and actively participating in meetings. Although the school psychologists empathized with the magnitude of a teacher's workload, they accentuated the fact that the process is not effective unless school staff devote the necessary time and effort to the process. In addition, teachers who do not complete the paperwork compromise the effectiveness of the process. Kurt (sp) sympathized with the demands that teachers face but explained the importance of their input: "In order for us to be able to do our jobs, . . . we need to have them fill the forms out and to give us all the information we need in order to answer questions or to make a diagnosis." The school psychologists encouraged teachers to communicate their insights through as many avenues as possible. Jane (sp) stated: "I always tell teachers to write comments because I hand-score everything." School psychologists' expectation of

teacher participation in the psycho-educational assessment process confirms their value of teacher input.

An essential part of teachers' commitment to the psycho-educational assessment process includes attendance at meetings. Jane (sp) stated that a teacher should "attend the debriefing, and, unfortunately, that does not always happen." She felt that for some teachers the debriefing is not a priority. Zena's (sp) experience with secondary teachers is a revealing example:

You might get one person showing up; sometimes it is the special education teacher. But the people who actually work with the child are not even there, and that is a waste of time as far as doing an assessment if . . . the information is not being communicated and . . . then used.

The school psychologists felt that, without teachers' active participation, undertaking an assessment is ineffectual.

An identified component of a teacher's role is the commitment to respond to the assessment findings. Brent (sp) raised the issue of teachers who "haven't taken the time to read the report before we come in for the debriefing." He believed that, prior to teachers' responding to the assessment findings, they must read the report. Chantal's (sp) comment illustrates the lack of follow-through: "A lot of teachers did not necessarily follow up on the recommendations, and . . . reports were not even read." She has worked with teachers to "develop an understanding . . . [of] what we need to do for this student" and then include those strategies in the Individualized Program Plan (IPP). The teacher participants recognized within their role the implementation of the findings. Victoria's (t) comment illustrates this responsibility. She explained that she expects school psychologists "to be able to debrief with me and the family, to give strategies and recommendations on how we can assist the student in class." It is then the teacher's role

to employ those strategies. She classified ineffective assessment as those that lead to “nothing. There’s no follow-up, the information is just lost, nothing is done.” The participants identified enacting the recommendations of a psycho-educational assessment as the responsibility of teachers.

Training

Many participants suggested additional training for teachers on the psycho-educational assessment process to improve its effectiveness. Expanding the role of teachers to include some expertise in the assessment processes, the participants believed, would enhance teachers’ usage of the service. Ruby’s (sp) response to the question on how the psycho-educational assessment process could be improved for classroom teachers represents the school psychologists’ perspective:

I do not know if all classroom teachers understand the kind of information I can gather and share with them, . . . or if they understand that I can look at certain things and give them information about different areas of a student’s learning style, and what works or does not work. I think sometimes teachers do not buy into the process because they do not understand the process well enough. So maybe continuing education for our regular classroom teachers [is required] on what a psycho-educational assessment can provide to them and how the process can help them from a teaching perspective.

Some school psychologists recalled teachers who had expressed an interest in the assessment process. They wanted to learn more about the relevancy and day-to-day application of different subtests. Kurt (sp) explained:

I have had teachers who are curious about what actually happens in an assessment: What are these tests? What are they all about? . . . I have taken groups of teachers through every subtest and shown them what this subtest does: “This is what I am doing with the student and what it is telling me.”

The school psychologists suggested that empowering teachers with knowledge about the assessment process would make them more knowledgeable about what the

results could offer them. Ruby (sp) added: “If teachers were more educated on what a psychological assessment could uncover, that would make the process more straightforward for the school psychologist.” She explained that knowing how a psycho-educational assessment works would give teachers a greater appreciation for the assessment results.

Two teachers expressed dissatisfaction with their limited understanding of the psycho-educational assessment process. They linked their inadequate knowledge to the lack of university training in this area. These teachers suggested that more professional development time be allocated to the subject of psycho-educational assessment. Victoria (t) was frustrated with her ability to educate students with disabilities in her classroom and did not understand how a psycho-educational assessment could help her. She emphatically stated:

I think it would be beneficial to be more educated about psycho-educational assessment through professional development. I do not know if they offer this training in university, but being thrown into a classroom, . . . and then you are supposed to deal with these students and meet their needs— . . . I feel very uneducated.

Tessa (t) also asked for supplementary knowledge: “I would like to have the assessment tools and process explained to me. I would like to be clear on what it does.” She indicated that it would be useful to understand how the results culminate in the creation of a student’s profile and concluded: “In a perfect world I would have a deeper understanding of what school psychologists acquire from the assessment tools.” The teachers called for an expansion of teacher knowledge in the area of psycho-educational assessment to increase the effectiveness of the assessment process.

Teachers: Role and Responsibilities: A Summary

The teacher's role in a psycho-educational assessment is pivotal to the productivity of the process. The participants made three points: (a) it is the responsibility of a teacher to identify appropriate students for assessment; (b) once the referral has been submitted, a teacher must commit the time to participate in the assessment process; and (c) it would be helpful for teachers to understand the possible benefits of a psycho-educational assessment. Teachers have an important function in the psycho-educational assessment process that is essential to its effectiveness.

Key Stakeholders: Roles and Responsibilities

The participants identified the key stakeholders in the assessment process as the school system, the parent, and the student. The interests of these stakeholders combine to play a role in the effectiveness of the process because they each contribute to the findings of the assessment and have a vested stake in the outcomes. Brenda (t) recalled an experience in which a functional psycho-educational assessment team included all key stakeholders:

The parents were very supportive once convinced and with the reassurance of the assessment findings. I have no doubt that they now know where their son was at and where he needs to go. I think this is a family that will support us at home. The teachers are prepared, and the principal is willing to put a teacher assistant in place. Everything is in place; it should go forward.

The School System: Role and Responsibilities

The school system is an institution of learning that holds a vested interest in the assessment process mainly because it generally funds this endeavor. Therefore, the productivity of this undertaking is of the utmost importance. Typically, the assessment takes place in the school setting; however, both the school system and the individual

school assume responsibility for contributing to its effectiveness. Chantal (sp) commented that the degree of productiveness of an assessment depends upon “the district and their philosophy.” She identified a supportive district as one that has a plan for how the assessment process will proceed. For instance, the plan provides information so that teachers know when to assess, school staff understand the purpose of assessment, and the school is prepared to fulfill their role of facilitating the assessment process. If this plan is clearly outlined to schools and is sustained with supportive provisions, then it is the school’s role to execute it.

Facilitating psycho-educational services. Some participants recognized the implications of school systems’ budgetary limitations; therefore, they suggested that assessments must be requested for the appropriate reasons. Some teachers pointed out that it is the responsibility of teachers to undertake various avenues of remediation and/or interventions prior to referring a student for assessment. Brenda (t) commented that she is very selective in referring students and hoped that other teachers are also prudent in this regard:

I think that it happens where teachers say, “Oh, little Johnny is giving me grief. I am going to get him assessed.” I would go through more channels . . . before I would take it to the psychologist to request long, intrusive, extensive tests.

In addition, Brenda (t) recognized that the misuse of the school’s psychological services could extend the waitlist and therefore have a negative impact on students who truly need to be assessed. Brooke (t) perceived the importance of assessing students and recognized that, although a psychological assessment is costly, if it is requested for appropriate reasons, it can positively alter a student’s future: “You cannot pay enough for a kid to

succeed.” These teachers balanced the value of a psycho-educational assessment with the cost of conducting the assessment.

Clarifying the purpose of the assessment. Some school psychologists pointed out that, if administrators make referrals in the pursuit of coding, funding, and/or placement, the results have limited impact on students because some teachers do not seem to be invested in the process. Brent (sp) shared his perception of the difference between referrals made for the purpose of coding and referrals made for the purpose of instruction: “Administrators obviously want to know if this is a student who can be coded. Teachers want to know, ‘How do I deal with a student on a regular basis and make things more efficient?’” Zena (sp) commented on ownership of the assessment process as it relates to its purpose: “Effectiveness depends on who is requesting the assessment and whether they are requesting the information for funding versus curiosity about why the child is not learning.” She explained that, when someone other than the teacher makes the referral, the teacher is generally not interested in the recommendations of the assessment. In her opinion, this renders the assessment ineffective. Other school psychologists suggested that teachers who are not involved in the referral process are often difficult to engage in fulfilling their psycho-educational assessment responsibilities. The difference is in who takes the responsibility and invests time in the process. In addition, if teachers have not participated in the referral request, it is apparent that they were not asking for assistance. The participants’ comments reveal that a productive referral comes from a teacher who is concerned about a student’s progress and is willing to allocate time to participating in the psycho-educational process.

Commitment. A school system's commitment to psycho-educational assessments is demonstrated in the coordination of the assessment process, which the participants identified as organizing the paperwork, and arranging for appropriate testing space. It is evident from the school psychologists' experiences that some school systems have superior organizational capabilities compared to others. Brent's (sp) comment encapsulates good organization:

We go in and things are just so well organized. The paperwork is completed and the informed consent is done. The parents have not just signed it, but someone has taken the time to explain, "This is why we are doing it."

Two school psychologists noted that, once the referral had been made, it is the school's responsibility to ensure the availability of an appropriate testing environment. Jane (sp) recalled an experience: "I was shown a broom closet with a piano in it. I said, 'No, this is not good for the child.' . . . There is an environment that is conducive to a good assessment." Brent (sp) described certain requirements: "A quiet environment that is free from distractions" is essential to meet validity standards. Compromising assessment testing standards may cause limited productivity and result in inaccurate data collection.

School participation. Some school psychologists emphasized that the school's participation is pivotal in the psycho-educational assessment process, and they were therefore apprehensive about doing an assessment in which there is no school contribution. With regard to the implications of no school participation, Brent (sp) replied: "It was the key; the lack of school participation limited the assessment to a third of what it should have been." Furthermore, Chantal (sp) reported that, when a parent hired her to do a private psycho-educational assessment, she said: "I can do the

assessment, but I cannot write it up until I have the background information from the school.” These school psychologists believed that a psycho-educational assessment without school input does not reflect all of the contributing factors and therefore is limited in its usefulness.

According to the participants, the quality of the psycho-educational assessment depends directly on the school system, which sets the guidelines under which the assessments are conducted. Schools are responsible for carefully selecting appropriate students to be assessed. A particular school demonstrates the degree of commitment to the process through its organizational practices, and the school psychologists strongly recommended schools’ active participation in the assessment process as key stakeholders.

The Parents: Role and Responsibilities

Both professions considered the involvement of parents or, in some cases, a student’s guardian, in the assessment process as crucial. Tessa (t) found that meeting as a team with parents can be a reassuring experience:

I find that the parents tend to be calmer after we have all met together. Beforehand they do not know what to do with this child, and they do not know where to go; they do not have the tools. Afterwards they feel that there is a team and there is some support. I find that very effective, which in turn helps the child.

Both professions saw the role of parents in the assessment process as their active participation in the collection and discussion of assessment information. Some school psychologists expect parents to question explanations if what they hear does not appear accurate or is incomprehensible. Brent (sp) explained:

My main strategy is encouraging questions, lots of checking for “Does that make sense? Do you really understand what I am saying? How does that fit with what you see at home? . . . If not, let us talk about why.” . . . Especially in the cases

where we have spoken to the parents beforehand, they come armed with some really good questions. That is awesome.

Some participants, representing both professions, described their role as working collaboratively to explain the findings and help parents to understand the results. Susan (t) reflected: "I think the parent gained more understanding of the assessment as the months went on." The participants identified parents as the constant factor in children's lives. Accordingly, school psychologists appreciate that empowering parents with an awareness of their child's abilities can result in powerful advocates for the child. Guy (sp) commented:

The second purpose of assessment is to have the parent develop a better understanding of what is taking place with their child. Sometimes this means an appropriate diagnosis for the child. Whether or not they accept the diagnosis, it is a means of ensuring that the parent has the knowledge to help his or her child.

Some participants also perceived the degree of parent participation as directly correlated with individual circumstances and readiness. Some parents are unable to accept the reality of their child's profile. Denial on the part of the parent of the diagnosis and the related implications was concerning to the teachers. Brenda (t) recalled an experience: "I have great hopes for these parents. It is a learning curve, an acceptance curve." She empathized with parents' emotional anguish upon hearing the assessment findings. However, as Brenda (t) commented: "I couldn't ignore some of these things. The assessment definitely needed to be done." She reassured herself: "I had the child's best interests at heart." Brenda (t) believed that, even though it was difficult for the parents to learn about the assessment results, their participation was essential.

The effectiveness of a psycho-educational assessment depends on the participation of key stakeholders. Parents are the stakeholders whose participation is vital because they have a long-term emotional connection with their child.

The Students: Role and Responsibilities

The remaining stakeholder in the psycho-educational assessment process that the participants identified is the student. Some asserted that it is essential to understand what the student thinks: what he or she believes is the purpose of the assessment and the problem areas. Brooke (t) discovered that students believe that the purpose is to determine their intelligence quotient. She suggested that assessments would be more effective if students understood that the process could help them to achieve their maximum potential and be more successful in the school setting. Brooke (t) stated: "I want the student to understand that 'The assessment is to help you be successful in school.'" A few school psychologists felt that students need to be active participants in the entire assessment process and that their participation is particularly important during the dissemination of the results to enhance their ability to rely on strengths and learn to cope with challenges. Chantal (sp) illustrated this line of reasoning: "I think this is going to sort of empower him a little, and he will know that this is what he needs so he can start advocating for himself." There appears to be a paradigm shift from thinking in terms of doing assessments *to* students to doing assessments *with* students. A psycho-educational assessment can help students to understand their profile so they can use their strengths to cope with their weaknesses.

