

**EXPERIENCING EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY:  
LEARNING THROUGH PRACTICE**

A Practicum Report

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### ABSTRACT

This report describes and discusses a practicum in psychological assessment that occurred in Prairie South School Division, No 210, in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan. The focus of this report is the author's practical application of psychological assessment, including interviews, file review, cognitive and achievement measures, rating scales, report writing, and communicating with clients and other stakeholders. The objective of this report is to provide a reflection on and analysis of the author's involvements, professional growth, and considerations surrounding his practicum in educational psychology. Connections to theory learned in graduate coursework in Educational Psychology at the University of Regina is also linked to the experience of practicing assessment in schools.

**Key Words:** practicum, educational psychology, assessment

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## DEDICATION

This project report is dedicated to my wife, Kristina. You are a true gift from God to me and I am thankful every time I think of you. Kristina, I could not have completed this journey without your support and encouragement.

I also thank God for blessing me with this opportunity to study the discipline of psychology and assessment in order to competently and compassionately serve “the least of these” that I meet in schools for the remainder of my career.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABAS-III	Adaptive Behavior Assessment System – Third Edition
ADHD	Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
ADOS-2	Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule – Second Edition
BEd	Bachelor of Education
BYI-II	Beck Youth Inventories for Children and Youth – Second Edition
CBRS	Comprehensive Behavior Rating Scales
CHC	Cattell-Horn-Carroll
DSM-V	Diagnostic and Statistics Manual of Mental Disorders – Fifth Edition
EAL	English as an Additional Language
EVT-II	Expressive vocabulary Test – Second Edition
EYE	Early Years Evaluation
IIP	Individualized Instruction Plan
KABC-II	Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children – Second Edition
MEd	Master of Education
PVAT	Picture Vocabulary Acquisition Test
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PPVT-IV	Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test – Fourth Edition
PSSD No. 210	Prairie South School Division No. 210
SLD	Specific Learning Disability
SLP	Speech-language pathologist
VMI-6	Beery-Buktenica Developmental Test of Visual-Motor Integration – Sixth Edition



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WIAT-III	Wechsler Individual Achievement Test – Third Edition
WISC-V	Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children – Fifth Edition
WJ-IV	Woodcock-Johnson Test of Cognitive Abilities – Fourth Edition
XBA	Cross-Battery Assessment

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Upon the completion of my coursework in educational psychology, I felt prepared to put the theory I learned into practice; therefore, I embarked upon a practicum to experience educational psychology firsthand. The purpose of this report is to reflect on and communicate my experiences, professional development, and considerations regarding my practicum in educational psychology. For the sake of analysis of my practicum involvements, clients and their psychological profiles are referred to in this report. In order to communicate my actual experiences, these profiles are presented accurately; however, names, ages, locations, and other identifying information have been omitted to maintain clients' anonymity and safeguard their privacy.

#### **Background and Preparation**

My current journey to become an educational psychologist began in my middle school years, as I watched with admiration as my father, a special education teacher, obtain his PhD, specializing in working with students exhibiting behaviour challenges and disorders. I always believed that my father brought out the best in a population of students that many felt would never succeed. Following in my father's footsteps, I began my career in education as an educational assistant, working with students with a variety of needs. Subsequently, I obtained my BEd from the University of Regina in 2007 and began teaching that year.

As an elementary school educator, I have been interested in understanding how children develop, socialize, and learn. I also desired a deeper understanding why children sometimes have difficulty learning and helping them to achieve to their potential. I began to assume informal leadership roles and worked on improvement

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teams in my school division; these experiences convinced me that the best way that I could benefit students with a variety of needs was to be an in-school administrator. To this end, I obtained a MEd in Educational Administration in 2014. While I thoroughly enjoyed my experience in graduate studies, and grew as an academic, leader, and teacher, I did not visualize myself as a principal; I wondered what the next step might be for my development as an educator. It was during this time of career reflection that my school division approached me with an offer to take a leave of absence in order to train in educational psychology, with the understanding that I would commence my career as an educational psychologist following the completion of my degree. I immediately recognized this as an excellent fit for my personality, professional goals, and passions.

As a prekindergarten and kindergarten teacher, I was trained in the administration of the Early Years Evaluation (EYE). While some of my colleagues disliked the highly structured and scripted nature of the assessment, I thoroughly enjoyed administering the EYE with students one-on-one. This gave me a unique opportunity to establish rapport and observe their behaviour. Furthermore, I was excited to obtain results that would be comparable across students and classrooms, and I used that information to inform my educational practices and guide how I taught individuals and groups of students. With this positive experience in standardized assessment, I felt confident that pursuing a graduate degree in educational psychology was compatible with my goals and disposition.

I began my studies in educational psychology at the University of Regina in September of 2016, in the course-based program route. As my goal was to become a registered psychologist, I transferred into Practicum Route One for my second term. On

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the advice of my faculty advisor, Dr. Scott Thompson, I began the process of reaching out to agencies in order to obtain a practicum placement in the spring of 2017. I contacted Lori Meyer, Superintendent of Learning with Prairie South School Division (PSSD No. 210), and she was pleased to accommodate my request for a practicum, placing me with Mrs. Jennifer Osberg, Registered Psychologist #716.

My practicum commenced after my classwork was complete at the end of April, 2018, and ended in June 2018. Over the course of my practicum I completed over 180 hours of work in my psychological setting, gaining invaluable experience and knowledge as I progressed in toward my goal of becoming a registered psychologist. The final requirements for my MEd, such as this report and my practicum evaluation, were completed and submitted to Graduate Studies at the University of Regina following my practicum.

