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Vicarious trauma: Risk factors, symptoms and coping strategies

While the primary obligation of school psychologists is to care for those traumatized, the needs of the school psychologist caregiver are equally important.

By Victoria Comerchero, PhD

The purpose of this brief article is to review vicarious trauma (VT) with respect to the major symptoms and risk factors as well as to highlight some recently applied strategies worthy of further exploration for possible integration into training for school psychologists and those already working in the field.

Over the past several years several local and global tragedies including natural disasters (e.g., terrorist attacks; Superstorm Sandy; Typhoon Yolanda), school shootings (e.g., Sandy Hook; university shootings) and terrorist attacks (e.g., Boston Marathon tragedy) have increased the need for school psychologists to be prepared to handle the psychological effects of trauma on the victims and families. Additionally, these events have forced school psychologists to deal with coping with their own psychological needs in response to working with traumatized clients. The increase in both coverage of local and global traumas on television and social media (Ben-Zuhr, Gil, & Shamshins, 2012) further increases the risk for mental health professionals to re-experience these events. Through repeated and cumulative exposures to the traumas presented by clients, mental health professionals such as school psychologists may experience significant adverse psychological effects (Culver, McKinney, & Paradise, 2011).

Overview of Vicarious Trauma

Vicarious Trauma (VT) is defined as a process of change that is ongoing, and unfolds over time via repeated exposure to the trauma that others experience. VT is a transformative effect that one experiences when working with people that are experiencing traumatic life events; it is the transmission of traumatic stress through hearing or observing the stories of traumatic events. The emphasis on vicarious trauma as a process of change happens because one cares about other people who have been hurt, and feels committed or responsible to provide assistance. Over time this process can lead to changes in one's psychological, physical, and spiritual well-being (McCann, & Pearlman, 1990; McKay, 2007). This term is often associated with terms such as compassion fatigue and secondary traumatic stress. Readers should be aware that some studies use these terms interchangeably, due to a lack of consistency and differentiation amongst the various terms (Craig & Sprang, 2010).

Risk Factors

Vicarious traumatization occurs mostly among those who work with trauma survivors (e.g., trauma counselors, school psychologists). Newell and MacNeil, (2010) identified the following risk factors in clinicians for vicarious trauma: (1) pre-existing anxiety disorder *;* (2) mood disorder; (3) personal trauma history and (4) maladaptive coping

skills on the part of the clinician (e.g., suppressed emotions , distancing from clients and reenacting abuse dynamics).

Research has demonstrated that several organizational features may increase the risk of VT, including organizational setting, bureaucratic constraints, inadequate supervision, lack of resources and lack of professional support (Newell & MacNeil, 2010). These organizational factors are often endemic to school settings and may be of particular relevance to the school psychologist who might be the only school psychologist in the building or even the entire district.

Symptoms
"Symptoms of vicarious traumatization may include anxiety, suspiciousness, depression, intrusive thoughts and feelings, avoidance, emotional numbing and flooding, and increased feelings of personal vulnerability" (Adams & Riggs, 2008, as cited in Culver et al., 2011, p.34). Moreover, individual experiences of VT may have a negative effect on teams of workers who in turn, are vicariously traumatized. Consequently this may reduce the psychologists' interpersonal communication, effectiveness on the job and organizational functioning (Pack, 2013). Some research has focused on reducing the negative consequences associated with VT through using protective self-care strategies such as those that promote physical and spiritual well-being such as exercise, relaxation and meditation (Harrison & Westwood, 2009).

Promising Practices to Reduce Vicarious Trauma

Evidenced Based Strategies Applied from Clinical Settings
Craig and Sprang (2010) examined the use of evidence based practices in influencing compassion fatigue, burnout and compassion satisfaction in a sample of 532 self-identified trauma specialists. Results indicated that evidence based practices (cognitive therapy, behavioral therapy, solution focused therapy and eclectic therapy) reduce burnout and compassion fatigue while increasing compassion satisfaction, defined by Stamm (2005 as cited in Craig & Sprang, 2010) as "the pleasure one derives from being able to do his or her work effectively" (Craig & Sprang, 2010, p. 327). Further data analyses revealed that younger practitioner age, having no special trauma training and not using evidenced based trauma practices significantly predicted burnout. These findings are applicable to school psychologists in that most school psychologists likely do not have access to specialized training in evidenced based trauma therapy and many entering school psychologists might be of younger age. These results imply that perhaps more training in applied coping mechanisms through workshops and graduate courses is warranted.