Key Stakeholders: Roles and Responsibilities: A Summary

The school psychologists and teachers identified three key members of an effective psycho-educational assessment team: (a) the school system, (b) parents, and (c) students. They also cited specific attributes and responsibilities of each identified contributor. The role of a school system has multiple aspects. An effective psycho-educational assessment process is founded on the school system's clear expectations that strategically identify when a student should be referred for assessment. The school psychologists recommended that school systems clarify the purpose of assessment and suggested that the purpose of an effective assessment is to gather information about a student to guide programming. They believed that the degree of school systems' commitment to the psycho-educational assessment process is informative. Systems that co-ordinate the process in terms of paperwork and testing space positively contribute to a psycho-educational assessment. The contributions of parents regarding their child's functioning and contextualization of the assessment findings are essential elements of an effective psycho-educational assessment. The role of students depends on maturity; however, the hope was that students would be given the opportunity to understand their profile and then take some responsibility for their own learning. The participants emphasized that the roles of the key stakeholders influence the effectiveness of a psycho-educational assessment.

Building a Team

Both professional groups discussed the importance of a team approach as an essential component of an effective psycho-educational assessment process. The underlying premise is that a positive relationship among team members—school

psychologists, teachers, parents, students, and other school staff—enhances the process.

The participants believed that a good team relationship contributes to the comprehensiveness of the assessment findings and results in the effective implementation of the recommendations. Kurt (sp) encapsulated this notion: “I am there to help them just like they are there to help the students. Again, I am there to help the students, we are all there for the same reason, and we are all on a team.”

Reciprocal Respect

Both groups of professionals saw their counterparts as playing a critical role in an effective psycho-educational assessment process. They were keen to point out that their appreciation of each other is based on mutual respect. Both groups referred to school psychologists who do not respect teachers’ expertise, and because they were adamant that this attitude can be detrimental to the psycho-educational assessment process, they value their counterparts.

All of the school psychologists stated that they respect teachers’ professional expertise as well as their knowledge of the day-to-day functioning of their students. The school psychologists were quick to recognize the fact that they spend a limited amount of time with students and that their testing procedures analyze only certain aspects of a student’s profile. The expertise of teachers was therefore essential to consider to broaden and authenticate the assessment process. Jane’s (sp) comment represents a common thought: “The teacher will have more awareness in knowing the child or in having a relationship with the child; then, sometimes I have to defer. . . . They may have a better idea than I will in that situation.”

All of the teachers reported their respect for the specialized training and expertise of school psychologists. They depend on school psychologists to diagnose a student and assist in planning appropriate educational strategies. Teachers consistently have a hypothesis about what the issues are and what the results will convey. However, they also recognize the limits of their training and consequently rely on the school psychologist to translate their subjective perspective into a concrete analysis. Bob (t) summarized this notion:

I may have a suspicion that something is not quite right, and the assessment results validate my suspicion. Sometimes I cannot put my finger on why the child is not able to learn, so I find out through an assessment.

Kurt (sp) described reciprocal respect as two experts' having different knowledge about a student's functioning and appreciating their counterpart's contributions, which enables them to work as a collaborative team:

I will go into a school and know they are the experts in teaching and I am an expert in this specific type of assessment. If we can work together, then I can hopefully help to make their job, not necessarily easier, but I can help them figure out how to effectively work with a certain student or group of students.

Bringing these two knowledgeable sources together and creating a partnership results in a comprehensive understanding of the student.

The participants clearly identified mutual respect between the school psychologist and the teacher as fundamental to an effective psycho-educational assessment process. However, some teachers recalled school psychologists' treating them as inferior. Susan (t) recollected her working relationships with school psychologists and characterized the type of communication between them as not "a two-way street. I have always felt they are there to talk and I am there to listen." In her opinion, the outcome of the process

would be far more productive with a team relationship in which she is invited to convey her expertise: “I never had a chance to talk to the psychologist, just the two of us.” Susan (t) elaborated:

You have to establish a joint relationship. The school psychologists that I have dealt with are always the experts and I am not. . . . I have always felt that, when the psychologist comes in, he is the expert and has all of the answers. Perhaps we have to have a more realistic look at how we interact. I guess it would be nice to know that we are working as a team. I have not felt team.

The school psychologists were adamant in their disapproval of colleagues who assume the stance of expert when they work with teachers. Kurt (sp) stated, “I am not the expert on this child” and suggested that it is, in fact, the teacher and the parent who have the necessary background to appropriately contextualize the results of an assessment. Thoughtfully, Zena (sp) advised, “I think school psychologists should enter a psycho-educational assessment as an expert in something but not in everything.” She explained how combining her expertise with that of the teacher benefits the student. Recognizing the expertise of all professionals and effectively utilizing all of that knowledge to help a student is an advantageous approach to making psycho-educational assessments more effective.

Relationships

Once mutual respect is established, then a working relationship can evolve. Both professional groups recognized that developing a meaningful working relationship requires teachers and school psychologists spend time together to come to understand the other’s role and the expertise each has to contribute to helping a student. Exploring commonalties and differences is another aspect of understanding what the other brings to the psycho-educational assessment process.

The participants commonly referred to the notion of spending time together to understand another's perspective. Brent (sp) related:

Under ideal circumstances it would be more effective to be able to spend time within the classroom watching how the child is functioning, to talk to the teachers directly and ask what their concerns are. . . . Are there any time-of-day issues, or are there other variables that are contributing to this child's difficulties?

The school psychologists also felt that the relationship between the two professionals can be improved if teachers appreciate psychologists' skills and abilities. They felt that few teachers understand how they can be of assistance and that they need to promote their role more diligently. Ruby (sp) reflected on an experience at a new school after she had completed an assessment:

It gave good introductions between the staff and myself . . . in terms of what kind of services I can support them with, in terms of teaching and understanding children. So I see it as a good bridge to get new referrals from that school in the future.

As well, many school psychologists felt that delving into common experiences helps to establish a more solid relationship with teachers. Brent (sp) reported: "I have spent some time in the classroom, and I do have an appreciation for what is reality, and I think that goes a long way."

Setting up opportunities for collegiality, according to the teachers and school psychologists, helps to develop positive relationships. Both professional groups agreed that the most effective way to promote relationships is to assign the services of a school psychologist to a designated group of schools. In doing so, the school psychologist is able to become familiar with the school staff. Chantal (sp) described the limitations of not being able to connect with a school on a regular basis:

That is the frustrating thing, because you feel so not joined in. . . . You go in and do the assessment and it is done, and you have no idea what has happened afterwards unless you happen to be at that school again.

Brooke (t) recalled how positive it can be when a school psychologist interacts with staff in an informal setting: “He was very welcoming. . . . He was in our staffroom, and he was . . . a person in our building.” The participants described having an opportunity to get to know a school psychologist in the same manner that school staff build relationships as beneficial.

Another identified avenue to develop relationships among teachers and school psychologists is to include school psychologists in some school-based professional development. The participants thought that this learning time would facilitate mutual understanding and collaboration between the two professions. Chantal (sp) speculated: “Maybe by including both professionals in some professional development, then collaboration could occur.” She suggested that the time spent together in a learning environment presents an opportunity to amplify both professional and personal rapport.

Bob (t) was puzzled about why there was not more of a partnership between teachers and school psychologists: “We are both doing the same type of service: We are helping children.” Teachers and school psychologists have many commonalities, and developing working relationships with each helps them to realize their mutual underpinnings. Jane (sp) concluded: “I think we have to remember we are part of a team; we are not a unitary entity. It is beneficial to have those relationships with everyone.”

Trust. Zena (sp) affirmed: “If you form a collaboration or a relationship with teachers where they trust you, . . . then you can really build a team.” Establishing trust within any relationship requires time, and a trusting relationship indicates that each

professional feels confident to convey his or her ideas and insights knowing that the other values the information. Zena (sp) also established trusting relationships by discussing and interpreting the results with teachers before the debriefing. With regard to the level of communication with a teacher before the debriefing, Zena (sp) “talked with the teacher so much that she knows exactly what I will say.” She believed that teachers understand their integral role in the assessment process.

Some of the school psychologists reported their awareness of the detrimental impact on trust that judging others’ actions could produce. They were cognizant of the implications of blaming or placing the responsibility on either the home or the school.

Brent’s (sp) comment reflects a reoccurring perspective:

My attitude going into the assessment is to help keep the communication lines open between teachers and parents. We are not going to put either one on the spot; we are not going to lay blame in any direction. We are going to take the strengths that the parents have and strengths that the teachers have and move on. I think that is appreciated—placing emphasis on the future and solutions, not reflecting on the past and finding fault.

Furthermore, trust is damaged when team members become defensive. Chantal (sp) recommended “not being confrontational, but just trying to get them to understand this is where the student is at.” These two school psychologists considered the goal of developing trust a priority.

The teachers categorized trust in two different ways. The first involves the teacher’s ability to trust in the school psychologist’s expertise to perform specialized assessment and interpret the results. The teachers readily acknowledged this unique skill that school psychologists possess. They were confident in a school psychologist’s resolve to complete the necessary testing to assess a student’s challenges. Brent’s (sp) comment exemplifies the teachers’ expectations:

At the end of the testing session, if I do not understand what the referral question is asking or I am not able to answer it meaningfully, typically, I will go back; I will phone the parents or I will meet with the teachers again.

The second type of trust comes from the expectation that trust in professional expertise is mutual. In effect, when a teacher makes a referral to a school psychologist, that teacher's professional integrity must be respected by accepting his or her clearly identified concern. Tessa (t) believed that school psychologists "have to trust teachers as the frontline workers with children, and if the teacher perceives that the child is in need of a psycho-educational assessment, then that opinion is valued"; for example, in the case of a typical battery of assessment procedures not initially revealing the core issues. Kurt (sp) stated his opinion regarding ending an assessment before discovering the underlying problem, which may lie beyond the obvious symptoms: "To leave it at a typical battery is a disservice to that child as well as the school." At this point teachers expect school psychologists to respect their professional judgment and persevere with the assessment process. In summation, school psychologists must trust in teachers' proficiency in identifying appropriate students for level C assessment, and teachers must reciprocate this trust by having faith in school psychologists' assessment abilities.

Collaboration. The participant interviews revealed the notion that a psycho-educational assessment's effectiveness is linked to collaboration among the stakeholders. The concept of team is founded on the premise of responding as a group to a common concern, collaborating to formulate an attainable plan. Guy (sp) explained: "It is the coming together, the sharing of as much information as we have and then determining what is to take place for the student." Once the team has been brought together, through

collaboration a plan can be devised. Chantal (sp) succinctly summarized the overall perception of school psychologists with regard to collaboration:

Collaboration between the parent, the student, and the teacher is secured when the teacher, the parent, and the student are aware of the student's strengths and needs and that the needs can be addressed in the school so that the student can be successful.

The function of the school psychologist in the assessment process is to assemble information based on each stakeholder's expertise and experience. The teachers suggested that school psychologists are in a unique position to bring home and school together to focus on what is best for the student. The school psychologists concurred and perceived themselves as being in a position to facilitate this collaboration. Brent (sp) explained:

Part of my job is to convince them of the necessity of having everyone on the same team. It does not have to be a strained relationship between the school and the parents, but they do have to be on the same page in terms of understanding what the student's needs are.

Building a Team: A Summary

The participants described building a team in terms of establishing mutual respect for the professional expertise of their counterparts. Once respect has been established, then relationships based on trust and collaboration can develop. The participants believed that the growth of relationships needs to be the intention of all stakeholders to evolve those relationships into a team. Guy (sp) summarized:

It is developing a relationship, and if the relationship is not there, then it is not productive. Spend more time in the classroom with the teacher and more time observing the child within the classroom to find out what is taking place there. Then recommendations are going to be relevant to that teacher in that situation. As well, it is building up that relationship so that . . . when you make those suggestions, the teacher is not just saying, "Oh, there is another cabbage-head psychologist."

Theme 2: Working as a Team: A Summary

The participants identified the formation of a team as an essential component of an effective assessment and the key team members as school psychologists, teachers, school systems, parents, and students. Each stakeholder has specific responsibilities. The main premise that evolved from the data is the sincere commitment of stakeholders to work collaboratively in the psycho-educational assessment process to assist students. Zena (sp) concluded: “It is collaboration. There has to be teamwork at the end, a big team.”

Theme 3: Comprehensive Assessment: Hoping to Change Lives

The discussion in theme 1, reflecting on the assessment process, examined the effectiveness of psycho-educational assessment components; and in theme 2, working as a team, revealed the participants’ preference for a shift from a supplier-consumer relationship to a collaborative team relationship. These two themes are the foundation from which the final theme evolved. If the previous suggestions are implemented, they link to the third theme, comprehensive assessment—hoping to change lives. I have implied some of the aspects of this final theme in the discussions on the previous themes, but they have not been the primary focus of the findings thus far reported.

Comprehensive Assessment

Both school psychologists and teachers identified an effective psycho-educational assessment as a process that surpasses the initial compilation of testing results. A comprehensive assessment gathers the appropriate quantitative and qualitative data and then interprets that information into a meaningful description of a student’s functioning.