### **Practicum Objectives**

The objectives for my practicum were outlined in my Practicum Proposal, and refined in collaboration with my practicum professional associate, Mrs. Osberg. My overarching objective for this practicum was to improve my knowledge, ability, and confidence in the discipline of educational psychology. More specific objectives that I wished to meet under the supervision of Mrs. Osberg were as follows:

- To obtain practice in the use of cognitive, achievement, and behavioural assessments utilized to investigate students' cognitive abilities. Specifically, to practice using measures I am familiar with, such as the Wechsler intelligence assessments, and to increase my repertoire of assessments by learning to use at

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least three unpracticed assessments, such as achievement assessments, emotional and behavioural rating scales, the Woodcock-Johnson assessments, etc.

- To receive experience using other assessment tools and assessment techniques, such as observation, interviews, the DSM-V, and other resources.
- To form diagnostic conclusions regarding students who have been referred for a variety reasons (e.g. learning, behavioural, or intellectual disabilities).
- To practice writing psychological reports of those students I have assessed, summarizing my findings and providing recommendations.
- To gain proficiency in communicating with parents, school teams, and other relevant individuals regarding my clients' assessments and plans. Specifically, to observe and practice reporting assessment results to parents or guardians.
- To acquire a greater understanding of potential issues regarding the ethical practice of psychology in an educational setting.

### **Practicum Environment**

PSSD No 210 serves nearly 7000 students in Moose Jaw and surrounding rural communities (Prairie South School Division No. 210, 2017a); it employs four registered psychologists, and each is assigned a selection of schools in which they are responsible for the provision of psychological services. During my practicum, Mrs. Osberg was responsible for four elementary schools, three in Moose Jaw and one rural school. Other than observations conducted in two other schools, I worked exclusively with students in Mrs. Osberg's assigned schools. Office space was provided for me adjacent to Mrs. Osberg's office at Riverview Collegiate High School in Moose Jaw.

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The mission statement for PSSD No. 210 is “Learning together for our future,” and the administration, employees, and students of PSSD No. 210 strive for excellence in education. The board, administrators, teachers, and other employees are guided by four core values (Prairie South School Division No. 210, 2017b). These values are:

1. Holistic student development: this value includes high expectations for achievement, school and community citizenship, and lifelong learning.
2. Community orientation: this value involves the schools being an integral part of their communities and communities being highly involved in the schools.
3. Transparency and trust-building: this value involves maintaining high ethical standards, and openness regarding finances and decision making.
4. Best practices: this value means that educational programming and division decisions are implemented in evidence-based ways, and data is collected and interpreted carefully and accurately.

This set of values informs the way educational services are delivered in PSSD No. 210, and I saw evidence of many of these values in action in among the employees of the division and in the schools where I practiced.

### **Practicum Responsibilities**

Over the course of my practicum I had several responsibilities. At the beginning of my practicum, my duties involved observation; my role was to observe assessments being administered, psychological report debrief meetings, team meetings, and student behaviours. Another responsibility was to increase my competence through practice, study, and professional development; I studied resources recommended by Mrs. Osberg,

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practiced assessments in the office and in schools, and participated in professional development and collegial discussion sessions.

As my practicum continued, my responsibilities were to participate in the assessment of students. I was involved in the assessments of seven students; for two of these students it was my responsibility to complete the assessment process from start to finish. This involved reviewing the referral information and the students' file, selecting a battery of assessments, conducting interviews, observation, cognitive and achievement assessment, administering rating scales, communicating with parents and teachers throughout the assessment, interpreting assessment results, report writing, and debriefing the report.

### **Ethical Considerations**

During my practicum, all observations and practices adhered to the ethical standards outlined in the *Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists*, hereafter referred to as the Code (Canadian Psychological Association, 2000). While I did not encounter any significant ethical concerns or dilemmas over the course of my practicum, there were a few minor ethical considerations that were addressed. First, Mrs. Osberg stressed the importance of printing any materials to her secure drop box on the photocopier, so that sensitive documents were not left on a printer tray, even if only for moments while retrieving them. This consideration honors Principle I, Article 41 of the Code, to "handle, and transfer all private information...in a way that attend to the needs for privacy and security (Canadian Psychological Association, 2000, p.13). These issues will certainly be a concern in any office setting I find myself in and was beneficial for me to consider. Second, our offices were in a cubical setting, meaning that others in the

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office would be able to overhear sensitive phone calls, such as with clients' families.

Therefore, sensitive phone calls were made in alternate locations within the building to ensure my clients' confidentiality was maintained. Such accommodation acknowledges Principle I, Article 40 of the Code, to provide for my clients "reasonable personal privacy" (Canadian Psychological Association, 2000, p.13). Lastly, there was one case in which a very young student was being permitted to view extremely frightening and violent media; this student's referral was due primary to aggressive behaviours toward other students and teachers. Mrs. Osberg and I discussed if it would be appropriate to mention this to the caregivers and recommend they make different decisions regarding this child's media consumption; however, we concluded that there was a significant risk that these caregivers might withdraw consent for psychological services if they felt judged or threatened. Psychological services were urgent for this young child; therefore, we decided that in this case such a discussion would be better received after some time for relationship to develop between the school team and the caregiver, honoring various articles in Principles II and III of the Code: Responsible Caring and Integrity in Relationships (Canadian Psychological Association, 2000).

### **Collegial Cooperation and Professional Development**

Throughout my practicum at PSSD No.210, the team of psychologists would meet to discuss difficult cases, debate differences of interpretation, and acquire new knowledge about assessment. For example, Mrs. Osberg and another psychologist routinely read one another's reports and conferenced about differences of opinion regarding interpretation. Also, I participated in a meeting with the psychologists of the division to discuss how varied results among the index scores on an individual's



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cognitive assessment, or scatter, should be interpreted and reported. We debated whether results that show a high level of scatter are valid and, if so, how to interpret and report those results properly. It was fascinating to hear the variety of well-informed, yet differing opinions offered in this debate.