School Based Crisis Intervention Practices
In a more targeted sample of school psychologists, Bolnik and Brock (2005) examined working school psychologists retrospective self-reports of their "typical reactions to having participated in school crisis intervention" (p. 118). Results indicated among school psychologists who had taken part in at least one crisis intervention experience,

the majority of the participants (90 percent) reported having at least one physical, emotional, behavioral or cognitive reaction following the work with the crisis. All respondents (n =175) reported using at least one self-care strategy during crisis intervention work, which suggests that school psychologists might intuitively feel the need to seek out healthy coping mechanisms to deal with difficult feelings. Strategies included: following a normal routine, sharing feelings with others, exercise/nutritional focus, and avoiding drugs/alcohol. The most commonly used strategy among respondents was to resume normal routines. This study suggests that teaching school psychologists/trainees effective self-care strategies and stressing the importance of focusing on rebuilding normal routines after a crisis/trauma is a worthwhile pursuit.

Increasing Vicarious Resilience

The construct of vicarious resilience was recently developed and studied (Hernandez, Gangesi, & Engstrom, 2007) through a phenomenological analysis of interviews with therapists working with traumatized clients. Themes that emerged from qualitative study indicated that therapists who work with trauma learn about coping with adversity from their clients, that their work has positive effects on therapists and that the effect can be enhanced by attending to it more closely (Hernandez et al., 2007, p.237).

More recently, Hernandez, Engstrom and Gangesi (2010) summarized how work with trauma survivors has "the potential to affect and transform therapists in a unique and positive manner" (Hernandez et al., 2010, p. 72). Through interpretation of results from several studies the authors concluded that therapists often described how observing their clients overcome obstacles altered their own attitudes, emotions, and behavior consistent with vicarious resilience. Specifically, the goals of helping school psychologists regain hope, reassess the dimensions of one's own problems and discover the power of community healing may be applied to school psychology situations.

Conclusions and Implications for School Psychology Practice

Vicarious trauma poses significant consequences for both the school based mental health practitioners and the clients they work with. School psychologists and trainees need to be aware of the risk factors and symptoms so they are able to recognize when they most need to develop and apply an individualized coping plan to deal with the negative consequences of VT. Research highlighted in clinical and school settings provides a starting point in helping those in the field develop and apply effective evidenced based strategies (e.g., CBT derived; Craig & Sprang, 2010) as well as more practical school based methods such as resuming routines and self-care strategies (Bolnik & Brock, 2005). Finally, helping school psychologists develop increased levels of vicarious resilience (Hernandez et al., 2010) in response to working with trauma victims may result in more positive outcomes both within school psychologists and in the clients they service.

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Reflections on 2014: Advancing school psychology science, practice and policy through interdisciplinary collaboration

Collaboration has taken us far; it is only through our collective efforts that we can continue to grow.

By Linda A. Reddy, PhD

As 2014 comes to a close, it has been a tremendous honor to serve as Div. 16 president. Throughout 2014, the Div. 16 Executive Council and membership continued to prioritize and advance the science, practice and policy of school psychology. As this article serves as my last presidential message, I would like to acknowledge many individuals that have worked tirelessly for Div. 16, school psychology and professional psychology at large. First and foremost, I thank our membership (scholars, practitioners, trainers, and students) for all of their work, communications and collaborations with Div. 16 and other allied national associations. Without our membership, the division's strategic initiatives and accomplishments would not be possible. Likewise, I thank David Cheng, president of the Student Affiliates of School Psychology (SASP), and the SASP Executive Committee (Cait Hynes, Jennifer Cooper, Samara Montilus, Kendall Bowles, Candice Aston, Rachel Stein and Jeremy Rime) for working with the Div. 16 Executive Council on engaging graduate student involvement in the division. I thank our Early Career Psychologist (ECP) Work Group (led by Prerna Arora, chair; Amanda Sullivan; Bryn Harris ?; Natascha Santos; and Kristin Thompson) for their leadership and tremendous contributions during the APA Convention and throughout the year. Our SASP Executive Committee and ECP Work Group serve as role models and are the future of our profession.