For example, interpreting how a student formulates an answer surpasses the reporting of numbers that result from the assessment tools. Chantal (sp) summarize this perception:

It should give me a good picture of how the student relates to the person doing the assessment. I am not just looking at the numbers; I am looking at it qualitatively, at how the student responds to difficult tasks, at how they approach different tasks.

Essentially, Chantal's comments indicate that she gathers information about a student's learning aptitude by looking beyond the answer to a question to looking at how the student's behavior influences how he or she has arrived at that answer.

Some school psychologists considered functional implications pivotal in gaining a comprehensive grasp of the student's profile in the context of his or her day-to-day life. Zena's (sp) comment exemplifies this perception: "Ineffective assessment is the kind where the school psychologist does a quick assessment in three hours. They really do not get to know too much about the child. They do get the numbers, but it is not very effective." Brent (sp) supported this belief by also defining an ineffective assessment as one of "interpreting results based on nothing but the book or nothing but what you see in front of you without any contextual information or appreciation of those variables." He explained that the purpose of assessment is to provide an insightful understanding of the student within his or her own individual circumstances. This informed understanding facilitates the development of specific program plans to enable the student to reach his or her potential. Chantal (sp) summarized this perception of school psychologists who spend a minimal amount of time on an assessment: "If a school psychologist is just whipping into the school to get scores and then out again, he would have missed all this qualitative data. It is really important to include this information in the report." Ruby's (sp) statement illustrates what is missing from a comprehensive assessment:

An ineffective assessment is one that not only takes a lot of the child's time away from a classroom setting or their learning setting; much time is also spent talking with teachers and parents. To have them leave the debriefing without a good understanding of what will or will not work for the child is not effective; for example, giving numbers or scores without much insight into what those numbers and scores really mean, how that child will learn better. Presenting only the numbers and being really brief does not help a classroom teacher or a parent to understand how to help that child.

Hoping to Change Lives

The participants' vision of effective psycho-educational assessment included the concept of hoping to change lives. Both the school psychologists' and the teachers' descriptions of valuable assessment components and their aspirations for what the process can incorporate reflect the need to go beyond the initial results of an assessment to ensure that the results make an impact on the student's life. This means that the student's individual life circumstances are considered in interpreting the results and planning subsequent interventions. The participants identified the importance of allocating time to the assessment process to increase the capacity of both professions to collect and analyze assessment data and generate a comprehensive assessment.

The notion of psycho-educational service as it pertains to impacting on a student's education was also apparent in the data. The teachers recommended that the assessment results go beyond reporting the findings to determining how the findings can be applied to the student's environmental functioning. The participants' descriptions of an effective psycho-educational assessment include the significance of defining a student's profile in terms of both learning and the social/emotional aspects of the student's daily functioning.

A psycho-educational assessment that is more comprehensive, that goes beyond sharing results to making a change in a student's life, is the third major theme that

evolved from the participants' interviews. Brent's (sp) definition of school psychology service summarized the concept of comprehensive assessment: hoping to change lives.

It is taking the information from the tests and interpreting it in the student's context. It is bridging the gap between the resulting student profile and what that means in his day-to-day functioning. How are we going to use this information to provide a better program for this child? . . . We start with an understanding of the child in his or her context and then use that information to improve service for that child.

Time

The need to designate more time to augment the psycho-educational assessment process was a recurring concept in many of the interviews. Producing a psycho-educational assessment that is more than just numbers requires more time, as the participants' comments reveal. Monique (t) characterized an effective assessment as "when the psychologist has taken the time to sit down with the teacher, the resource teacher, and the parents to explain everything." Brenda (t) felt that the psycho-educational assessment process could be improved if the school psychologist had more time to do each assessment: "Most teachers are willing to work around a school psychologist's schedule; they understand that school psychologists' time is limited. But more time spent in each individual assessment would improve the process." Kurt (sp) added: "In a perfect world we would not have time or financial constraints." However, the reality is that funds and, consequently, time are limited in most psycho-educational assessment; hence, a common recommendation from the participants was to increase these allocations.

The teachers also voiced concern over the amount of time that passes between the initiation of a referral and the completion of a psycho-educational assessment. Brenda's (t) comment exemplifies this issue:

At the beginning of the year you identify the problem, but the school psychologist does not arrive to do the assessment until February. By the time you have the debriefing, it is Easter. This leaves very little time to implement any recommendations.

Victoria (t) raised a concern about the academic implications:

I feel like a whole growth period is lost. . . . It took almost an entire year. It is good that the assessment is in place for next year, but the first half of the year was trial and error instead of finding out the diagnosis—what strategies work—and then putting them into place right away.

The teachers complained about losing strategic instruction time while they wait for a psycho-educational assessment to be completed.

The participants identified the concept of time, in terms of allocating time to the process and responding to referrals in a timely manner, as an essential factor in a psycho-educational assessment process. Guy (sp) summarized the principle of time:

It comes down to time and quality; they go hand in hand. The school district that I work for has an incredible number of assessments to get done, but they have no problem if I want to spend longer with a student if there is more information to be acquired.

With regard to teachers' time, the reluctance of schools to release staff to participate in the psycho-educational assessment process surfaced in the interviews. Commonly reported were situations in which teachers were interviewed in hallways or while they were teaching. In response to this dilemma, the participants suggested that teachers who are involved in an assessment be given class-coverage time to complete questionnaires, answer interview questions, and participate in the assessment process with school psychologists.

The participants understood that including more teacher expertise in a comprehensive assessment process requires additional time on their part and that, because

teachers have numerous responsibilities, having a student assessed should not be an added burden. Susan (t) expressed her frustration with school psychologists who do not take her teaching responsibilities into consideration: “It makes me crazy when these people come into the school and want to interview you during the school day. What do they think I do with my students, wave a magic wand and poof! they are gone?” Susan (t) suggested that substitute teachers be hired to allow teachers to spend time with the school psychologist to discuss professional knowledge and the assessment findings. She wanted to be involved but suggested that meeting time be planned.

One school psychologist raised another aspect of teachers’ time. Kurt’s (sp) concern reflects a unique perspective in the data but contains valid logic regarding the demands on some teachers: “I think that certain students are in accommodating classrooms with extraordinary teachers, and because they get all the students that need extra help, they spend every evening filling out the paperwork.” He supported these teachers: “They are almost being punished for being good teachers. I think it is unrealistic. I would like to see them get the time they deserve to fill out the paperwork so they do not miss out on going to their own kid’s baseball game.” Kurt recognized that an effective psycho-educational assessment takes time and effort on the part of all stakeholders and suggested that more time be assigned to key professionals.

Jane (sp) summarized the purpose of allocating time for teachers and school psychologists to meet:

I think it is important to have more facilitation with the teachers to allow them to have substitute coverage to come and sit down with me in an interview when it is not 4:00 p.m. and it is not over their preparation time. It is a time when they can come, sit, and show me their anecdotal records and tell me what is going on. Often time is so crunched that I get five minutes in the hallway while their kids are occupied. I think that denigrates the relationship between the two of us

because teachers are pulled in two different ways. If their information is important, then support could be shown by school administration by saying, "I am going to take your class, and you can have half an hour."

This action would give teachers the opportunity to meet with the school psychologist to engage in thoughtful and meaningful discourse. The participants believed that an effective psycho-educational assessment process must include teacher contributions; therefore, they pointed out that teachers must be given the time to contribute.

Service

The school psychologists and teachers established providing service to students as a fundamental component of a comprehensive assessment. Essentially, this means going beyond conveying assessment results to helping students, parents, and teachers to understand and respond to the assessment findings. In the interviews, they characterized the service aspect of the psycho-educational assessment as facilitating an understanding of the testing results, which in turn influences the student's educational experiences in a positive way. Kurt (sp) and Brent (sp) felt that answering the questions of parents and teachers is a critical element of service. Monique (t) concurred: "I want to have answers: Why is the child not learning like the others? Why is this child struggling? Help me figure out what piece of the puzzle is missing." Bob (t) commented: "When there is a plan and possibilities of how you can help a child, then that is an effective assessment." He also recognized the importance of service to the student in the home environment. "The assessment provides help to parents so they know how to assist their child to be the best he can be." Furthermore, Jane (sp) described an effective assessment as one that has a long-term impact: "It is moving towards a future that is more productive." In many of the interviews the participants specifically supported Jane's viewpoint that the final

outcome of an assessment should facilitate the student's increased success. Guy (sp) summarized this aspect of service: "An assessment can really make a difference in the learning and life of a child. The purpose of assessment is to benefit the student." The participants defined psychological service in terms of (a) assisting with the implementation of recommendations, (b) instigating change in the life of an assessed student, (c) completing an assessment to serve the best interest of the student, (d) implementing assessment results in a classroom, and (e) linking recommendations to an IPP.

Follow-up. Most school psychologists were forthcoming in conveying their perspective that an effective psycho-educational assessment does not end at the debriefing stage. Rather, they stated that psycho-educational assessment service includes a commitment to confer with schools to clarify any misunderstandings or adapt programming suggestions. Chantal (sp) appreciated that, in many circumstances, it is a school psychologist's responsibility to follow through with teachers and to encourage them to utilize the strategies suggested. She empathized with teachers: "Overwhelmed teachers are given the recommendations, and they do not know where to start or even how to implement the suggestions." Chantal (sp) recognized that assisting teachers in implementing the recommendation plan is an essential element of service. Even though he is a contracted school psychologist, Brent (sp) expressed interest in being called on to provide follow-up assistance to school staff: "Have them call me if they have questions. I am in the area often enough and could easily accommodate a school visit to discuss the report and explain the recommendations." Kurt (sp) actively seeks feedback on students he has assessed when he visits their schools, and he welcomes teachers' questions about

his former clients. He recalled a message that he gives teachers after completing an assessment: “The next time I talk to you, I want you to tell me what is working and is not working. We can discuss the issues, and I can give you some other ideas.” Although Jane (sp) recognized the importance of being accessible to further confer on psycho-educational assessment findings, her perspective on whose responsibility it is to initiate contact differed from those of her colleagues: “I expect the school to do their best with what I have suggested, and if it is not working out, then I would expect the school to call me.” She put the onus on the school to ask for assistance if additional support beyond the debriefing is needed. These school psychologists are committed to ensuring that psycho-educational assessment recommendations are workable and are willing to confer with teachers to assist in any modifications.

Guy (sp) also strongly believed in follow-up to assist with the implementation of psycho-educational assessment programming suggestions. He recognized that this undertaking requires that more time be allotted to the assessment process: “After the assessment is completed, it would be ideal to spend time in the classroom with the teacher to fine-tune or modify suggestions.” Guy (sp) saw this occasion as an opportunity to partner with teachers to solidify the remediation plan. The school psychologists felt that an effective psycho-educational assessment requires monitoring after the debriefing to support the implementation of recommendations.

Change. Another component of service in a comprehensive assessment that some participants identified is the element of change—change in the life of the student. Zena’s (sp) statement exemplifies this premise: “The aim of the assessment is to make change . . . for the child in the way that they are taught.” Bob (t) also identified change in a

student's ability to function and/or attitude as a fundamental outcome of the psycho-educational assessment. He reflected on the effect of a recent assessment: "The changes that I have seen in the past month show me that this child has much more potential than I had previously thought was possible." Furthermore, he noted a change in this student's disposition: "I am seeing a very happy boy at school, and his parents have also seen a significant change at home." Other participants also linked the element of change to the student's success in school. Chantal (sp) commented: "Results that provide a plan produce a more successful student." Tessa (t) aptly summarized this element of change: "An effective assessment means that I am going to see a change for this child because of some of the new strategies I use. The student can become more successful because there are changes occurring in the classroom." The participants defined change as a concrete difference in how the student functions in various environments.

Service purpose. The participants revealed conflicting perspectives on what is the main service in psycho-educational assessment. The discussion focused on service as it pertains to obtaining a diagnosis to secure special education funding or determining a student's learning profile. The teachers recognized the function of special education funding as it can create the possibility of specialized services that facilitate individualized programming. While all of the school psychologists were adamant that psycho-educational service is the development of a global profile of a student's functioning and a subsequent program plan regardless of the presence of a diagnosis.

Some teachers hesitantly identified the importance of being provided with a diagnosis that labels a student's difficulties. A diagnosis is pivotal in most circumstances in obtaining a special education code, which in turn allows access to specialized services

in a school system. Specialized services range from the provision of an educational assistant to specialized program placement; generally, the more severe the diagnosis, the more extensive the services that are available. Susan (t) emphasized that obtaining a diagnosis is imperative: "I do not think labeling is a bad thing. I think it gives direction for how to teach the child. It provides us with an understanding of realistic expectations." She explained that assessment is necessary because of provincial funding criteria; however, she also raised a concern about this evolution: "I am not always sure if a better education is the result of the assessment." Susan (t) realized that a diagnosis does not necessarily equate with better programming, and Tessa (t) agreed: "A lot of assessments are done for placement." She explained that assessments that are used to recommend placements in special education programs can sometimes negate teacher ownership of the psycho-educational assessment process and results. These teachers appeared to have mixed feelings. They realized that although a diagnosis often leads to additional funds and services, it does not guarantee improved programming for a student.