I also participated in two professional development sessions. The first was a webinar regarding the Ortiz Picture Vocabulary Acquisition Test (Ortiz PVAT), an assessment used to measure the communication abilities of English as an additional language (EAL) learners (MHS Assessments, 2018). The Ortiz PVAT appeared to be a useful and easily implementable instrument, and one which I might use in my career to better serve the increasing number of EAL learners in Saskatchewan schools. The second professional development session was a presentation and discussion on understanding specific learning disabilities (SLDs), focusing the work of Steven G. Feiffer. This session was facilitated by Mrs. Osberg and another psychologist with PSSD No. 210 who have attended several conferences presented by Feiffer, and was based on the presentation slides from one of these conferences (Feiffer, 2013). In his presentation, Feiffer discussed the subtypes of SLDs in reading and writing, providing diagnostic insights and advice for recommendations. I found this presentation helpful for creating my assessment, interpreting results, and making recommendations for one of my clients, whose referral question surrounded a SLD in reading.

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### 2. ASSESSMENT

#### **Referrals**

Referrals within PSSD No. 210 come from concerns raised by parents, teachers, and other stakeholders, such as administrators, speech and language pathologists (SLPs), counsellors, and consultants. When a referral is made, it is processed by the Learning Department, and assigned to a psychologist based on which school the student is attending. Some referrals are more urgent in terms of safety risk, behavioural disruptions and learning needs; for these referrals, assessments are started as soon as possible. Other referrals, while important, are less urgent. Mrs. Osberg and I provided assessment for one urgent referral, and the remainder of the cases we worked on were non-urgent. As Sattler (2014) emphasizes, “Although the reason for referral is important, it may not be the most important reason or only issue affecting a child’s behaviour” (p.88); therefore, I continued to investigate to determine what other issues could be contributing to difficulties experienced by the children I assessed.

At the beginning of the referral process, consent is received from parents and guardians for psychological services, after which a file is started for the student. Consent is usually obtained over the phone during an initial interview. During an initial semi-structured interview (Appendix A), the parents are given the opportunity to express what they are most concerned about, provide background information regarding their child, and describe their child’s strengths. Sattler (2014) sets out 11 goals for interviewing parents, and this interview process met each recommended goal. It was also during these interviews, that I communicated my role as a psychology practicum student, clarified that I would be supervised by Mrs. Osberg throughout the assessment, and obtained consent

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to work with their children. All interviewees were agreeable to my working with their children as a practicum student. At the conclusion of the interview, I explained that a written consent letter would be sent home for them to review, sign, and return to the school (Appendix B)

Most students referred for assessment had received a variety of educational services, including literacy interventions, SLP services, behavioural plans, counselling, and individual instruction plans (IIPs), as it is the normative practice in PSSD No. 210 to attempt to assist students and address concerns using in-school interventions before psychological assessments are conducted. Additionally, many of the students who were referred for services were receiving or had received support from other agencies, such as mental health and Family Services. Of the seven students for which I was a participant in the assessments, three had previous psychological reports.

### **Initial Data Collection**

After obtaining consent and interviewing the parents or guardians, I completed a thorough review of the students' files. This is important because, "Information contained in records can also contribute directly to answering referral questions" (Goldfinger & Pomerantz, 2014, p. 58). I reviewed current and old report cards, intervention plans, SLP reports, previous psychology reports, and attendance records. During this review, I analyzed the data, taking notes about information relevant to the referral question.

With this information in mind, I conducted a semi-structured interviews with the classroom teachers (Appendix C) to determine their primary concerns, secondary concerns, general observations, and strategies they have already tried to address their concerns (Sattler, 2014). Other teachers at the schools and administrators were also

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interviewed. In one case, a teacher from a previous school was interviewed. In this case, the child was exhibiting significant behavioural and social problems in school, yet his mother reported that these problems did not exist at the previous school. Mrs. Osberg contacted the teacher to better understand this reported discrepancy in behaviour.

Next I conducted an interview with the student. This was an unstructured interview process that helped to establish rapport between myself and the student. This interview process allows a psychologist to learn about the referral question, while maintaining a normal conversation format, where the client feels valued and listened to (Sattler, 2014). In a free-flowing way, I would learn about their families, hobbies, attitudes toward school, self-image, social life, and goals. I was aware that working with a psychologist could elicit anxiety from some students, so I was careful to maintain a friendly tone and accepting body language, and I quickly developed a comfortable rapport with the students I assessed.

### **Selecting Assessment Measures**

Mrs. Osberg does not have a standard battery that she administers to each client; instead the selection of assessment measures was dependent on the referral question, the file review, and interviews. I followed this model in choosing my assessments, as well, following some of the recommendations outlined by Sattler (2014). For example, one of my referrals was concerning a child exhibiting behavioural and social problems, therefore, I conducted significant observation of the child in various school environments and performed a behavioural rating scale; whereas, another referral was primarily about the child's difficulty in learning to read, and interviews revealed no social or behavioural

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concerns, resulting in less thorough observation and no behavioural rating scale being used.

Nearly all of the assessments that I participated in involved a cognitive measure, usually a Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children – Fifth Edition (WISC-V) (Wechsler, 2014); only once did we not administer a cognitive measure, but that was because the client had completed WISC-V less than one year previous. Mrs. Osberg's usual practice with the WICS-V was to administer the first ten subtests, adding Comprehension and Arithmetic; I usually followed this battery. For students under the age of six, Mrs. Osberg usually uses the Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children – Second Edition (KABC-II) (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2004), and I observed this assessment being administered twice during my practicum. Except for one, all of the assessments I participated in involved a Wechsler Individual Achievement Test – Third Edition (WIAT-III) (Wechsler, 2009).