I would like to recognize and thank the Div. 16 Executive Council for all of their hard work this year : Vincent Alfonso (2013 president), Amanda Clinton (vice president for professional affairs), James DiPerna (2015 president), Catherine Fiorello (vice president for education, training and scientific affairs), Jessica Hoffman (vice president for membership), Mark Terjesen (treasurer), Melissa Pearrow (vice president for publications and communications), Amanda Sullivan (secretary), Scott Methe (vice president for convention affairs and public relations), Amanda VanderHayden (vice president for social, ethical, and ethnic minority affairs), Tammy Hughes (council representative), Beth Doll (council representative), Frank Worrell (council representative), and David Chang (president of SASP). Special thanks go to Beth, Amanda, Jessica and Vinny who will be ending their division roles this year. I am truly grateful for their support and collaboration this year.

As *School Psychology Quarterly* (*SPQ*) is our flagship journal, I am grateful for the tremendous efforts of Shane Jimerson (editor) and the associate editors (Scott Ardoin, Wendy Reinke, Chris Riley-Tillman and Matthew Mayer) for promoting the science of

school psychology worldwide. Likewise, I am grateful to Rosemary Flanagan (editor) and Greg Machek (associate editor) of *The School Psychologist* (*TSP*). Greg also services as the coordinator of the division's Conversation Series, which showcases timely and historical interviews of our scholars and practitioners. Finally, I thank Robin Codding, the 2014 APA Convention chair, for her hard work and collaboration in the 2014 APA Div. 16 Convention Programming. Thank you all.

Preserving the history of our profession and showcasing individuals who contribute in front and behind the scenes is critically important. For approximately 25 years, Thomas Fagan has served as the Div. 16 and National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) historian. His work is immeasurable. Tom has tirelessly researched and detailed the special personal and professional contributions of many scholars, leaders and practitioners. I thank Tom for his tremendous service to the school psychology community. Tom's service will end in summer 2015. Div. 16 is pleased to welcome Dan Florell, assistant professor at Eastern Kentucky University, as the new Div. 16 (and NASP) historian.

In sum, I am very fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with these talented individuals who have been fully committed to Div. 16 and the school psychology community worldwide. I look forward to supporting the goals of James DiPerna (2015 president) and Lea Theodore (2016 president). I am confident they will accomplish a lot for the division.

In my first presidential message, I outlined my goals to advance science, practice and policy through: (1) active interdisciplinary collaborations, (2) strategic involvement in APA Governance, (3) partnerships with other APA divisions, (4) membership involvement and (5) dissemination and work group efforts.

Since January, I have communicated and collaborated with many school psychology faculty, practitioners, and students as well as non-school-psychology professionals on topics important for schools. It is clear that there has been much accomplished this year and many opportunities remain that can further promote the science, practice and policy for schools and student learning worldwide. I will briefly highlight some of the many activities Div. 16 has attended to during 2014 and some opportunities for 2015.

Active Interdisciplinary Collaboration and Advocacy for Schools

With other national organizations, Div. 16 has successfully engaged in many collaboration projects for children, families and school communities. Some 2014 examples include:

- Div. 16 (led by Kris Varjas) and Div. 44 (Society for the Psychological Studies of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Issues) were awarded a Committee on Division/APA Relations (CODAPAR) grant (*Improving School Climate for LGBT Youth: Resources and Interventions*) that will develop recommendations and

resources (e.g., model curricula, strategies) for school psychologists, school administrators, staff, teachers and community agencies to promote the health of LGBT youth.

- Div. 37 (led by Mary Ann Campbell, president-elect of Div. 37) and co-sponsored by Divs. 7, 15, 16, 43, 53 and 54 were awarded a CODAPAR grant focused on developing a science-based Web resource center, which showcases the contributions of psychological science and links to other reliable and valid websites focused on promotion of youth healthy development, parenting, prevention and evidence-based practice. Outcome measures for this project include the number of times the site is accessed and available information on the range and satisfaction of users. The initiative links science and practice and maps to the APA strategic plan.

- In March, Div. 16, APA, NASP, Council of Directors of School Psychology Programs (CDSPP) and the American Board of School Psychology worked together to refine the school psychology eligibility criteria for HRSA-14-077 (Behavioral Health Workforce Education and Training for Professionals grant program) with the federal government. This was a tremendous team effort from the entire school psychology community and APA. We thank you all for your efforts on behalf of our students, schools, children and families.