The school psychologists expressed a noticeably different point of view on the purpose of the psycho-educational assessment process and the resulting implications. They questioned the professional appropriateness of assessment referrals that are based strictly on meeting funding or placement criteria. Chantal (sp) speculated: "I think there is still the perception out there that assessments are done for coding and funding purposes rather than for the good of the child." Jane (sp) openly stated her frustration: "Sometimes I feel like it is a funding grab. The child has a learning disability, but if it is not severe enough, we look for something more." Kurt (sp) recalled his experiences with schools that advocate for diagnoses that they do not understand: "There is a very specific criterion

that has to be met, and just because the student behaves poorly, it does not mean that he has a specific disorder.” The school psychologists were discouraged by the focus on obtaining a diagnosis as a priority and believed that a student’s profile and the resulting remediation plan should be the focus. Ruby’s (sp) aspirations for her practice reflect many other school psychologists’ hopes:

I wish as a school psychologist I could simply write a report that described a child in terms of strengths and weaknesses and then outline things that could be done to help that child. I could do this without worrying about the school asking, “Is this kid codeable?” The labeling, the diagnosing, the coding should be a secondary issue, but sometimes it overrides all of the other information. I find the other information to be more important. Schools get caught up in the numbers, the coding, and the labeling. It is frustrating.

Interpretation of numbers: Classroom implementation. The teachers unanimously agreed that an effective psycho-educational assessment must consider classroom implications. They demonstrated their commitment to this consideration by advocating for the use of informal assessment methods, as previously reported. Furthermore, they insisted that the numbers do not guide their teaching but that the translation of the numbers into classroom strategies is critical in a comprehensive assessment. Victoria (t) commented: “A WISC does not mean anything to me. I need someone to interpret the results and tell me what to do for the student. Give me the specific strategies to support the student in the classroom.” Brooke (t) explained that the process of gaining an accurate understanding of a student’s functioning must consider the classroom environment:

We [the school and the parents] were trying to determine the child’s ability to focus, but every five minutes the tester was stopping and rewarding the child for good behavior. . . . Realistically, as a teacher, I cannot reinforce a child every five minutes.

Brooke (t) reported that the assessment did not determine the student's attention threshold, nor did it give her new strategies because the results reflected the student's potential under artificial conditions.

Monique (t) recalled her experience of asking for a remediation plan for implementation in her classroom. She was frustrated when she was presented with strategies that required significant one-to-one assistance: "I have twenty-one other students who need me. . . . In an ideal world I could sit beside him, help him with the work, and he would be fine. But in this classroom situation he is not coping." Several teachers discussed their struggles to implement assessment recommendations in addition to meeting the needs of the rest of their students. Tessa (t) stated, "The purpose of the assessment is to have the child be more successful in school"; however, Susan (t) has found it discouraging when "recommendations that are intended to help the child do not realistically consider how the child functions in the classroom environment." Brenda (t) concluded that an ineffective assessment is one in which "recommendations are provided that are not useful in the classroom." For an assessment to be helpful, it needs to take into consideration the student's education setting. Brenda's (t) description epitomizes a productive culmination of a psycho-educational assessment that includes environmental implications:

[An effective assessment results in] a student profile that is bang on for what is occurring in the classroom. It is almost like the school psychologist has been there on a daily basis and knows exactly how the student has been behaving, acting, or working. Sometimes it just amazes me because the school psychologist is not there, but yet he or she just nailed it: This is exactly what is going on in the classroom.

Individualized Program Plans. Some participants in both professions outlined the implications of linking psycho-educational assessment findings to an IPP. They believed

that this practice can directly impact on how a student is taught. Bob (t) stated that an effective assessment is not complete when the final report is written. Instead, the assessment findings must be reflected in an IPP that defines the student's strengths and weaknesses. Brenda's (t) practice of incorporating recommendations directly into the IPP exemplifies how an assessment can guide instruction: "When I receive a report, I immediately go to the recommendations because they can generally go directly into the IPP." Victoria's (t) perception was very similar: "I think the assessment should drive your instruction; it should drive how you can build on the student's strengths." Brent (sp) stated his firm belief that a psycho-educational assessment report should assist in IPP development and has even formulated some recommendations into goals so that they can transfer easily into this program-planning document. He recommended that the assessment proceed beyond the interpretation of results into a proposal of programming action for the student. Chantal (sp) also reported that it has been her responsibility to develop recommendations that are "practical and easy to implement" and felt that, when appropriate, the recommendations should be incorporated into an IPP, thus facilitating the student's future growth. Both professions suggested that the results of a psycho-educational assessment are crucial to IPP development.

Global Understanding

The teachers and school psychologists discussed the importance of a comprehensive assessment as a process that results in a global student profile that encompasses a student's academic and cognitive abilities in terms of his or her strengths and weaknesses as well as social and emotional functioning. Brenda's (t) comment exemplifies the ideal psycho-educational assessment situation: "First of all, it is the

teacher requesting the assessment for the right reasons and, secondly, the school psychologist answering the referral concerns with a global response.” Tessa (t) suggested that the purpose of a psycho-educational assessment is to gather information that ultimately results in a global understanding of how the student is functioning: “We were looking for what was hindering the student both socially and emotionally, thus obstructing her academic achievement.” Brent (sp) summarized his perspective: “I consider all the student’s variables, and then I take the assessment data and interpret it within that context. I then link that understanding to implications for the student in his day-to-day functioning.” The participants saw the development of a profile that considers the student’s global functioning as an indicator of an effective assessment.

Student profile. Members of both professions clearly saw creating a student’s learning profile in relation to strengths and weaknesses as advantageous to a comprehensive assessment. Bob (t) commented: “Over the past twenty-five years of teaching, psycho-educational assessments have become more helpful in regards to determining strengths and weaknesses of the child.” He felt that identifying issues of concern as well as a student’s assets can help to develop effective remediation solutions. Brooke (t) described assessments that emphasize “the student’s ability, not the student’s inabilities,” as the most effective in determining a student’s potential. Jane (sp) and Chantal (sp) considered a comprehensive profile crucial. They felt that understanding a student’s strengths and how the student can use those strengths to cope with challenges is most productive in helping that student to reach his or her potential. The participants recommended including information on a student’s strengths and identifying his or her weaknesses to enhance the usefulness of a psycho-educational assessment.

Social/emotional well-being. The participants also suggested proceeding beyond a learning profile to include a student's social and emotional functioning to develop a global understanding of a student. Monique (t) described an effective assessment as

a description of what problems need to be remediated, suggestions on how to help the child in the classroom and how to encourage him to succeed in general. Most of all, a result that makes the child feel better about himself.

Some of the school psychologists cautioned that for a student to achieve his or her potential in a school environment, he or she must have a healthy disposition. They expressed concern about students who experience anxiety, low self-esteem, and depression. Jane (sp) believed that schools are responding more productively to student struggles and linked this evolution to students' having "access to the school counselor" and to the recognition that school success is "not only educational, but emotional and social as well." Kurt (sp) suggested that key to understanding a student in a global context is going beyond the symptoms to discover the underlying issues. He suggested that many academic problems have social/emotional issues at the root. Guy (sp) stated his expectation of change as a result of an effective assessment: "The parents are going to feel better about what has taken place for their child. But more importantly, at the conclusion of the assessment the child will feel better about himself than he had previously."

The participants identified developing a global understanding of a student's functioning as a critical element of an effective psycho-educational assessment. Victoria (t) aptly summarized this element: "It gives me insight into meeting the student's need both academically and socially within my classroom."

Theme 3: Comprehensive Assessment: Hoping to Change Lives: A Summary

The concept of conducting a comprehensive assessment in the hope of changing lives evolved from the participants' passion and their dedication to children as they described their vision of various aspects of an effective psycho-educational assessment. Both teachers and school psychologists stressed the importance of allocating time for the assessment process to increase the likelihood that it will provide a comprehensive service to students. The school psychologists suggested that they would like to concentrate on determining a student's global profile in terms of aptitude and behavioral functioning rather than on obtaining a diagnosis to meet funding criteria. Many teachers asked that assessment findings be formulated into classroom teaching strategies. The participants perceived the ideal psycho-educational assessment as a compilation that reflects the efforts and expertise of many and results in a unique picture of each student assessed—and in a changed life experience.

Conclusion: Perceptions of Effective Psycho-Educational Assessment

The school psychologists and teachers both recommended that the psycho-educational assessment process include a commitment from stakeholders to serve students. As Zena (sp) stated: "It is not just getting a bunch of numbers and writing a report." A helpful assessment considers the student's profile and then interprets the findings as they apply to his or her surroundings. Guy's (sp) comment illustrates this premise: "An effective assessment culminates in a clear understanding of a child. It is more than intellectual ability, but how that intellectual ability applies to his or her educational experiences, everyday life." An effective psycho-educational assessment then

results in an action plan to assist the student in his or her area of need. According to Brent (sp), the aim of a psycho-educational assessment is

to provide a context-based, deeper understanding of what the child's needs are, and then use that information to increase his functioning. . . . Finding out the level his skills are at or what is behind some of his emotional difficulties and then taking that information to make some specific recommendations.

Both the school psychologists and the teachers outlined various essential components of psycho-educational assessment as well as recommendations to improve the process. Creating a structure that supports effective psycho-educational assessment will be challenging because it will require the commitment of all key stakeholders. Most important, the participants' comments clearly show that providing an effective psycho-educational assessment is a service that can change a student's life. A discussion of these findings follows in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

My research explored teachers' and school psychologists' perceptions of effective psycho-educational assessment. As I reported in the previous chapter, three main themes emerged from the data analysis: (a) reflecting on the assessment process, (b) working as a team and (c) comprehensive assessment—hoping to change lives. The discussion in this chapter will focus on the interpretation of the findings as they relate to current school psychology literature. I will examine the implications for training and practice in light of the suggestions from school psychologists and teachers. Then I will propose future research topics. The chapter will conclude with final reflections.

Theme 1: Reflecting on the Assessment Process

The first theme represents the participants' perceptions of the components of the psycho-educational assessment process. Both teachers and school psychologists commented on the process in terms of referral procedures, assessment tools, the written report, and the debriefing. The findings conveyed in theme 1 will be discussed in terms of three underlying concepts: (a) referral procedures, (b) assessment considerations, and (c) communicating results.

Referral Procedures

The participants discussed referral procedures in terms of the role of a referral question and the addition of a pre-assessment conference. The school psychologists associated the clarity of the referral question with the effectiveness of the assessment outcomes. It is therefore logical that this is the first assessment component that I will examine.

The school psychology literature has recommended that referral questions be thoughtfully formulated to guide the unfolding of the psycho-educational assessment (Kamphaus & Frick, 2002; Reschly & Grimes, 2002; Saklofske et al., 2000; Sattler, 2001; Shea, 1985). Teachers do have an opportunity to direct the assessment process via the information in the referral forms and the composition of the referral questions, but in this study the school psychologists reported that referral questions are often vague and do not reflect the outcomes that teachers seem to have in mind. It is possible that some teachers may not understand or appreciate the role of referral questions/forms and may not have the training to formulate questions that directly reflect the information or assistance that they are seeking. It is also possible that school psychologists may not have taken the initiative to communicate what is essential information in a referral process.

An avenue to improve both teachers' satisfaction with the outcomes of an assessment and school psychologists' need for a focused referral purpose may be to strengthen the process of referring a student for psycho-educational assessment. In a school setting, teaching staff are generally responsible for deciding whether a student needs a psycho-educational assessment (CPA, 2007; Gutkin & Curtis, 1999; Mureika et al., 2004). Instead of delegating the task of determining that need to a lone teacher, the Alberta Department of Education (Alberta Education, 1996; Alberta Learning 2002, 2003) suggested the use of a school-based systematic model to assist classroom teachers in responding to the needs of a struggling student. This model is comprised of a learning team whose role is to collaboratively create a responsive plan to a student's challenges that may entail academic testing and adaptations in teaching strategies. If school-based interventions are unsuccessful or inadequate, then the learning team may determine that a

student is in need of a psycho-educational assessment. After the team examines the presenting concerns and clarifies the psycho-educational assessment referral objectives, then classroom teachers are given the responsibility to complete the referral forms.

It may also be appropriate for school psychologists to work with teachers to determine the nature of the information required on referral forms. It may be productive for school psychologists and teachers to collaboratively create exemplar questions/forms to develop common understandings of how to articulate insights and needs. Then school psychologists and teacher collaborators could inservice colleagues on how to complete the forms and compose referral questions to effectively guide the psycho-educational assessment process and possibly incorporate their bank of exemplar forms/questions.

Schools and, more specifically, teachers have an opportunity to direct the assessment process via the information that is presented in the referral forms and the composition of the referral questions. By taking advantage of this opportunity, teachers may be able to guide the psycho-educational assessment process.

Both school psychologists and teachers recommended the incorporation of a pre-assessment conference into the referral process. A goal of the pre-assessment conference is to refine and/or alter the referral question to clearly respond to the combined concerns of the school and the family. This meeting is an opportunity for school psychologists to ensure that they understand what families and schools hope to gain from the psycho-educational assessment process. The participants suggested that all key stakeholders attend the conference. The premise of a pre-assessment conference—an opportunity to clarify/determine a shared assessment purpose—is also found in the conjoint behavior consultation model ([CBC]; Sheridan, Kratochwill, & Bergan, 1996). In the CBC model

the initial meeting is termed *preconsultation*, during which the perspectives of two main participants—parents and teachers—are examined. The objectives of this meeting are twofold: to build relationships and to develop a common understanding of concerns. The participants in my study seemed to approach the pre-assessment conference with the same objectives in mind. Developing a shared purpose—either assessment or consultation—should give a school psychologist a clear understanding of what teachers and parents hope to gain. It seems logical that a psycho-educational assessment with a shared purpose would be more effective. It is also important to note that both teachers and parents have rated the CBC model as a satisfactory process (Guli, 2005; Sheridan, Eagle, & Doll, 2006; Wilkinson, 2005), possibly because they feel that a shared purpose among school psychologists, teachers, and parents is productive.