Many of the assessments I participated in began with a Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT-IV) (Dunn & Dunn, 2007) and an Expressive Vocabulary Test (EVT-II) (Williams, 1997). Mrs. Osberg has found that the PPVT-IV and EVT-II provide more thorough assessments of receptive and expressive vocabulary than are offered by the WIAT-III; furthermore, she has observed that the PPVT-IV and EVT-II are brief and engaging instruments that help students become comfortable with the assessment process before beginning a cognitive assessment, such as a WICS-V.

There are several other assessment measures that I had experience with in my practicum, either as the administrator or observer. These instruments are: the Woodcock-Johnson Test of Cognitive Abilities – Fourth Edition (WJ-IV) (Schrank, McGrew, &

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Mather, 2014); the Conners Comprehensive Behavior Rating Scales (CBRS) – Parent and Teacher Forms (Conners, 2008); Adaptive Behavior Assessment System – Third Edition (ABAS-III) – Parent and Teacher forms (Harrison & Oakland, 2015); Beck Youth Inventories for Children and Youth – Second Edition (BYI-II) (Beck, Beck, & Jolly, 2005); Beery-Buktenica Developmental Test of Visual-Motor Integration – Sixth Edition (VMI-6) (Beery, 1997); and the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule – Second Edition (ADOS-2) (Lord, Rutter, Pamela, Dilavore, & Risi, 2008).

Frequently, Mrs. Osberg and I would consult about the ongoing results of an assessment and decide whether to perform additional instruments or supplementary subtests during an assessment. I will discuss this practice more in the Cross-Battery Assessment section.

### **Administration**

The administration of the WISC-V and WIAT-III assessments was different from the practice I received in my cognitive assessment classes because I was using the Q-Interactive system. Becoming proficient using the Q-Interactive administration was an important goal during my practicum because I will be leading my division in implementing Q-Interactive administration of Wechsler cognitive and achievement tests following the completion of my MEd in education psychology. With Q-Interactive, the psychologist and student each have an iPad (Pearson Assessment Canada, 2017). The psychologist's iPad controls the assessment, scores and records responses, provides instructions and prompts, while the student's iPad is used to provide stimulus and record responses.

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There are several advantages to administering the WISC-V and WIAT-III using Q-Interactive. I found learning the Q-Interactive system to be very intuitive; it was well laid-out and easy to understand. Also, I found that the Q-Interactive administration is more engaging for students than the paper administration. Importantly, the Q-Interactive administration is faster than the paper administration; this is particularly beneficial for younger students and those with attentional difficulties. Another facet of the Q-Interactive system I appreciated was that I could do practice assessments on the iPad; this was an invaluable way to familiarize myself with this new format before administering it with children. This was particularly important because many of the subtests are adjusted slightly from the paper administration. Another noteworthy advantage is that some aspects of administration are done automatically; for instance, the iPad takes a recording of oral responses to questions, allowing for more concentration on scoring the response and making observations, rather than focusing on writing out verbatim responses. Finally, Q-Interactive scores the assessment on an ongoing basis and at the end of the assessment; this eliminates the human errors that might occur when transferring data from subtests to the score sheet on the test record forms. Furthermore, because Q-Interactive provides a scaled score after each subtest, it helps to refine the battery immediately, by informing a decision to add supplementary subtest to the assessment. For example, with one WISC-V administration, I noted very discrepant scores for the two core Working Memory Index subtests (Digit Span and Picture Span), so I was able to immediately add the Letter-Number Sequencing subtest to the assessment to better understand the client's working memory capabilities; with the paper administration I

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might not have noticed this score discrepancy until later, resulting in an additional testing session to gather that data and more missed classroom instruction time for the student.

Although there are many benefits to Q-Interactive test administrations, there are several potential problems I noticed. One downfall is technological reliability problems. Both iPads need to be connected to the Internet, and in some schools I have worked at, WiFi signal strength is not consistent throughout the school; while this was never an issue in my practicum, I will need to be aware of this potential problem in future practice. Another problem that I did encounter is the software crashing. This happened several times during my practicum and was usually a minor problem that was corrected within seconds; even so it was a distraction in the test and might have affected results. With one student this problem occurred during a timed subtest (WISC-V-Coding), resulting in a spoiled subtest. In that case, I was able to simply administer the paper form of the Coding subtest to replace the spoiled electronic subtest. Another problem that I observed is that some children seek feedback from the device. For instance, they might purposely tap an incorrect response to see if the iPad will provide feedback for an incorrect response. This occurred once during my practicum and when the student said that he had done this, I re-administered the item to obtain his intended correct response; however, I was unsure whether this was a breach in standardization.

Typically administration would begin with the PPVT and EVT; as noted earlier, these measures are engaging and quick to administer and help transition children into the assessment process. Next a cognitive assessment was administered, usually a WISC-V, to determine overall reasoning skills and cognitive proficiency. I found the cognitive assessment provided useful information to interpret concerning the child, regardless of



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the referral question. Then, an achievement assessment was administered to determine areas of academic strength and weakness; this was always a WIAT-III during my practicum. The importance of various testing methods, including achievement testing depends on the referral question (Sattler, 2014). For example, on one assessment I conducted the referral question surrounded a suspected SLD, and for this assessment the WIAT-III provided vital information in order to confirm or rule out a SLD; on the other hand, for another assessment where the referral was regarding Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), the WIAT-III provided useful, but non-vital data in order to confirm or rule out ADHD. Following cognitive and achievement testing, various rating scales or other instruments might be administered, such as the BYI-II, VMI-6, or Conners CBRS, depending on the referral question. Immediately following the administration, I would score the assessments, using manuals for the instruments, unless the scoring was already completed by Q-Interactive.