- Div. 16 developed the Grant Program for School Psychology Internships (GPSPI) to assist in the predoctoral internship crisis in the U.S. The GPSPI is supported by Div. 16, CDSPP, NASP, and Trainers of School Psychologists (TSP). The GPSPI's primary aim is to provide funds and consultation for developing new APPIC school psychology internship programs that will eventually obtain APA accreditation. Internship programs that accept doctoral students from more than one doctoral program are preferred (non-captive programs). The GPSPI also provides funds and consultation for expanding existing APPIC school psychology internship programs that will eventually obtain APA accreditation.

- With APA Legislative and Federal Affairs, Div. 16 membership provided feedback on future research initiatives to the U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Science, National Center for Education Research and National Center for Special Education Research programs.

- Under the leadership of Scott Methe (vice president for convention affairs and public communications) and Robin Codding (2014 Convention chair), the 2014 APA Convention program was well-attended and outstanding. For the first time, the APA Convention reduced the number of divisional programming hours and increased the number of cross-divisional programming hours. This change offered many opportunities for c ross-divisional collaborations, increased Div. 16 visibility and enhanced Div. 16's opportunities for APA governance. Our Div. 16 convention program featured 10 symposia, four poster sessions (129 posters), seven cross-divisional collaborative programs, two interactive roundtable paper sessions, two social hours and a conversation hour with Div. 16 Executive Council members. I am confident the 2015 Div. 16 convention programming will be outstanding. For more information on the 2015 Div. 16 convention programming, please contact Scott Methe and Michelle Perfect (2015 convention chair).

In sum, I strongly encourage interdisciplinary collaboration and welcome your participation in promoting the science, practice and policy of school psychology at the state, national and international level. Please visit our website.

Strategic Involvement and Recognition in APA Governance

Div. 16 Executive Council continues to strategically increase and sustain its presence in APA governance. We currently have numerous Div. 16 members appointed and elected on important APA boards, committees and councils (e.g., Frank Worrell, Board of Scientific Affairs; Tammy Hughes and Vincent Alfonso, Board of Educational Affairs; Linda Reddy, Board of Professional Affairs; Donald Bersoff, Board of Directors; Bonnie Nastasi, Sissy Hatzichristou, and Amanda Clinton, Committee on International Relations in Psychology; Gary Stoner and Carlen Henington, Committee of Accreditation; Cecil Reynolds, Council of Editors; Thomas Kubiszyn and Ron Palomares, Commission for the Recognition of Specialties and Proficiencies in Professional Psychology; Thomas Kratochwill, Committee on Education and Training Awards; Carol Dwyer, Committee on Policy and Planning; Robyn Hess, Committee on Psychological Tests and Assessment; Cynthia Carlson, Council of Graduate Departments of Psychology; Ron Reeve, Chair of the Consortium of Combined-Integrated Doctoral Programs in Psychology; Christine Malecki, Council of Chairs of Training Councils and Chair of Council of Directors of School Psychology Programs). (These individuals serve as examples only, and I apologize if I accidently omitted anyone. Please let me know.) Our involvement in APA is critically important and highly valued by the APA Board of Directors. For example, Tammy Hughes received the 2014 APA presidential citation in October from Nadine Kaslow (2014 APA president) for her outstanding contributions to school psychology and professional psychology. Likewise, Stephen T. DeMers, chief executive officer of the Association of State and Provincial Psychology Boards, received the 2014 APA presidential citation in August from Nadine Kaslow for his sustained contributions to the practice of professional psychology. Also, in 2011 Frank Worrell received the APA presidential citation from Melba Vasquez (2011 APA president) for his significant and sustained contributions to psychology. Additionally, in 2015 Frank Worrell is the chair of the APA Board of Scientific Affairs, and Tammy Hughes is the chair of the Board of Educational Affairs. In sum, these awards and leadership roles are truly outstanding for Div. 16. Congratulations to all.

Our involvement in APA enhances school psychology's visibility and input in important issues such as predoctoral internships, licensure and future discussions of the Model License Act. Div. 16 needs to be "at the table" with other professional psychologists engaging in thoughtful (planned) discussions that inform system and policy changes, which impact children, families, schools and communities. Please contact James DiPerna (2015 president), Lea Theodore (2016 president) and me if you are interested in learning more about our efforts in APA governance.