Assessment Considerations

The second point for discussion addresses the participants' insights into assessment considerations in relation to the tools used. The discussion that follows focuses on their perceptions as to the need to improve psycho-educational assessment through the use of formal and informal testing procedures, and it describes the utilization and effectiveness of specific tools.

The school psychologists acknowledged the value of both formal and informal testing tools. Their appreciation of these two types of assessment tools is similar to the findings in a survey that Wilson and Reschly (1996) analyzed. They reported that school psychologists identified structured observations as their most commonly used assessment tool, and formal standardized tools followed in popularity. The inclusion of both types of assessment tools increases a school psychologist's ability to gather subjective data via

informal tools and to balance those findings with the objective results from formal tools. Balancing assessment data collection helps school psychologists to ensure that their analysis is not skewed by a particular type of tool (Reschly & Grimes, 2002).

The teachers also identified the importance of data collected through informal assessment tools. Specifically, they commented positively on the employment of observations and interviews as data-collection methods. The teachers expressed frustration with psycho-educational assessments that present findings in isolation of classroom factors. They felt that the utilization of informal tools allows a school psychologist to understand concerns either through the experiences of the teacher or directly through their own observations. The teachers believed that, through interviews and observations, school psychologists can balance the data collected from standardized tools to reach a comprehensive understanding of the presenting issues. In their discussion regarding assessing classroom environments, Ysseldyke and Elliott (1999) had also suggested that gathering information about student-performance concerns can be effectively completed through structured classroom observation (e.g., checklist, task analysis) as well as parent and teacher interviews. Furthermore, they stated that although the inclusion of data from an assessment of the instruction environment seems obvious, it is not common in psycho-educational assessment.

The participants considered interviews a practical approach to gathering the insights of key stakeholders—teachers, parents, and the student. It was evident from the teachers' comments that they felt an interview is significantly more effective than a questionnaire in tapping into their individual experiences and insights. The teachers "had so much more to say," and they felt that this could not be communicated on a forced-

choice questionnaire. The teachers want to be able to contribute their direct knowledge of a student's functioning to the psycho-educational assessment process. Researchers have reported that interviews with parents and teachers are rich sources of experiential data (Beaver & Busse, 2000; Dawson, 2005). Additionally, Beaver and Busse recognized that interviews can compensate for the drawbacks of questionnaires, such as informants' misinterpretation of questions or responses. Dawson's summary applies to the perceptions of the participants in my study:

Interviews are also key to ensuring that all people involved—parents, teachers, and students—felt that they are heard and contribute to the assessment process. . . . By laying this groundwork, the likelihood is increased that the interventions designed will be acceptable to all and ultimately successful. (p. 173)

The teachers expressed their confidence in reporting their insights into a student through an interview and expressed concern about the reliability of standardized questionnaires. They were suspicious of the dependability of these types of tools in making diagnoses because they reported that some of their colleagues do not complete the questionnaires in a thoughtful and diligent manner. The teachers' concern about the validity of questionnaires seems to be a unique insight. If standardized questionnaires are the primary or lone tool that school psychologists are utilizing to collect data to make diagnoses or to formulate programming suggestions, then they may be making decisions based on limited information. School psychologists have always been encouraged to collect data through multiple methods to ensure validity (Brown-Chidsey, 2005; Kamphaus & Frick, 2002; Merrell et al., 2006; Sattler, 2001), and considering the teachers' comments, this recommended practice is even more noteworthy.

Another source of data that school psychologists and some teachers recognized as useful is anecdotal notes, which are written documentation of incidents that occur in the

school environment; nevertheless, both professions commented on the inconsistent manner in which schools are maintaining these notes. Because school staff record anecdotal notes, they offer them a way of contextualizing their concerns. I was unable to find literature on the value or use of anecdotal notes as a data-collection tool in psycho-educational assessment. However, functional behavior assessment (FBA) illustrates the purpose and practice of collecting narrative data (anecdotal notes; Skinner, Rhymer, & McDaniel, 2000). FBA models have demonstrated that narrative data can (a) define concerning behaviors, (b) substantiate referral issues, and (c) fulfill diagnostic requirements. These notes do not have to be limited to behavior assessment; they also document school experiences and may therefore benefit any psycho-educational assessment process.

Communicating Results

The communication of psycho-educational assessment findings occurs in the final stages of the assessment process through two main methods: a written report and a debriefing. Both professional groups recognized that the written report is permanent documentation of the assessment results. This assertion is also evident in the literature (Kamphaus & Frick, 2002; Ownby, 1997; Sattler, 2001; Wiener, 1985). The participating school psychologists perceived the report as a vehicle that can influence the future education of the assessed student (Andrews & Gutkin, 1994). The debriefing is typically the final meeting that stakeholders attend to receive the results and confer on the implications. The school psychologists defined the purposes of the debriefing as increasing stakeholders' comprehension of the results and presenting an opportunity to create stakeholder ownership of the recommendations.

The teachers and the school psychologists identified the use of straightforward and basic language as an indicator of the potential effectiveness of a written report. A report that is easy to interpret is far more likely to make a positive impact on a student's educational experience. The inclination of participating teachers to read the report summary first may be a product of their reported frustration in trying to decipher the complete report. The teachers appreciated school psychologists' reports that are easily understandable. Previous researchers (Davidson & Simmons, 1991; Ownby, 1990; Salvagno & Teglassi, 1987; Wiener, 1985) reported that teachers value a clear and concise writing style. The findings from this current study concur with those of previous research in that both teachers and school psychologists recognize the impact that writing style can have on the effectiveness of a psycho-educational assessment.

The teachers believed that the written report should be employed as a guide to instruction. This purpose is similar to the concept of assessment for instruction (Popham, 2003), which is not a summative judgment of progress, but a determination of what should be taught next. Assessment for instruction reflects the participants' perception that psycho-educational assessment should not only be documentation that fulfills government requirements for special education coding, but also, in fact, the catalyst to improve the student's educational growth (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Gutkin & Curtis, 1999; Kamphaus, Reynolds, & Imperato-McCammon, 1999; Merrell et al., 2006). Psycho-educational assessment reports should not just fill files; teachers should utilize them because the findings are beneficial to teaching practice (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Hagborg & Aiello-Coultier, 1994; Merrell et al., 2006).

The comments of the teachers and school psychologists, as well as previous researchers indicate that teachers value practical recommendations (Davidson & Simmons, 1991; Salvagno & Teglassi, 1987; Wiener, 1985). Teachers appreciate clearly written, workable recommendations because they require strategies that can be implemented in a regular classroom under typical classroom conditions. The current study's findings suggest that teachers and some school psychologists believe that including teachers in developing the recommendations would result in a more classroom-friendly plan. The implication of this approach is the need for a collaborative working relationship between teachers and school psychologists.

The teachers also suggested that school psychologists can develop useful recommendations if they spend more time in actual classroom situations because it might further their understanding of classroom realities and a student's typical behaviors. The teachers advocated for methods of collecting data that consider the implications and context of the school environment (e.g., observations) because they felt that an ecological understanding can assist in the development of practical recommendations. In the school psychology literature in the last decade, researchers have discussed the benefits of analyzing environmental factors as a component of a psycho-educational assessment (Deno, 2005; Gutkin & Curtis, 1999; Roberts, 1996; Sheridan & McCurdy, 2005; Ysseldyke & Elliott, 1999). Psycho-educational assessment is the process of collecting data that inform the selection of appropriate intervention strategies (Merrell et al., 2006). A combination of various strategies may be used to devise practical recommendations resulting in recommendations that support a student's unique profile while taking into account the classroom context.

Debriefings provide another opportunity to communicate the results of an assessment process (Kamphaus & Frick, 2002; Saklofske et al., 2000; Sattler, 1992, 2001). The school psychologists and the teachers considered these meetings to be extremely influential on the potential degree of impact of the assessment. A common concept that emerged in this area of analysis was the importance of all key stakeholders' attendance at the debriefing, which gives school psychologists, teachers, school administration, parents, and students an opportunity to discuss the results and recommendations.

The participants linked teachers' and school administrators' attendance at the debriefing to school systems' commitment to facilitating the release of staff from teaching duties. If school divisions want the impact of psycho-educational assessment results to reach the classroom, then they must support school staff philosophically and financially to allow them to attend debriefings. The school psychologists and the teachers both accentuated the need for teachers to be allocated substitute coverage to free them from teaching responsibilities to attend these meetings. Supporting more extensive school staff participation may mean additional financial support for each psycho-educational assessment.

The participants saw the attendance and participation of parents at the debriefing as a pivotal element of an effective assessment: "Parents should be viewed as having such crucial information about their child that their presence at meetings is essential" (Galant, Trivette, & Dunst, 2000, p. 685). The participants associated parents' participation in psycho-educational assessments with more effective communication and implementation of recommendations. These outcomes are similar to the concept of parent empowerment

in the school psychology literature. *Parent empowerment* is defined as a shift from parents' passively receiving information about their child to their active participation in the determination process and subsequent remediation plans for their child (Christenson & Buerkle, 1999; Galant et al., 2000). Research has identified the implication of parents' taking on an active role as a factor in the promotion of their children's educational outcomes (Cox, 2005; Dunst & Trivette, 1988; Guli, 2005). Applying this premise to psycho-educational assessment means that parents would contribute to the assessment data and discuss the assessment outcomes as well as partake in the development and/or selection of recommendations that are applicable to their family system. This shift in the type of parent participation represents the perceptions of participants as they relate to the role of parents in psycho-educational assessment.

Student attendance at the debriefing is another strategy for increasing the effectiveness of psycho-educational assessment. Some participants perceived sharing information with a student at the debriefing as empowering, with possible long-term positive effects. The literature revealed that students who have an in-depth understanding of their strengths and weaknesses are more capable of developing effective compensative strategies and thus become more successful learners (Alberta Assessment Consortium, 2005; Alberta Education, 2006a; Black & William, 1998; Stiggins, 2005, 2007). The participants' perceptions mirror the premise of assessment for learning, a prevalent concept in classroom assessment (Alberta Assessment Consortium, 2005; Alberta Education, 2006a; Black & William, 1998; Stiggins, 2005, 2007). This concept asserts that empowering students with their assessment results makes them "better performers" (Stiggins, 2005, p. 29). They are empowered to use the outcomes of the assessment to

“immediately improve performance. In this context, students become both self-assessors and consumers of assessment information” (Stiggins, 2007, p. 23). The conceptual progression of classroom assessment can potentially be very beneficial to students if it is applied to psycho-educational assessment. Consider that when students are given their assessment results and help to develop the resulting goals, they are able to assume some responsibility for their own learning. Student empowerment is a worthy goal of all assessment.

Theme 1: Implications for the Assessment Process: Conclusions

The psycho-educational assessment process continues to be a mainstay of a school psychologist’s role and a valued contribution to education. All of the participants’ comments reflect the merit of the process and outcomes. Their perceptions pertain to improving the process. Examining the findings from this study within the context of the school psychology literature makes it apparent that many concepts have been identified in other areas of school psychology service (e.g., consultation) as well as general education (e.g., assessment for learning). This research calls for consideration of these concepts in the context of the psycho-educational assessment process as a means of improving effectiveness.

Theme 2: Working as a Team

The second theme relates to the participants’ comments pertaining to working as a team. The participants explained that establishing working relationships between psycho-educational assessment key stakeholders is fundamental to develop and ultimately work as a team. This theme will be discussed with a focus on the working relationships between school psychologists and teachers, as well as a review of the implications for

parents' contributions to an effective psycho-educational assessment. The second theme reflects the participants' vision of weaving throughout the psycho-educational assessment process a commitment from all key stakeholders to work collaboratively as a team.

School Psychologists and Teachers

The study's participants identified both school psychologists and teachers as key professional members of a psycho-educational assessment team. The findings of the current study delineate a working partnership between school psychologists and teachers as both parties having their respective roles and responsibilities within the psycho-educational assessment process. The participants believed that the collective expertise of school psychologists and teachers has the potential to be a powerful collaboration that is beneficial to students.

The school psychologist–teacher working relationship has previously been defined in terms of a school psychologist's being a supplier of psycho-educational assessment services and a teacher's being a consumer of that service (Brady, 1985; Evans & Wright, 1987; Fairchild & Seeley, 1996; Fairchild & Zins, 1992; Hagborg & Aiello-Coultier, 1994; Lentz & Shapiro, 1986; O'Hagan & Swanson, 1986; Ownby, 1990; Reschly & Grimes, 2002; Salvagno & Teglassi, 1987). The professional perspectives revealed in this research indicate that both school psychologists and teachers realize that the supplier-consumer relationship is not meeting the needs of either profession. The literature has recommended that psycho-educational assessment services be reexamined to improve/incorporate/establish relationships with teachers (Erchul, Raven, & Whichard, 2001; Gilman & Gabriel, 2004; Gutkin & Conoley, 1990; Knoff, Hines & Kromrey, 1995; Knoff et al., 1991; Knoff, Sullivan, & Lui, 1995; Mureika et al., 2004).