### **Cross-Battery Assessment**

Cross-battery assessment (XBA) was an important consideration for Mrs. Osberg. To familiarize me with XBA principles, I was assigned to read sections of *Essentials of Cross-Battery Assessment*, by Flanagan, Ortiz, and Alfonso (2013). My study in this book was focused on forming an assessment that would provide the data needed to confirm or rule-out a SLD diagnosis. This information was extremely beneficial for me as one of my assessments required me to use several different instruments following cognitive and achievement testing. According to this Flanagan, et al., (2013) the discrepancy model is not sufficient to diagnose SLD; a more rigorous approach is needed, such as one informed by Cattell-Horn-Carroll (CHC) theory and observation.

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According to CHC theory, intelligence is understood in terms of general intelligence, and broad and narrow cognitive abilities. For this assessment, the results of the WICS-V and WIAT-III did not seem to give enough evidence about all of the broad and narrow cognitive abilities to diagnose a learning disability; however, the results did raise some questions regarding specific aspects of working memory, auditory processing, and comprehension. Observations suggested anxiety might be a problem contributing to reading difficulties. With these narrow cognitive abilities in mind, with suggestions provided by Flanagan, et al. (2013), and informed by observation, I was able to select subtests from the WJ-IV, administer them, along with a BYI-II to investigate anxiety; in so doing, I collected the additional data that I needed to rule-out a SLD for this student.

### **Observations**

Observation was a crucial part of the assessment process. I was able to observe children for several periods in their classroom, in the gym, at recess, and other school environments in order to inform my understanding of their academic, behavioural, and social functioning. Sattler (2014) notes that it is important to observe clients in many environments. These observations are of particular importance for students whose referrals are due to behavioural or social concerns. Observations are more than useful information to become familiar with the child; instead observations provide vital data that is needed to help understand the referral question and confirm or rule out a diagnosis. Observations for children with disruptive behaviour can also help to identify the causes of behaviours and inform recommendations (Sattler, 2014). The amount of time needed to observe varies from one child to the next. Some children so consistently display concerning behaviours and those behaviours are so disruptive that an hour of

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observation may be all that is required; whereas, with other students longer observation may be needed to see subtle concerning behaviours and get an accurate picture of the students' behaviours at school. Observations were helpful in writing my report and supporting my conclusions; I frequently referred to observations and occasionally quoted what a student was saying in a given situation. These observations also informed my recommendations, as I saw what strategies were already being implemented and their effectiveness. I always carried a clipboard in schools in order to record my observations.

During assessment sessions, making notes and observations was crucially important (Kranzler & Floyd, 2013; Sattler, 2014). I would record comments and behaviours on assessment protocols or in my clipboard. Like classroom observations, these notes also informed my conclusions. Assessment observations also helped me to be aware of when a child was discouraged, agitated, fatigued, or frustrated. I used this information to provide encouragement, redirect focus, and offer breaks. During practice assessments for my educational psychology classwork, I had difficulty making many meaningful observations while maintaining standardization; however, with the opportunity to practice so many assessments during my practicum, I found that I have grown tremendously in this skill.

I was able to take part in an ADOS-2, as an observer. This assessment is intended to investigate indications of autism in children (Lord, et al., 2015). With this assessment, the administrator is usually occupied with interacting with the student and has little time to record observations and little desire to impede the flow of the assessment by stopping to write. Therefore, another psychologist is usually present to make observations. This is a guided observation, as each activity provides the observer

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with specific behaviours to look for, such as, initiating conversation, showing an interest in others, identifying feelings, stereotypy, and so on (Lord, et al., 2015). It was a beneficial process for me to participate in this observation, and then, in collaboration with my colleagues, to discuss our observations to score the assessment.

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### 3. INTERPRETATION AND COMMUNICATION

#### **Report Writing**

Report writing was done progressively, rather than all at once at the end of the assessment; my practice was to enter information into the report as soon as I had collected it. I used a template provided for me by PSSD No. 210, and formatted by Mrs. Osberg. I felt the report layout was strong, so I did not change the format. When I received the report from the online data base, it had most of the personal information included. I added referral information, background data, interview summaries, file review notes, observations, assessment results, a summary, and recommendations. As I compiled more information, I would begin to interpret the results by referencing assessment scores, observations, interview and file review data, the Diagnostic and Statistics Manual of Mental Disorders – Fifth Edition (DSM-V) (American Psychological Association, 2013), and other sources. In one case, I referred to Mash and Wolfe’s book, *Abnormal Child Psychology* (2016), to answer questions I had regarding ADHD; in this case, I was seeking clarification on some of the diagnostic criteria for ADHD. I would also consult with Mrs. Osberg about my interpretations and conclusions before reporting them.

Throughout the report writing process, as is recommended by Kranzler and Floyd (2013), I tried to keep a varied audience in mind. I attempted to write in a way that is meaningful for parents, educators, doctors, psychologists, and others. Additionally, I strove to write with clarity and organize my report so that it is easy to read, as is suggested by Goldfinger and Pomerantz (2014). I also made certain to highlight children’s strengths, while being forthright about their areas of concern. As I completed

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a report, I would frequently ask questions of Mrs. Osberg. After completing a draft of a report, I would send it to Mrs. Osberg, she would send revisions back to me. I would make revisions, we would discuss the final report, then print it for the child's file. I noted progress in the area of report writing as this process became more fluid for me, and my speed and confidence increased with each report I wrote.