Importance of Membership Involvement

Div. 16 Executive Council serves the interests of membership. We need your feedback and participation in all Div. 16 activities. Please contact James DiPerna (2015 president), Lea Theodore (2016 president) and me if you have any suggestions on timely topics and activities you believe warrant consideration by the division.

As you know, the number of Div. 16 members is critically important for our visibility and "voice" in APA governance. Our membership campaign requires a team effort. We must increase our membership to maintain our number of APA Council Representatives. Unfortunately, our Council representatives (i.e., Tammy Hughes, Frank Worrell and Beth Doll) will be reduced from three to two in 2015. We need to increase our membership numbers and increase our votes (i.e., 10) on the APA apportionment ballot each year. We will continue to offer *free* first year membership. See the PDF membership application. (PDF, 474KB) Please encourage your colleagues and students to take advantage of this outstanding offer to join Div. 16. Please contact Amy Briesh (2015 vice president of membership) with any questions regarding membership benefits.

Dissemination and Work Group Efforts

Div. 16 offers many outstanding publications that showcase the science and practice of school psychology. Under the leadership of Melissa Pearrow (vice president of Publications and Communications), these publications represent our members' contributions worldwide.

Please review the latest issues of *TSP* and submit brief papers and commentaries to the editor, Rosemary Flanagan.

We encourage you to visit the Div. 16 Applied Psychology in the Schools Book Series that includes over 14 volumes. Please submit book proposals to Melissa Pearrow.

Please continue to submit your best work to *SPQ*. Shane Jimerson, the editor of *SPQ* has significantly increased the number of manuscript submissions and reduced the article review process. *SPQ* presents premier scholarship from around the world and offers editorial board members continuing education units for their reviews.

Additionally, the division supports the work of four outstanding work groups :

- Translation of Science to Practice and Policy (co-chairs: Karen Stoiber and Jorge Gonzalez)
- Globalization of School Psychology (chair: Sissy Hatzichristou)
- Social Justice and Child Rights (chair: Stuart Hart)
- Mental Health in Schools — subgroups (a) Mental Health Promotion in Schools and (b) Trauma (co-chairs: James DiPerna and Stacy Overstreet)

These work groups have resulted in substantial dissemination efforts (e.g., articles, presentations, workshops, manuals, book proposals, journal series).

Each work group has representation from the Div. 16 Executive Council and members (i.e., practitioners, trainers, early career psychologists, and graduate students). Please join us in our efforts to advance science, practice and policy in schools.

Div. 16's investments with Ameriprise have gone well in 2014. Funds generated from the balance have been used strategically to support the four work groups and the GPSPI. It is anticipated that revenues generated by investments will continue to be used to support other division strategic initiatives.

Throughout 2014, I enjoyed communicating the division's good work through our excellent website (*TSP* ; Twitter and Facebook led by Shane Jimerson our technology chair) and Div. 16 announce-only email messages. Our website includes all Executive Council meeting minutes, initiatives and updates. Please take some time to visit our website. Again, please consider contributing to Div. 16 in the many roles and activities that advance our science, practice and policy for schools.

Thank you again for the privilege to serve Div. 16. May you and your families have a happy and healthy new year.

Sincerely,

Linda A. Reddy
Div. 16 president

Addressing and meeting the needs of Div. 16's early career members

Survey data will help guide the direction of the Early Career Work Group.

By Jacqueline A. Brown, Prerna Arora, PhD, and Jennifer M. Cooper

Due to APA's priority of involving and retaining early career psychologist (ECP) members and low rates of ECP representation in Div. 16, information needs to be obtained on how to best address and meet the needs of ECP members. In an effort to inform recruitment and programming efforts, Div. 16's ECP Work Group recently disseminated a survey assessing ECP needs and interests within Div. 16. One hundred and two ECPs responded to the survey, with all respondents having less than ten years of experience. This article will summarize responses regarding ECP interests and early career challenges they have encountered, with the goal of identifying future directions for the Early Career Work Group to better support ECPs within Div. 16.