The participants in the current study proposed a shift from a supplier-consumer relationship to a collaborative team model. Researchers have previously recommended this shift as an avenue to improve school psychology services (Gutkin & Nemeth, 1997; Mureika et al., 2004; Schiappa et al., 2000). They have acknowledged that school psychologists' approach to psycho-educational service has not been collaborative and advised that service to students would be more productive with a team-based approach (Gutkin & Nemeth, 1997; Schiappa et al., 2000). Considering the participants' comments within the context of the social power model seems to suggest a shift from expert to informational power (Erchul & Raven, 1997; Erchul, Raven, & Whichard, 2001; Martin, 1978; Raven, 1965). This shift requires that school psychologists let go of the notion that they are the more knowledgeable professional—the expert—and recognize that teachers also have unique knowledge to contribute to the psycho-educational assessment process. School psychologists will move from being suppliers of psycho-educational assessments to facilitators of a collaborative process that involves discussion with teachers and parents (Andrews & Gutkin, 1994; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Petty et al., 1997). School psychologists would become members of teams in which all stakeholders have unique expertise that is mutually valued and in which everyone has a responsibility to participate and contribute to the psycho-educational assessment process. It is interesting that the school psychology literature has specifically outlined this type of shift in a relationship; however, it is discussed in terms of the process of developing a partnership between parents and teachers (Galant, Trivette, & Dunst, 2000). The participants in the current study suggested a similar shift in the relationship between school psychologists and teachers within the context of psycho-educational assessment.

The participants proposed another model that is similar to the collaborative relationship between teachers and school psychologists and is developed within the context of school psychology consultative services. This relationship model—coordinate power status—is based on the premise of “shared and equal power in the decision-making process [by teachers and school psychologists]” (Gutkin & Curtis, 1999, p. 604). The model has several fundamental aspects that are similar to the insights of participants.

The teacher participants in my study readily acknowledged their respect for the unique capabilities of school psychologists in assessment and diagnostic decision making, and the school psychologists also valued teachers’ knowledge regarding student functioning. Coordinate power status acknowledges the distinctive qualifications of each team member, and there is an understanding that each partner brings his or her own professional knowledge. The participants in the current study believed that establishing reciprocal communication between a teacher and a school psychologist is a responsibility of the school psychologist. In the coordinate power status model, the school psychologist has a leadership role that gives him or her the responsibility to initiate and encourage active participation in open and focused discussion. With regard to this model, Gutkin and Curtis (1999) questioned the willingness of teachers to be active participants; but the current study’s findings demonstrate that teachers are advocating for the opportunity to be more actively involved in the psycho-educational assessment process. It is also important to note that they identified another possible outcome of active teacher participation in the coordinate power status model as the opportunity to increase teachers’ self-efficacy. The teacher participants hoped that the psycho-educational assessment

process would affirm their decisions. Increasing teachers' self-efficacy may have an outcome of increased teacher confidence in their professional judgments.

Fundamental to the coordinate power status model is the merit of multidisciplinary conclusions and solutions that are not always discovered in unilateral assessment models. The participants in this current study also identified the potential strength of a partnership between school psychologists and teachers in meeting the needs of students. Applying facets of the coordinate power status model to the psycho-educational assessment process could result in a multifaceted understanding of a student and thereby result in a practical remediation plan.

School Psychologists

The school psychologists and the teachers identified the training and employment parameters of school psychologists as an influential factor in their role in the psycho-educational assessment process. The qualifications of school psychologists were a topic of substantial concern for the participating school psychologists because the licensing standards in Alberta are not as specialized as they are in other parts of Canada and the United States. The school psychologists' comments indicate that the lack of specific qualification guidelines and accountability measures in licensed practice has had a negative impact on their profession. In Alberta, psychologists may be trained in one area of psychology but may work in other areas at their professional discretion. The National Association of School Psychologists ([NASP] 2000) has campaigned for recognition of the school psychology profession by devising graduate syllabus guidelines that specifically outline minimum requirements and accreditation guidelines. The school psychologists' comments indicate a need for specialized training and specific provincial

licensing standards. The College of Alberta Psychologists may need to examine the issue of specializations and licensing.

The teachers and some school psychologists commented on the ramifications of school psychologists' employment parameters. Most participants perceived that the ability to develop working relationships is significantly enhanced if school districts employ school psychologists. The participants expressed a desire for a psycho-educational assessment team, and doing this requires an opportunity to develop working relationships. The participants stated that the realities of contracted psycho-educational assessment services result in a number of different school psychologists in their schools, and when a student is assessed, the school staff needs to develop a new relationship with a different school psychologist. This issue may be unique to this study in that NASP's national survey results show that 88% of school psychologists work for schools, and 4% of school psychologists are in private practice (Curtis, Lopez, Batsche, & Smith, 2006).

In this current study I have examined the role of the school psychologist within the continuing mainstay of a school psychologist's work—psycho-educational assessment services. Throughout their interviews, all participants expressed an appreciation for the value of psycho-educational assessment. It is interesting that there has been significant debate on the role of the school psychologist in the school psychology literature (Bramlett et al., 2002; Fagan & Wise, 2000; Reschly, 2000; Reschly & Wilson, 1995) concerning the tasks that school psychologists undertake, specifically with regard to the desire of school psychologists to decrease their time in the area of assessment and relocate their services in other areas. Even though school psychologists are advocating for a shift in role(s), they continue to spend the majority of

their time in psycho-educational assessment service (Bramlett et al., 2002; Fagan & Wise, 2000; Hosp & Reschly, 2002; Hutton & Dubes, 1992; Hyman & Kaplinski, 1994; Reschly, 2000; Reschly & Wilson, 1995). The proposed shift away from assessment appears to be reflected in the scarcity of recent research that has examined psycho-educational assessment. It is concerning to note that the task of psycho-educational assessment occupies the majority of school psychologists' time, but that it is not a prevalent research topic.

Teachers

The role of the teacher is also a subject that the teachers and the school psychologists discussed. They recognized that teachers have the unique position of being professionals with pedagogical expertise who work directly with the student being assessed. An aspect of teachers' professional responsibility that the participants identified is the expectation that teachers will utilize all of their expertise to remediate challenges before referring students for psycho-educational assessment. They recommended the utilization of classroom assessment and standardized individual academic assessments, which Alberta Education (1994, 2006a) also outlined. Essentially, students should not be referred for psycho-educational assessment until other less complex avenues have been explored (Kovaleski, 2002).

Another aspect of teachers' responsibilities that the school psychologists mentioned is their commitment to the psycho-educational assessment process. The school psychologists raised concerns about teachers' engagement in the assessment process and linked the root of this concern to teachers' not reading the written reports or not attending

the debriefings. This situation is not unique; it was also evident in Hagborg and Aiello-Coultier's (1994) study.

Teachers' disengagement may result for any number of reasons, such as the realities of current workloads or a lack of ownership of the process and the ensuing results and recommendations. The participants suggested two reasonable courses of action that I have already discussed: relieving teachers of some teaching responsibilities to facilitate participation in interviews and meetings as well as creating a partnership with teachers, thus engaging them in the assessment process.

School psychologists must rely on teachers to implement their recommendations (Gutkin & Conoley, 1990); participants representing both professions suggested that this can be achieved by ensuring that teachers are key collaborators in assessment procedures and the analysis of the results. The teachers in this research expressed frustration with their role as strictly consumers because they want to actively participate in the psycho-educational assessment process. They outlined their contribution of professional knowledge in terms of their direct experience with students and understanding of classroom realities. The school psychologists recognized teachers' substantial educational expertise as an asset to a psycho-educational assessment and identified their desire to have the opportunity to work more closely with teachers. Hence, both professions expressed their desire to engage in a more collaborative approach to psycho-educational assessment.

Parents

Neither schools nor school psychologists can demand parent participation; however, the participants recognized that parent involvement in the psycho-educational

assessment is critical. The school psychologists and teachers both believed that the key to gaining parent participation is to develop a collaborative working relationship between parents and schools. The implications of developing school-family partnerships is a growing topic of discussion in the research (Christenson, 2004; Christenson & Buerkle, 1999; Elizalde-Utnick, 2002; Esler, Godber, & Christenson, 2002; Fish, 2002; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Minke, 2006; Vickers & Minke, 2000). A working relationship between parents and schools creates “a sense of shared responsibility for children’s development, tempered with a respect for individual family functioning” (Vickers & Minke, 2000, p. 555). The participants suggested that creating a positive relationship with parents can be facilitated by easing their discomfort with the school system. Christenson concurred: “Of particular importance is the degree to which educators have examined the school climate to ensure that it is welcoming and inclusive for all families” (p. 95). Vickers and Minke reported that schools can form collaborative relationships with parents by coming to mutual understandings about students and agreeing on common priorities. Essentially, parents who trust that home and school have a joint concern are more likely to engage in a collaborative home-school relationship. Furthermore, it is important to note that, in a study of 18 home-school partnerships, Cox (2005) concluded that “home-school collaboration interventions are effective in helping achieve desired school outcomes for children, including changes in academic performance and school-related behavior” (p. 491). Previous research seems to support the participants’ belief that an expanded parent role in the psycho-educational process would be beneficial.

Theme 2: Working as a Team: Conclusions

Forming a team by strengthening working relationships is the second theme that evolved from the data analysis. The school psychologists and the teachers both recognized that the psycho-educational assessment process can be improved if all key stakeholders work collaboratively throughout the psycho-educational assessment process. However, it seems that the school psychology profession has not applied the concept working as a team as it relates to psycho-educational assessment. In the chapter “Working With Teams in the School” in the *Handbook of School Psychology*, Rosenfield and Gravois (1999) did not refer to psycho-educational assessment teams. Results from this research indicate that a team approach to psycho-educational assessment is valued by participating teachers and school psychologists.

Discussion of this theme revolves around the participants’ suggestion that working relationships should become partnerships, which would ultimately result in a team approach to psycho-educational assessment. The participants believed that stakeholders typically perceive work that is a compilation of input from all team members as more effective than plans that school psychologists develop independently. Benazzi, Horner, and Good (2006) supported this belief. They found that team members rated a team’s intervention plans as more practical for implementation than a specialist’s independently developed plans. Vickers and Minke (2000) also supported the participants’ perception that working as a team to identify concerns and develop remediation plans “increases the likelihood of each person’s investment in following through with the plans” (p. 555). For a psycho-educational assessment to be effective, the

outcomes must impact on the assessed students. Creating a psycho-educational assessment team appears to be a viable avenue to attain this goal.

Theme 3: Comprehensive Assessment—Hoping to Change Lives

The final theme of comprehensive assessment—hoping to change lives addresses the belief that psycho-educational assessment can and should change the life of a student. This theme is comprised of various interrelated factors that make it possible for the psycho-educational assessment process to positively impact on a child's life. This section on changing lives encompasses psycho-educational assessment that evaluates a student's global functioning and then devises a comprehensive action plan, which entails a commitment of time. Essentially, I discuss the participants' suggestions on what needs to be done to change the life of a student as a result of a psycho-educational assessment.

Psycho-Educational Service

The school psychologists and teachers in the current study described psycho-educational assessment in terms of a service model. They contended that psycho-educational service must assure that psycho-educational assessment findings benefit the student, the parents, and the teacher and that providing service must involve implementing practical recommendations that result in a change in the student's functioning.

The participants and previous research identified an aspect of service as assessment recommendations that are workable in the sense that they are conducive to implementation in the classroom context (Gutkin & Curtis, 1999; Sheridan & McCurdy, 2005) and the family system (Fish, 2002). The participants linked the ability to impact on a student's learning experience directly with recommendations that can be implemented

under typical classroom conditions. They suggested that ensuring that recommendations are effectively implemented can be accomplished through collaboration between the teacher and the school psychologist following the debriefing. This means that these two professionals could work together to adapt or modify programming plans. The goal of this collaboration or follow-up is similar to the purpose of school psychology consultation (Conoley & Gutkin, 1995; Gutkin & Conoley, 1990; Zins & Erchul, 2002) Zins and Erchul defined the purpose of school consultation as to develop a partnership between school psychologists and teachers to engage in collaborative problem solving. Merrell et al. (2006) described consultation as a meeting between school psychologists and teachers to change the behavior of a student. According to Zins & Erchul, “The goal is to enhance and empower consultee [teacher] systems, thereby, promoting students’ well-being and performance” (p. 626).

According to the findings of this study, the participants believed that consultation should become a component of an effective psycho-educational assessment process. The perception that school psychologists should view assessment services in a broader context has previously been proposed by Merrell et al. (2006). Psycho-educational service is a continuum of interrelated tasks of which assessment is a key component. “Without an appropriate assessment, it is difficult to know what intervention to use and whether the implemented intervention is having the desired effect” (p. 103). If teachers and school psychologists engage in consultation beyond the debriefing, they can modify their responsive plans to ensure that students progress. This current research describes effective psycho-educational assessment as having an impact on the student—a discernible change in a student’s life experience. Ideally, the change in a student’s

functioning should be a result of the psycho-educational assessment findings, which determine the focus and composition of the recommendations. Implementation of recommendations is supported through consultation between school psychologists and teachers to ensure viability and student growth.

The school psychologists and teachers were conflicted on service to the student in terms of diagnosis and funding. Some teachers recognized the need for special education support that results from diagnoses. However, overall, the school psychologists and teachers believed that the primary purpose of psycho-educational assessment should be to help a student. In school systems, diagnosis generally links to funding and/or placement; however, according to the research, diagnosis does not necessarily equate to service for the student (Kamphaus et al., 1999; Merrell et al., 2006). The participants and previous research perceived psycho-educational assessment solely for diagnosis and the resulting funding as ineffective (Gutkin & Curtis, 1999; Kamphaus et al., 1999; Merrell et al., 2006). The potential implications of being pressured to make a diagnosis to secure funding results in professional dilemmas for teachers and school psychologists because they must maintain their professional integrity balanced with the best interest of the student. This brings into question the dispersion of special education funding in relationship to the purpose of psycho-educational assessment. What is the goal of psycho-educational assessment—to enhance a student’s functioning or to label a student for funding? Can it effectively be both?