### **Recommendations**

For the formation of my recommendations for students, I attempted to strongly link recommendations to the referral question and conclusions in the report (Goldfinger & Pomerantz, 2014). I relied heavily on research-based recommendations given by Sattler (2014). Following this I discussed recommendation with Mrs. Osberg, and was given a copy of previous reports. As suggested by Goldfinger and Pomerantz (2014), in making recommendations, I tried to maintain an awareness of which recommendations would have the greatest impact and which recommendations would take the most effort to implement. I sought to have a list of strong recommendations with many that could easily be implemented by parents or teachers. I strove to provide recommendations that would both bolster areas of difficulty, and also make use of areas of strength to improve functioning in school and at home.

### **Debriefing the Assessment**

I participated in eight meetings to debrief assessments during my practicum, and I led two of these. Invited to debrief meetings were the parent(s)/guardian(s), present homeroom teacher, next year's homeroom teacher, principal, student support teacher, SLP, and representatives from other agencies. Sometimes all of these people would attend, making for a very large meeting, while other times the meeting would consist of

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the parent(s)/guardian(s), Mrs. Osberg, and myself. On one occasion, Mrs. Osberg had a separate meeting to provide a private debrief for a parent before meeting with the whole school team; this occurred to give this parent an opportunity to hear a new diagnosis privately, instead of in front of a group. I strove to set a time for my meetings when as many people could attend as possible, especially all parents/guardians. Goldfinger and Pomerantz (2014) note that considering who should be present when results are shared is important; holding private meetings for parents and ensuring as many stakeholders as possible can attend shows a consideration for this principle.

Meetings would begin with introductions, followed by a discussion of the report led by Mrs. Osberg or myself. The discussion was not a word-for-word read-through, but a summary highlighting important aspects of the report and explaining any unfamiliar terms. Parents and others at the meeting were asked clarifying questions throughout to ensure accuracy of the report (Kranzler & Floyd, 2013). Those present were also invited to ask their own questions as they arose. After the summary of the report and recommendations, those present were invited to ask questions, make comments, or add any pertinent data. Importantly, those involved in the meeting discussed the next steps, such as, what recommendations could be implemented, setting up a family doctor appointment to discuss the report, and ideas for classroom placement for next year.

The debrief meeting was kept as positive as possible, while still being accurate. Mrs. Osberg always strove to communicate the strengths of the children being assessed, while also being forthright and clear about their struggles and challenges, as is suggested by Kranzler and Floyd (2013). Most meetings were very calm and positive, but others were more emotionally upsetting for the parents, particularly when a diagnosis was made

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or when the parent did not feel that their child was respected or cared for by individuals present in the meeting. In two meetings that I participated in, the parents felt as if they were not being listened to and that their child was not valued by their teachers and administrators; in these cases Mrs. Osberg was quick to acknowledge the feelings of the parents and assure them that regardless of what had happened in the past, everyone was invested in their children achieving to their potential.

I felt confident leading my two meetings. I attribute this confidence to the nature of assessment and report writing and my experience as a teacher. First, in order to perform a full battery of assessments and write a psychological report, I became intensely familiar with every aspect of the child's assessment, and had a strong awareness of his or her personality and history. My conclusions were well thought through and recommendations were thoroughly researched and discussed. Kranzler and Floyd (2013) recommend being well prepared for debrief meetings, and I felt well prepared for the meetings I led. Second, the meetings were not entirely unfamiliar to me, as I have participated in a few psychological assessment debrief meetings as a teacher. Furthermore, the meetings reminded me somewhat of a parent-teacher conference, of which I have performed hundreds.



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### 4. CONCLUSION

#### **Practicum Reflections**

My practicum with PSSD No. 210 was an incredible learning experience. I believe that I achieved all of the objectives which I laid out for myself at the beginning of this practicum. Furthermore, there were other lessons that I did not anticipate learning at the outset of my practicum.

I could not think of a better professional associate to work under than Mrs. Osberg. Practicing psychology under her guidance and encouragement was extremely constructive to my growth. I benefited from observing Mrs. Osberg as she performed her duties. When she led meetings or conducting interviews, she was careful to maintain respectful and positive approach that highlighted strengths and cast a vision into the future toward a student's potential. Occasionally, someone in a meeting would bring up past failures and weaknesses, or attempt to assign blame for problems; however, Mrs. Osberg was quick to refocus the meeting toward positive plans to help the student learn and grow to his or her potential. When I participate in meetings and interviews in the future, I will remember what I observed in my practicum: that a positive and future-focused approach is best for all involved, especially my clients. I also benefited from observing Mrs. Osberg assessing students; by showing genuine caring, providing timely encouragement, and modelling excitement about the activities, she easily established and maintain rapport with students throughout the assessment process. I also noted that Mrs. Osberg had very strong professional instincts to be able to tell when a child was frustrated, anxious, or needed a break.

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I appreciated how Mrs. Osberg supported my professional development by exhibiting openness to my questions. Mrs. Osberg always welcomed my questions or concerns as they arose, regardless of whether she was busy working on a report or other important duties. She would sometimes provide direct answers, but other times she provided resources for me and supported me in finding the answer on my own. When time was of the essence or when the issue was not very complex, I appreciate quick answers; however, I acquired deepest learning about an issue when she aided me in finding the answer independently, then discussing it together. Having spent ten years as a teacher, this approach to learning does not come as a surprise to me, but I will have to keep this lesson in mind: that self-discovery is deeper and more meaningful than getting a quick answer.

My practicum experience was an invaluable step that helped me learn about the role of a psychologist in deeper ways than I could in the university classroom or lab. While listening to lectures, studying theory, and participating in classroom activities was valuable, it came alive when I had a context for that learning in my practicum. Also, while my practice assessment experiences were helpful, performing assessments with real students who exhibited genuine behavioural challenges, and writing reports with real implications was an essential component in my learning to become a psychologist.