Within the survey, ECPs identified their level of interest in a variety of professional development topics, indicating if they were "3=Very Interested," "2=Somewhat Interested," "1=Not Interested," or whether the topic was "Not Applicable." With respect to general areas of professional development, ECPs were most interested (as indicated by a rating of 3 or 2) in publishing (87 percent), licensure (83 percent), and self-care/work-life balance (82 percent; see Table 1). When examining the responses of specific groups, graduate students indicated that they were most interested in making the transition from student to faculty member (75 percent) or practitioner (72 percent), as well as the faculty job search (66 percent). Early career school psychologists and clinicians also expressed a strong interest (as evidenced by a rating of 3 or 2) in navigating the job search process (79 percent), setting up private practice (86 percent) and specialization (82 percent). Finally, early career faculty and researchers indicated high levels of interest in research funding (85 percent), research collaboration (89 percent) and developing a research agenda (79 percent). Overall, ECPs appear to be seeking additional professional development in the general areas of transition and career establishment, achieving balance and wellness and tenure-related issues.

ECPs also identified challenges they have encountered, with similar themes emerging. These included (a) time and organization management issues (e.g., staying current on research with time restrictions); (b) transition and career establishment (e.g., school budget cuts, navigating university politics, increased mentorship); (c) tenure-related issues (e.g., need for journal selection guidance, publication pressures); (d) achieving balance and wellness (e.g., teaching-research-service balance, work-life balance); and (f) issues specific to women in the workplace (e.g. sexism). Consequently, ECPs may benefit from additional professional development in the areas previously identified to better support them in dealing with these challenges.

Div. 16's ECP Work Group will take these results into consideration when planning activities over the upcoming year. At present, the ECP Workgroup's plans include developing an ECP website on the Div. 16 webpage, targeting school psychology graduate students approaching graduation, and developing additional early career networking events at the APA Convention. Survey results related to ECP needs will likely inform these and other activities, including development of the Div. 16's ECP programming at the 2015 APA Convention. Moreover, future ECP columns in the *TSP* newsletter will likely address both areas of need and challenges faced by ECPs. The ECP Work Group appreciates the responses to the survey and welcomes additional feedback in their goal of addressing ECP needs within Div. 16.

Table 1
Summary of Responses of ECP Highest Interest in Professional Development Topics

Group/Topic	Interest (%)					Did your training program cover this (%)?		
	3	2	1	N/A	N	Yes	No	N
General								
Publishing	64	23	12		73	64	36	69
Licensure	58	25	18		73	58	42	59
Self-care/Work-Life Balance	49	33	18		73	25	75	59
Graduate Students								
Making the Transition from Student to Faculty Member	52	23	11	15	66	25	75	52
Making the Transition from Student to Practitioner	48	24	15	12	66	20	72	54
Faculty Job Search	47	19	19	15	68	36	64	53
Early Career School Psychologists and Clinicians								
Navigating the Job search Process	58	21	18	4	67	37	63	54
Setting up Private Practice	49	37	7	6	67	63	37	54
Specialization	42	40	12	6	67	41	59	54
Early Career Faculty and Researchers								
Research Funding	71	14	8	6	63	19	81	58
Research Collaboration	62	27	6	5	63	35	65	48
Research Agenda	60	19	16	5	63	35	65	49

*Respondents were asked to indicate their level of interest in the following professional development topics (3= Very Interested, 2= somewhat interested, 1= not interested, and n/a= Not Applicable). The total number of respondents (N) for each topic is also provided.

When dues are due: The value of your SASP membership

Benefits of SASP membership include leadership opportunities, presentation and publication experience and the opportunity to participate in a mentoring program.

By Caitlin V. Hynes and David O. L. Cheng

It's that time of year again — with the 2014 membership cycle at an end and the 2015 cycle beginning, all of our graduate student members have probably been receiving materials asking them to renew for another year if they have not done so already. Faced with the option to join a number of professional organization and a limited budget, many students may be asking themselves whether or not their Div. 16/SASP membership is worth their continued investment.

Compared with many other psychology and school psychology organizations, student membership in Div. 16 and SASP is one of the more affordable options available to graduate students. For a single membership fee, students have access to not only the resources available to the division as a whole but also to student-led initiatives specifically designed to benefit graduate students through SASP. However, while many students take advantage of the free first year of membership, we often hear students ask why they should renew for subsequent years. As many student affiliates are unaware of some of the benefits their membership entitles them to, the SASP officers would like to take this time to highlight just a few of the many reasons to stay a student affiliate.