Impacting on the Global Child

The concept of developing a comprehensive understanding of a child’s functioning as an outcome of a psycho-educational assessment seems intuitive.

Developing a global understanding encompasses collecting data on a student's strengths and weaknesses as well as his or her emotional/social functioning. With an understanding of a student's global profile, the findings and recommendations can be tailored to build upon his or her strengths to change the student's life experience (Zins & Erchul, 2002).

Bob (t) suggested that, over the past 25 years, including the strengths as well as weaknesses in the assessment results has been beneficial. This revelation reflects the evolution of intervention models that were developed from a deficit perspective (Vickers & Minke, 2000) and now are beginning to concentrate on student strengths (Henderson, 2007). The participants identified this development as highly effective in helping students to reach their potential. They also coupled helping students to obtain their utmost capabilities with the responsibility of addressing social/emotional/behavioral difficulties.

The participants believed that effective psycho-educational assessment practice ensures that students' social/emotional/behavioral functioning is evaluated and that specific recommendations are developed to assist students in coping with everyday stresses. Shapiro and Heick (2004) reported that school psychologists have expanded the typical psycho-educational assessment to address social/emotional/behavioral functioning and that their findings have a stronger link to intervention strategies. It is interesting that the assessment tools that the participating teachers valued—interviews and observations—are intrinsic tools in the evaluation of social/emotional/behavioral problems (Shapiro & Heick, 2004). This evolution in assessment practice is beginning to address the universal question, *Is the child misbehaving because he or she cannot learn the curriculum, or has the child misbehaved and missed the opportunity to learn the curriculum?* Social/emotional/behavioral functioning is inherently linked to many

learning challenges (Zins & Elias, 2006); therefore, the participants in this current study recommended exploration of all aspects of a student's functioning in the psycho-educational assessment process.

Money and Time

Both teachers and school psychologists identified within their own practice and that of their counterparts that, consistently, not enough time has been allocated to the psycho-educational assessment process. The participants recommended a more comprehensive psycho-educational assessment process that implies more time (a) to meet at a pre-assessment conference, (b) to utilize informal assessment tools—observing students and interviewing key stakeholders, (c) to allow school psychologists and teachers to work collaboratively throughout the assessment process, and (d) to allow teachers and school psychologists to work together following the debriefing. For school divisions to support the implementation of comprehensive psycho-educational assessment, there must be additional financial support for this service or consideration of the age-old adage “quality versus quantity.” The findings from this study may be cause for school districts to examine the number of psycho-educational assessments being completed in their schools and the resulting impact of these assessments on student learning. With this in mind, school districts may be more successful in improving student learning by conducting fewer assessments that take more time or increasing assessment budgets. Shapiro (2006) commented on the evolution of school psychology services in relation to the capacity for change. He suggested that change that requires additional funding is generally not sustainable and that, to facilitate change and maintain sustainable

funding, resources and personnel must be redirected and redeployed. He cautioned that change can be sabotaged if it is not sustainable.

Theme 3: Comprehensive Assessment—Hoping to Change Lives: Conclusions

The teachers and the school psychologists believed that an effective psycho-educational assessment process improves the life experience of a student. The outcomes of the assessment process enable the school and the family to respond to a child's needs in a manner that leads to progress. The findings in the current study indicate that this can be achieved through comprehensive assessment. A comprehensive assessment serves the student because the findings result in helpful interventions. Comprehensive assessment encompasses a variety of components that require additional time for each assessment process. The addition of time leads directly back to financial support. Hoping to change the life of a student is an achievable desire; however, it means reexamining the typical psycho-educational assessment process as well as school systems' psycho-educational assessment models.

Considerations of the Study

I ask the readers to consider a few factors that might impact their reading and interpretation of this research. First, in this study I purposely examined the perceptions of two groups of professionals—school psychologists and teachers—to report their insights. However, key stakeholders who did not participate in this study are parents, students, special education teachers, and school administrators. Obtaining other perspectives might result in different interpretations. Second, the participants were all from central Alberta. School psychology, special education, and psycho-educational assessment systems in this geographical area may differ somewhat from those in other areas of Canada and the

United States. Last, I interviewed the participants only once. Additional interviews might have given the participants more time to become comfortable with the process and reflect further on their insights.

Recommendations for Training

The results of the current study suggest several important implications for school psychology and postsecondary education training institutions as well as the day-to-day practice of school psychologists and teachers. Influencing practice begins with examining the professional knowledge of school psychologists and teachers. Some of the participants' suggestions for improving the psycho-educational assessment process can be most effectively embedded into the training of these two professionals. Hence, I suggest the following recommendations for contemplation.

Postsecondary Institutions: School Psychology

- Develop curriculum that examines psycho-educational assessment as a collaborative problem-solving undertaking.
- Offer training on how to interpret assessment findings in school-based terms to which teachers and families can relate.
- Develop students' ability to compose psycho-educational assessment reports that teachers and parents can comprehend.
- Ensure that practicum experience partners education and school psychology students in examining assessment, collaboration, and classroom ecology.
- Consider school psychology students' undergraduate training, with a preference for education students.

Postsecondary Institutions: Education

- Offer training on the elements of psycho-educational assessment and teachers' roles and responsibilities as partners in the psycho-educational assessment process.
- Include curriculum that outlines evidence-based practice in evaluating and assisting struggling students.
- Ensure that practicum experience partners education and school psychology students in examining assessment, collaboration, and classroom ecology.

Recommendations for Practice

The practice of school psychologists and teachers centers on the education of students. Within the psycho-educational assessment process, these professions have the common purpose of assisting students who are experiencing difficulties. One of the main goals of the current study was to explore how school psychologists' and teachers' practice can be influenced to result in more effective psycho-educational assessment. The subsequent suggestions for school psychologists and school systems may enhance the psycho-educational assessment process.

School Psychologists

- Incorporate a pre-assessment meeting into the psycho-educational assessment process. Meet with parents and school staff to examine the assessment purpose.
- Use ecological assessment techniques as a pivotal component in a psycho-educational assessment process. This can be accomplished by incorporating interviews and observation strategies into the assessment process.

- Use standardized questionnaires cautiously and not in isolation. Discuss with stakeholders the importance of completing questionnaires and forms. Explain instructions and give individuals an opportunity to convey their perceptions regarding the information that they relayed in the forms.
- Invite teachers and parents into the psycho-educational assessment process as genuine partners. Discuss findings and plan interventions collaboratively.

School Systems

- Allocate release time to the psycho-educational assessment process to free teachers from teaching responsibilities, thus allowing them to communicate/analyze information with the school psychologist.
- Communicate the clear expectation that teachers will begin the formal process of documenting behavior incidents three to six months before requesting a psycho-educational assessment. This documentation may assist in determining a diagnosis.
- Implement and utilize prereferral teams/systems to assist teachers in responding to students' needs before referring them for psycho-educational assessment.
- Ensure that classroom teachers have access to specialists (e.g. reading consultant, special education teacher) to assist in developing programming for students who are experiencing difficulties.
- Facilitate the attendance of all key stakeholders at the debriefing—principal, classroom teacher, special education teacher, parents, and student (if developmentally appropriate).

- Supply teachers with coverage of teaching responsibilities.
- Do not hold meetings when time is limited by daily commitments.
- Show a preference for school psychologists who are employed by the school system; if this is not possible, then assign contracted psychologists chiefly to particular schools.
- Consider the long-term vs. short-term implications of staffing school psychologists: Is it for programming or coding?
- Communicate the clear expectation that school psychologists will interview key school staff (e.g., teachers) and parents as a component of the psycho-educational assessment process.
- Include in the psycho-educational assessment process the expectation that school psychologists will collect educational environment data (e.g., structured classroom observation).
- Allocate funds/time to consultation following the psycho-educational assessment.
- Offer professional development for teachers—inservicing that outlines a teacher’s role and responsibilities in the psycho-educational assessment process. Specifically emphasize devising referral questions and maintaining anecdotal notes.

Implications for Future Research

Researchers (Canter, 1997; Hyman & Kaplinski, 1994; Merrell et al., 2006; Naglieri, 1996; Reschly & Grimes, 2002) have cautioned school psychologists not to discard their unique expertise as assessment specialists. The results from this study

indicate that psycho-educational assessment is valuable and helpful to students. However, school psychologists want to decrease the time that they spend in this role (Bramlett et al., 2002; Fagan & Wise, 2000; Reschly, 2000; Reschly & Wilson, 1995). Is it not logical to enhance the impact of psycho-educational assessment and try to improve this undertaking rather than continue to perceive assessment as an undesirable task?

The following potential research areas may expand upon the understanding of effective psycho-educational assessment. The findings of the current study have revealed many aspects of psycho-educational assessment related to the components of the process as well as the people involved in the process. Exploring both components and relationships would result in a deeper understanding of effectiveness.

First, the current study explored the perspectives of school psychologists and teachers. The perspectives of other key stakeholders such as students, parents, special education teachers, school administrators, and school-system administrators, should be examined to gather perceptions from all perspectives. Examining the insights of all stakeholders will result in a multidimensional understanding of the elements of effective psycho-educational assessment. Second, the school psychologists and teachers made various proposals on the components that the psycho-educational assessment process should include. Case studies that examine the implementation of their suggestions (e.g., a pre-assessment conference) could expand the understanding of how each element impacts on overall effectiveness. As well, I recommend that quantitative studies be undertaken to measure the impact of these elements. Third, I encourage additional studies that explore the working relationships among key stakeholders: students, parents, school staff, school psychologists, and school systems. Critical to effectiveness is collaboration among the

key stakeholders and each collaborator's perception of the effectiveness of that type of relationship. The participants also commented on the interactive styles of school psychologists and teachers during the assessment process. Examining the communication dyads within a psycho-educational assessment may also shed insight into the effectiveness of those interactions.

In conclusion, both the participants and previous research have suggested that school psychologists seek the perceptions of stakeholders as they determine their practice procedures (Adelman & Taylor, 2003; Gilman & Gabriel, 2004). I concur and suggest that the nature of psycho-educational assessment service demands that all key stakeholders be included in the investigation of how to improve effectiveness.

Significance of the Study

Although it is important to keep in mind that the current study has gathered preliminary findings that will need to be further explored, some meaningful insights have been revealed. The most important finding of this study is that both school psychologists and teachers are eager to work as partners in the psycho-educational assessment process. The participants were very articulate in expressing their appreciation for their counterparts' expertise and expressed a desire to work collaboratively with each other. There was also a clear mutual perception that assessment has value: It is helpful to students. Furthermore, the school psychologists and teachers conceptualized incorporating the input from a larger team as the most effective approach to psycho-educational assessment. They recognized the contributions of school administrators, parents, and students as crucial elements of a comprehensive assessment and exemplified this commitment to gathering information from key stakeholders in their belief that a pre-

assessment meeting would produce a more effective psycho-educational assessment. Last, the current study's findings suggest that time is a key factor in effective psycho-educational assessment. This time factor must be thoughtfully considered as the components and implications of effective psycho-educational assessment are further explored.

Concluding Thoughts

The participants in the current study expressed their confidence in the psycho-educational assessment process. They emphasized that effective psycho-educational assessment is a helpful process. Ruby (sp) summarized the thoughts of the participants:

An effective assessment to me is an assessment that assists a student, teacher, and parents in understanding their particular child's learning needs, what that child needs to be more successful in the school setting, and also what that child's currently able to do, and do well, so their strengths and understanding. To be effective the assessment has to support the environment, the learning environment, so that that child becomes more able to learn.

Overall, the findings of the current study are very encouraging and suggest that effective psycho-educational assessment can change the life of a student.

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APPENDIX A:

SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL FOR THE PARTICIPANTS

Attributes of Effective Assessment:

Teachers' and School Psychologists' Perceptions

Purpose and Rationale: The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate teachers' and school psychologists' perspectives of what an effective psychological assessment entails in order to clarify what each profession values in the psychological assessment process. A key feature of the psychological assessment process is the interdependence of teachers' and school psychologists' roles (Fairchild & Seeley, 1996; Gutkin & Conoley, 1990). The assessment process is composed of: 1) tests selected and administered; 2) a written report; and 3) the verbal dissemination of findings and recommendations (i.e., debriefing). Psychologists organize assessments based on the perceived need of the student and teacher. Next, teachers receive the information collected from the psychological assessment through a written report and a verbal debriefing. It is clear that there is an enormous dependency on the exchange of verbal information and the interpretation of this dialogue (Knoff, McKenna & Riser, 1991). In sum, a crucial feature of the assessment process is based on teachers' and school psychologists' perceptions. Thus, the following information will be sought: What are the components of an effective psychological assessment from these two perspectives? What are the similarities and differences between teachers' and school psychologists' perceptions of the psychological assessment process?

There is a growing concern in the special education literature that there is dissatisfaction on behalf of teachers with the usefulness of psychological assessments (Evans & Wright, 1987; Ownby, 1997). In particular, the recommendations typically made in assessment reports often do not produce a change in the child's educational environment (Reschly, 1996; Weiner, 1985). School psychologists acknowledge that the effectiveness of their role in the assessment process is dependent on the support of teachers (Fairchild & Seeley, 1996; Gutkin & Conoley, 1990; Knoff, Hines, & Kromrey, 1995; Sattler, 2001). Therefore, the need to illuminate both positive and negative perceptual aspects of the assessment process is immense, from both a research and practical perspective. It is proposed that by tapping into teachers' and school psychologists' perceptions of effective and ineffective components of the assessment process we will gain insight into areas of overlap and as well as points of divergence. It is expected that a platform of understanding will arise and the establishment of a basis of dialogue will occur.