I was able to begin to identify some personal strengths as I practiced psychology in my practicum. First, I found that I developed a quick and positive rapport with the students I assessed; this will be an essential skill to perform positive and accurate assessments with my clients. Second, I noted that my confidence, familiarity, and fluency with the Wechsler instruments has grown immensely; this is important, as these

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instruments are the most commonly used measures in my school division, where I will soon work as a psychologist. Third, as I discussed in Chapter 3, I feel confident and skilled at leading debrief meetings; I feel that the skills I acquired as a teacher and the positive modelling displayed by Mrs. Osberg has helped me in becoming more adept at leading meetings.

I still have much to learn to become a skilled educational psychologist. Looking forward, my practicum has provided me with several new professional goals; I will discuss four. First, I need to improve in developing effective working relationships with other agencies. It was clear to me during my practicum that psychologist do not work alone; interagency collaboration is crucial. I will need to become aware of the many agencies that can serve my clients, and familiar with the people who work at these agencies. Second, I wish to become proficient at administering new assessments, especially the ADOS-2. Having a wide variety of assessments in my repertoire will be valuable in perform XBA. Furthermore, the prevalence rates of Autism Spectrum Disorder continue to rise in Canada, and it will be important for me to be able to use a tool that informs an awareness of whether a client might be on the spectrum, such as the ADOS-2. Third, I will need to develop skills in forming and leading behavioural interventions with students. In PSSD No. 210, this is not part of the psychologist's portfolio, as there are consultants who perform this duty; however, in my school division, this will be part of my responsibilities. I appreciated that Mrs. Osberg allowed me to consult with and shadow a behavioural consultant periodically during my practicum. In my first year working in my division, it will be a goal of mine to learn from my supervising psychologist how to effectively perform all the task associated with

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behavioural consulting, including responding to behavioural emergencies, observations, forming plans, communicating those plans, and following up on progress. Fourth, I will need to become faster at crafting psychological reports; with a busy caseload, and many duties to perform, I will need to make sure I am increasing my competence surrounding diagnosis and recommendations, thereby expediting the report writing process.

### **Summary**

When I embarked on the journey to train in educational psychology nearly two years ago, I was excited to acquire new knowledge, learn new skills, and become better prepared to serve the students whom I encounter in my career. I had only a vague idea of what educational psychology was and the role of an educational psychologist; nevertheless, through the capable instruction of my professors, the expertise and mentoring of my practicum associate, countless hours of study, collaboration with fellow students, the encouragement of my employer, and the support of my family and friends, I have grown tremendously in my understanding and practice of educational psychology. As I reflect on my cumulative experience to complete a MEd in educational psychology, I have concluded that it has been a collaborative effort to learn and grow. I will need to remember this lesson in my future practice; one does not develop in isolation, but in community and cooperation with supportive and encouraging others.

I look ahead to a new role as a psychologist with my school division beginning in a two months, and it is time of great change, filled with feelings of both excitement and trepidation. I will miss many aspects of my previous role as a classroom teacher, I feel a healthy respect for the challenge of beginning to practice psychology, and I am daunted by the prospect of studying and testing for registration as a psychologist. At the same

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time, I am excited to try something unfamiliar, learn new things, help students in ways I could not have before, work with new people and teams, and continue to grow as an educator. Due to my coursework and practicum, I feel confident and prepared for the challenges that await me in my new role as an educational psychologist.

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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

## PARENT/GUARDIAN INTERVIEW FORM

**Parent Questionnaire**

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Date: \_\_\_\_\_ School: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

Parents / Guardians Name:

Mother: \_\_\_\_\_ Father: \_\_\_\_\_

Shared or Sole Custody

Siblings:

Name	Age	Concerns
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Are there any others that care for your child? (grandparent, daycare)

Would you say that the atmosphere at home (or in their care facility) is usually calm?

Please identify and describe your concern(s) regarding learning:

What are your concerns regarding behavior?

How is he/she at following rules and instructions?

...demonstrating self-control?

...maintaining attention to a task, a meal....?

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Have family members / close relatives experienced problems similar to your child? (Is there any family history of learning/behavioral/emotional problems?)

How is your child's general health?                      Good   Fair   Poor

How is your child's hearing?                              Good   Fair   Poor   Hearing Aide

How is your child's vision?  
Glasses/Contacts    Good   Fair   Poor   Eye

Last exam: \_\_\_\_\_

How is your child's fine/gross motor co-ordination?    Good   Fair   Poor

How is your child's speech/articulation?                      Good   Fair   Poor

Did they receive speech therapy through Public Health prior to entering school? \_\_\_\_\_

Any sleep concerns? (Difficulty falling asleep or restless sleeper?)

Any bed-wetting?

Please describe any health problems/difficulties your child may be experiencing (e.g. asthma, migraines, diagnosed disorders).

Current medications:

Type(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Prescribed by: \_\_\_\_\_

Purpose? \_\_\_\_\_

How long? \_\_\_\_\_

Were there any complications during your (your wife's) pregnancy?

Was your child born full-term or premature?

Birth weight?

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Were the doctors worried about his/her medical condition immediately after he/she was born?

Did he/she have to spend any time in a neonatal intensive care unit (NICU)?

Was there any smoking/drug/alcohol or other substance use during pregnancy? Specify.

Developmental milestones:

- By the time he/she was age 2, could he/she put several words together when speaking?
- Could people who didn't know him/her understand his/her speech by the time he/she reached age 4?
- Could he/she walk on his/her own by the age of 18 months?
- How did your child do with toilet-training?

Has your child ever experienced a serious injury or accident? Describe.