Leadership
Becoming involved with SASP opens the door to a number of different leadership opportunities. All members are eligible to run for office on the national SASP executive board, giving them the opportunity to represent and support graduate students in programs across the country. Serving as a SASP officer also gives graduate students an inside look into the workings of the division and helps them to further develop their leadership skills for continued use after graduation. Other opportunities to develop your leadership skills include serving as a chapter representative for your graduate program or serving on a SASP subcommittee.

Publications and Presentations
In addition to the conference and publication opportunities offered through Div. 16, SASP also offers presentation and publication experience designed specifically for graduate students. All SASP members are invited to submit articles for publication in our newsletter, *From Science to Practice to Policy* , which releases four issues per year. Submissions may range from research articles to pieces on policy or personal experiences in the field. SASP also hosts a Student Research Forum each year at the Annual APA Convention, which is designed specifically to allow students to network and present their research.

Mentoring
Students interested in participating in the diversity mentoring program can be matched with professional and early career psychology mentors to help the students develop their research ideas, seek available counsel about issues in graduate school and navigate the field.

Scholarships and Awards
In collaboration with Div. 16, SASP is able to offer a number of different scholarship and award opportunities to student affiliates. These opportunities include the Diversity Scholarship, the FSPP Student Research Award, the Mentee Recognition Award and the Student Research Forum Travel Awards.

These and the other benefits that SASP offers can provide students with the resources and opportunities they need to better prepare them for the field as well as with a network that will continue to provide support long after graduation. We encourage all student affiliates who have questions or concerns about the benefits of membership to reach out to 2015 SASP President Cait Hynes or 2015 Membership Chair Ruhee Sutar.

Current issues in psychological report writing

Not without challenges, writing theme-based reports may reflect best practices in the field.

By Stephanie A. Rahill

As busy practitioners, it is easy to see how school psychologists might get stuck in a routine when it comes to psychological report writing. Once a school psychologist has developed a certain style of report writing, it is likely to remain the same, often for years and years. However, taking time to reflect and evaluate your own report writing style and the way that you provide information in writing is a worthwhile endeavor. Whether making small changes or major overhauls to the content and style of reports, it is critical to consistently evaluate your writing to ensure that information is being presented in the most effective and efficient manner possible.

Current Issues in Report Writing

One of the major issues in report writing is the huge variation in report writing styles and content within the field. Some school districts are now requiring the standardization of reports to combat this problem; however, the "standard" report may not be adequate or reflect best practices. Utilizing a standard report also may not reflect best practices in conducting assessments specific to the child and the child's needs in order to answer the specific referral question(s).

Another issue is that report writing continues to account for large blocks of school psychologists' time. Given the large amount of time spent on psychological report writing, school psychologists often are looking for ways to increase efficiency with report writing. The issue becomes how to write efficiently while incorporating best practices in the report while providing a comprehensive overview of a child's strengths and weaknesses?

A question also exists regarding the audience for psychological reports. Within the field of school psychology, there are likely differing opinions on this topic. Yet, the audience for the report should dictate how the report is written. The potential audiences for psychological reports include:

Other psychological professionals
When writing for other professionals, there is an assumption that the reader of the report needs technical information in the report to contextualize the situation.

Teachers, administrators and other school staff
The assumption may be that psychological jargon should be reduced, but technical information still necessary.

Parents
If writing for parents, emphasis is on providing a complete picture of the child with low levels of psychological jargon.

One of the challenges for school psychologists it to write reports that can serve these multiple audiences while clearly communicating important information to the consumers of reports (Hass & Carriere, 2014).

Lastly, there appears to be a research-to-practice gap related to best practices in writing psychological reports. Previous research on psychological report writing in school-based settings has indicated that teachers express a preference for a report style in which the evaluator analyzes, synthesizes and provides implications for assessment results (Salvagno & Teglasi, 1987) as opposed to simply providing assessment results in a test-by-test format. Teachers also express a preference for reports in which results were organized by themes as opposed to a test-by-test format (Pelco, Ward, Coleman, and Young, 2009) and with lower readability levels and practical recommendations (Wiener, 1987). Despite this research indicating the need for child-centered reports with low levels of psychological jargon and integration by the evaluator, psychological reports continue to predominantly be written in a test-by-test fashion in the field (Harvey, 1997). Without integration of data, reports are perceived by consumers to be difficult to understand and overly technical (Harvey, 2006).