Research that has been done in the area of effectiveness of psychological assessment is sparse (Knoff, Sullivan, & Lui, 1995; Ownby, 1997). The findings that are most critical pertain to the role of school psychologists, the effectiveness of the written report, and the producer-consumer relationship between the two professions. To date it has been found that teachers and school psychologists have contradictory views on the

role of the school psychologist. O'Hagan and Swanson (1986) found that school psychologists saw themselves as agents of change in education, whereas teachers viewed the school psychologist's role as that of an assessor. Research has revealed that teachers have identified the reporting of results in a written report as a prevalent issue of dissatisfaction (Davidson & Simmons, 1991; Hagborg & Aiello-Coultier, 1994). It is recognized that teachers are the primary consumers of psychological assessments (Evans & Wright, 1987; Fairchild & Seeley, 1996; Hagborg & Aiello-Coultier, 1994; O'Hagan & Swanson, 1986) and school psychologists as suppliers of psychological assessment are endeavoring to influence teachers to enact their programming suggestions (Conoley & Gutkin, 1995; Gutkin & Conoley, 1990; Saklofske, Bartell, Derevensky, Hann, Holmes, & Janzen, 2000); then teachers' perceptions of the usefulness of those suggestions is key (Davidson & Simmons, 1991). Furthermore, it has been recognized that "School psychologists are dependent on adult third parties, such as teachers... to deliver their services. If these third parties do not act on psychologists recommendations in appropriate ways, their recommendations will have little if any positive impact on the children referred" (Gutkin & Conoley, 1990, p. 210).

Method: This investigation will be qualitatively based, utilizing the basic interpretive qualitative approach (Merriam, 2002). Participants will consist of regular education teachers and school psychologists. Recruitment of regular education teachers and district school psychologists will be done through participating school districts. Recruitment of contracted school psychologists will be attempted through collaborating school districts, if this route is not productive, the Psychologists' Association of Alberta will be contacted to give assistance. Participants will be interviewed individually (approx. 60 mins.) in an attempt to gather their personal experiences with psychological assessments. Queries will focus on their general opinions of assessment, their overall insights on assessment, and their experience with a specific psychological assessment. A standardized, open-ended interview (Patton, 1990) will focus on the assessment process, with specific emphasis on: (a) the tests utilized, (b) the written report, and (c) the verbal dissemination of findings (debriefing). Essentially, teachers and school psychologists will be asked to describe their perceptions of what an effective assessment is. The objective of the interview guide is to predetermine a breadth and sequence of inquiries that will explore perceptions ranging from open-ended queries to specific insights (Patton, 1990). Interviews will be audio-taped and transcribed into text for analysis. The interviews' text will be coded for themes and resulting in an inventory of attributes of effective assessments. These two lists will then be compared and contrasted to find similarities and differences. All products from this research study will be stored in a locked filing cabinet.

Significance of Study: In education today, psychological assessments are an essential part of the diagnosis, funding and programming for children with special needs (Alberta Learning, 2000; Dworet & Bennett, 2002; Saklofske et al., 2000). At present, a significant amount of money is allocated in school district budgets to do psychological assessments (K. Boschman, personal communication, June 18, 2002), and there are an abundant number of psychological assessments being completed (Canadian Psychological Association, 1996). Ideally, from an educational perspective, these psychological assessments should result in an improved learning experience for those assessed. The development of a body of research that explores what teachers and school

psychologists identify as useful components of psychological assessment may assist in achieving an improved schooling experience. Perhaps the findings will provide insight into the experiences of both professional groups and develop a foundation of appreciation. It is intended that results may also contribute to guidelines that school districts may refer to when outlining psychological assessment expectations for school psychologists and teachers. In turn, these guidelines may facilitate better communication between teachers and school psychologists, thus fostering a team relationship.

APPENDIX B:

LETTER OF CONSENT SCHOOL (SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST)

Dear Sir or Madam:

My name is Coranne Johnson and I am interested in school psychologists and teachers experiences with psycho-educational assessments. I would like you to consider allowing me to interview you as a participant in my dissertation research, which is a component of my doctoral studies at the University of Alberta. My dissertation is titled "Attributes of Effective Assessment: Teachers' and School Psychologists' Perceptions." The collection of perceptions from the perspectives of teachers and school psychologists entails the individual interviewing of each participant. School psychologists' interviews will follow a recently completed assessment. This recently completed assessment needs to be comprised of a battery of assessment tools, a written report and a debriefing. The interview will be open ended, exploring your perceptions of what you have experienced in the assessment process. The length of the interview will be approximately 60 minutes. The interview will be audio-taped to ensure exact recording of the conversation; thus, enabling me to review information and interpret answers.

If you consent to participation in this research, your identity will be completely protected. A pseudo-name will be used, and all written observations will be stored as my personal property. Audio-tapes of the interview will be stored in a locked metal box. The dissertation document will not identify the location or school district where the research was completed. You will be asked to read the transcript from your interview and makes comments as to its accuracy. A follow-up contact may be arranged to have you comment on the themes that emerged from your interview. This follow-up phase is important as it ensures that statements of meaning truly reflect your experiences.

At any time you wish, you may withdraw from this study. Either during or after the interview you may choose to withdraw and all data that has been recorded or written about your interview will be deleted. Simply contact me and let me know you no longer want your interview included in the data collection process.

If you choose not to consent, I will respect your decision and it will not reflect negatively on you. Thank you for your time and consideration of this study.

Sincerely,

Roberta Coranne Johnson
Ph.D. Candidate
780-361-2399
e-mail: johnnie@telusplanet.net

I _____ give my consent to be interviewed and the data from that interview to be used by Miss R. C. Johnson. I realize the data is being collected in conjunction with her dissertation "Attributes of Effective Assessment: Teachers' and School Psychologists' Perceptions" and the findings of this dissertation may be presented and/or published. I understand that Miss Johnson will be audio-taping the interview and writing up the results using pseudonyms. I also realize that I may withdraw my permission at any time.

Signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX C:
LETTER OF CONSENT (TEACHER)

Dear Sir or Madam:

My name is Coranne Johnson and I am interested in school psychologists and teachers experiences with psycho-educational assessments. I would like you to consider allowing me to interview you as a participant in my dissertation research. My dissertation is titled "Attributes of Effective Assessment: Teachers' and School Psychologists' Perceptions." The collection of perceptions from the perspectives of teachers and school psychologists entails the individual interviewing of each participant. Teachers' interviews will follow a recently completed assessment. This recently completed assessment needs to be comprised of a battery of assessment tools, a written report and a debriefing. The interview will be open ended, exploring your perceptions of what you have experienced in the assessment process. The length of the interview will be approximately 60 minutes. The interview will be audio-taped to ensure exact recording of the conversation; thus, enabling me to review information and interpret answers.

If you consent to participation in this research, your identity will be completely protected. A pseudo-name will be used, and all written observations will be stored as my personal property. Audio-tapes of the interview will be stored in a locked metal box. The dissertation document will not identify the location or school district where the research was completed. A follow-up conversation will be arranged to have you review the statements of meaning that have emerged from your interview. This follow-up phase is important as it ensures that statements of meaning truly reflect your experiences.

At any time you wish, you may withdraw from this study. Either during or after the interview you may choose to withdraw and all data that has been recorded or written about your interview will be deleted. Simply contact me and let me know you no longer want your interview included in the data collection process.

If you choose not to consent, I will respect your decision and it will not reflect negatively on you. Thank you for your time and consideration of this study.

Sincerely,

Roberta Coranne Johnson
Ph.D. Candidate
780-361-2399
e-mail: johnie@telusplanet.net

I _____ give my consent to be interviewed and the data from that interview to be used by Miss R. C. Johnson. I realize the data is being collected in conjunction with her dissertation "Attributes of Effective Assessment: Teachers' and School Psychologists' Perceptions" and the findings of this dissertation may be presented and/or published. I understand that Miss Johnson will be audio-taping the interview and writing up the results using pseudonyms. I also realize that I may withdraw my permission at any time.

Signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX D:
DEMOGRAPHIC DATA FORM (SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST)

Name: _____

Age: _____
 Between 20 and 25
 Between 26 and 35
 Between 36 and 45
 Over 46

Degree(s) earned:

Degree: _____ **Year:** _____
Major: _____ **Minor:** _____

Degree: _____ **Year:** _____
Major: _____ **Minor:** _____

Degree: _____ **Year:** _____
Major: _____ **Minor:** _____

Degree: _____ **Year:** _____
Major: _____ **Minor:** _____

Years of experience as a school psychologist: _____

Years working with your present school board: _____

Approximately how many school based psycho-educational assessments have you completed over the past 12 months? _____

Contact Information:

Phone number at which you may be contacted: _____

Preferred days and times: _____

APPENDIX E:
DEMOGRAPHIC DATA FORM (TEACHER)

Name: _____

Age:

Between 20 and 25

Between 26 and 35

Between 36 and 45

Over 46

Degree(s) earned;

Degree: _____

Year: _____

Major: _____

Minor: _____

Degree: _____

Year: _____

Major: _____

Minor: _____

Degree: _____

Year: _____

Major: _____

Minor: _____

Degree: _____

Year: _____

Major: _____

Minor: _____

Years of teaching experience: _____

Years teaching at present school: _____

Grades Taught in descending order:

Presently teaching grade: _____

Subject matter currently being taught:

Socioeconomic status of student body (estimate):

Rural or urban school setting? _____

School population size? _____

Have you participated in profession development that pertains to psycho-educational assessment?

yes / no

If so, please describe:

Approximately, how many psycho-educational assessments are completed on your students per year? _____

Have you had a psycho-educational assessment completed (testing, written report and debriefing) on one of your students in the past 6 months? _____

What was the referral issue:

Contact Information:

Phone number at which you may be contacted: _____

Preferred days and times: _____

APPENDIX F:
GUIDE FOR SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST INTERVIEW

Opening Statement:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study. I am very interested in your experience with psycho-educational assessment in educational settings. I am going to start with general questions about your experiences. Please be frank about your insights. There are no right or wrong answers.

General Questions:

Tell me about your experiences with psycho-educational assessment.

Tell me what effective assessment means to you?

What are the components of an effective assessment? Please describe them.

Tell me what ineffective assessment means to you?

Describe the purpose of an assessment.

What are your expectations of an assessment?

Is the assessment process typically productive? Please describe insights.

How would you describe your relationship with teachers?

- What do you do if you and the teacher do not agree important issues?

Now, I'm going to ask you questions about your experience with a recently completed school-based psycho-educational assessment.

Questions Pertaining to a Recent Psycho-Educational Assessment:

What was the referral issue?

Can you describe the most effective component of this psycho-educational assessment?

Tell me about the most ineffective component.

Please describe the effectiveness of the assessment tools utilized?

- For example, tests, interviews, observations

Tell me about the written report.

Describe the debriefing.

How will this assessment impact the education of the student assessed?

- Response to referral issue

Do you foresee any difficulties in implementing any of the recommendations?

- If so, what would those difficulties be? How will you facilitate the implementation of the recommendations?

How would you describe your experience with this assessment?

What was your relationship with the teacher?

Last, I would like to ask for your opinion.

Questions Pertaining to Participants' Recommendations:

How would you make the psycho-educational assessment process more effective for a classroom teacher?

How would you make the psycho-educational assessment process more effective for a school psychologist?

Are there any other questions I should be asking? Areas I should be exploring?
Are there any additional comments you would like to make?

Thank you for your time and sharing your experiences/thoughts with me.

APPENDIX G:
GUIDE FOR TEACHER INTERVIEW

Opening Statement:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study. I am very interested in your experience with psycho-educational assessments. I am going to start with general questions about your experiences. Please be frank about your insights. There are no right or wrong answers.

General Questions:

Tell me about your experiences with psycho-educational assessment.

Tell me what effective assessment means to you?

What are the components of an effective assessment? Please describe them.

Tell me what ineffective assessment means to you?

Describe the purpose of an assessment.

What are your expectations of an assessment?

Is the assessment process typically productive? Please describe insights.

How would you describe your relationship with school psychologists?

What do you do if you do not agree with the school psychologist?

Now, I'm going to ask you questions about your experience with a recent psycho-educational assessment.

Questions Pertaining to a Recent Assessment:

What was the referral issue?

Can you describe the most effective component of this psycho-educational assessment?

Tell me about the most ineffective component.

Please describe the effectiveness of the assessment tools utilized?

- For example, tests, interviews, observations

Tell me about the written report.

Describe the debriefing.

How will this assessment impact the education of the student assessed?

- Response to referral issue

Do you foresee any difficulties in implementing any of the recommendations?

- If so, what would those difficulties be?

How would you describe your experience with this assessment?

What was your relationship with the teacher?

Last, I would like to ask for your opinion.

Questions Pertaining to Participants' Recommendations:

How would you make the psycho-educational assessment process more effective for a classroom teacher?

How would you make the psycho-educational assessment process more effective for a school psychologist?

Are there any other questions I should be asking? Areas I should be exploring?

Are there any additional comments you would like to make?

Thank you for your time and sharing your experiences/thoughts with me.