Head Injury? Loss of consciousness? Hospitalized?

Seizures?

Has your child experienced serious emotional stress in the last year?

Parents divorced/separated?

Family moved?

Family accident or illness?

Family financial problems?

Death in family?

Parent changed job?

Changed schools?

Has your child previously been assessed for learning, behavioral, speech / language, emotional, or other difficulties? \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, please indicate who completed the assessment, date, and nature of the assessment. (provide copies)

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Please list schools attended. How was his/her progress?

How is your child's attendance?

Has your child repeated any grades? Please specify.

Has your child received additional educational supports?

Does your child participate in any organized social or sporting activities? Interests and hobbies?

How does your child do socially? (Troubles relating to other children? Playing alone? Few friends?)

By the time he/she was age 4, was he/she interested in playing with or being with other children?

What are the best things/qualities about your child?

List other professionals consulted: (e.g., mental health, medical doctors, counsellors, psychiatrists, etc)

*\*Explain assessment procedures and how results will be analyzed and shared with parents and school...*

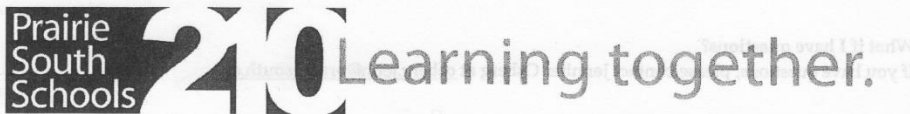
*\*Explain the parent's role in completing rating scales/checklists etc...*

*\*Explain when you plan to be at the school. Recommend good breakfast, sleep, etc...*

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## APPENDIX B

## CONSENT FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES



650 Coteau Street W., Riverview Collegiate, Moose Jaw, SK S6H 5E6 P 306 693 4631 F 306 694 4686 [prairiesouth.ca](http://prairiesouth.ca)

#### CONSENT FOR PSYCHOLOGY SERVICES

Your child has been referred to Jennifer Osberg, Registered Psychologist #716, for psychology services.

#### What might the psychologist do?

**Discussion/Collaboration:** Mrs. Osberg may speak to you about your child and his/her strengths and areas of need. She may ask you questions about your child's birth history, early development, learning, behavior, emotions and the ways in which they get along and communicate with others. She may also speak to your child's school team to find out areas of strength and struggle.

**Informal Assessment:** Mrs. Osberg may observe your child within the school. It is important for the psychologist to watch your child because this helps to get an idea about ways in which we can adapt the classroom environment or school activities so your child can succeed. Mrs. Osberg may talk to your child about his/her school experiences. She may also review your child's day-to-day work, school records and any reports that may have been completed by other people who have worked with your child.

**Formal Assessment:** Mrs. Osberg may conduct formal testing to gain a better understanding of your child's current skills and abilities. These tests examine your child's thinking and reasoning skills, memory, language, visual and auditory perception, academic attainment, socio-emotional and behavioral adjustment. These types of tests are helpful in understanding how your child skills and abilities compare to others of the same age.

**Consultation/Programming/Monitoring:** Mrs. Osberg may work with the school team in planning appropriate programming, developing academic and behavioral goals and monitoring progress as your child moves through school. Consultation may include school based observations, discussions and informal assessment of your child's work.

#### Who will receive the information?

Once Mrs. Osberg has seen your child, she will write a report or summary that will outline the results of the assessment process. You will receive a copy of the report and a copy will also be kept on file at your child's school in their cumulative folder. Additionally, a copy of the report will be kept by Mrs. Osberg in a secure database and one will also be kept in a locked file at the Prairie South Schools Division office (at Riverview Collegiate). The cumulative file information is transferred between schools attended by your child and is retained at the division office until age 25. If you would like the report to be forwarded to someone other than those listed above, a written request signed by you (the parent/guardian) can be submitted to Mrs. Osberg.

#### What are the limitations to confidentiality?

Assessment information is considered confidential except when:

1. A child threatens violence to harm him/herself or someone else
2. The Psychologist has concerns regarding possible child abuse
3. The Psychologist is required to do so by law (court order, subpoena)
4. The Psychologist is consulting about your child with other members of your child's learning team

#### Can I refuse psychology services for my child?

Yes. You can choose to refuse (or withdraw from) psychology services for your child at any time by contacting Jennifer Osberg at [osberg.jenn@prairiesouth.ca](mailto:osberg.jenn@prairiesouth.ca).

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What if I have questions?

If you have questions, please contact Jennifer Osberg at [osberg.jenn@prairiesouth.ca](mailto:osberg.jenn@prairiesouth.ca)

Please complete the following and return to your child's classroom teacher:

I affirm that I, \_\_\_\_\_ am the legal guardian of (parent's name) \_\_\_\_\_ attending \_\_\_\_\_ (child's name) (school)

I have read and understood the above and agree to proceed.

I have read and understand the above and do not agree to proceed.

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Date

If parents no longer reside together, consent of both parents is required except in cases wherein one parent has been awarded sole responsibility for decision making regarding the child.

Does this child have a second parent who is legally entitled to make decisions on his/her behalf?

YES  NO

If yes, please have the other parent sign below or on a separate form.

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Date

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## APPENDIX C

## PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT TEACHER INTEVIEW FORM

**What is your main concern with the student?**

**How is he/she doing academically?**

**Socially?**

**Behaviourally?**

**Do you have fine/gross motor concerns?**

**What classroom strategies do you use (or have you tried in the past) to meet the child's academic, social, or behavioural needs?**

**What are his/her strengths?**

**Is there any other important information regarding this child?**

**What are the best times/days to pull your student for assessment?**

**Please provide a recent unedited writing sample and a copy of the latest report card for this child.**