Theme-based Report Writing

Integrated or theme-based reports gather together data from various formal and informal data sources and integrate results into "themes" or "domains" designed to give the reader a full understanding of the cognitive, social, emotional and behavioral functioning of a child in relation to the context in which he or she must succeed (i.e., the classroom and school setting). A hallmark of integrated reports is that these are child-focused, rather than "score" focused. Groth-Marnat (2009) suggests that reports should have minimal discussion of test scores and instead be focused on connecting assessment results to the context of the person. In fact, scores are typically included in appendices to the report, as opposed to the body of the report. The readability level is typically lower because there is a reduced focus on psychological jargon. Groth-Marnat and Davis (2014) recommend using the results of specific assessments as just one tool, along with behavioral observations, record reviews, test session observations, interviews, etc., for understanding the child. They advocate organizing this information in reports by domains that highlight how these results translate into everyday situations.

To accomplish this goal of linking assessment results to themes, school psychologists interpret assessment findings in conjunction with other assessment results, as opposed to just presenting results from tests independently from one another. All assessment results should be analyzed to determine how they either link to information already gathered or conflict with other assessment results. When potentially conflicting assessment results are found, strategies must be developed to attempt to understand

and explain the reason (s) for these conflicting results. Thus, the assessment results in these cases inform the continuing assessment process. Once organized into themes, the report can be written so that each paragraph begins by discussing that theme in child-centered language. Assessment results supporting the theme can then be provided, along with a description of how this theme may impact the child, again with supporting examples. The inclusion of specific, quantitative assessment results can also be provided in appendices to the report.

Linking assessment results to themes

Integrated or theme-based reports often correspond with conducting problem-solving assessments. When conducting this type of assessment, there is no standard testing sequence or protocol. Instead, school psychologists should conduct assessments based upon a clear understanding of the referral question(s) and develop hypotheses based upon initial assessment results to determine which additional assessments are needed to fully understand the child. The themes that emerge from evaluation results are synthesized by the evaluator, and thus, the report functions as a problem-solving tool to answer the referral question(s).

Utilizing the best practices and conceptual models in theme-based report writing presented by Goldfinger and Pomerantz (2010), Mastoras et al. (2011), Groth-Marnat (2009) and others, school psychologists can link assessment results to themes that help to better understand the child and the environmental variables impacting the child in the various contexts that the child is functioning.

Challenges to writing theme-based reports

While writing theme-based reports may reflect best practices in the field, it is clear that there continues to be challenges to practitioners to changing their reports to a more integrated format. First, training programs may not teach graduate students to write in this manner (Harvey, 2006). In fact, little is known about how school psychology training programs across the country train students to write psychological reports. Additionally, practitioners are less likely to find examples of theme-based reports to use as exemplars and guides. It is also hypothesized that it is easier to write in a test-by-test format. More integration of test results requires more analysis and synthesis by the writer, which likely translates to more time in writing the report. Lastly, some school psychologists express concern that writing the report geared to parents and teachers with a reduced emphasis on jargon may mean that the report is not legally defensible or as professional as a test-based report might be. However, there is no evidence to suggest that integrating data into themes within a report equates to a less professional or accurate report. In fact, Hass and Carriere (2014) note that much of the information that school psychologists learn about creating reports that are legally defensible is actually concerned with how to conduct evaluations that are legally defensible. Moreover, Hass and Carriere (2014) distinguish between what must be true of assessment practices legally versus how psychological reports should be written. Increasing the amount of analysis and synthesis of test results and reducing the level of jargon should not impact the defensibility of the report as long as best practices in assessment and interpretation of assessment results continues to be followed.

Future Research

Updated studies with teachers, administrators and parents as participants should continue to further document the impact of various report writing styles on understandability and usefulness. Additional information is also needed about the training practices of graduate programs on report writing. An updated survey of graduate training programs about ways that report writing are taught in school psychology programs would contribute to the literature base. Additionally, since it seems that practicing school psychologists often write reports in a test-based manner, it is important to understand better the challenges in writing reports in a more integrated manner. Future surveys of practicing school psychologists about their perceptions of challenges of writing integrated reports would be useful information to collect.

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