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Rapport during the assessment process: A survey of school psychologists

Ebony Mason

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Rapport During the Assessment Process: A Survey of School Psychologists

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A research project submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the degree of

Educational Specialist

Department of Graduate Psychology

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	ii
List of Tables	iii
Abstract.....	iv
I. Introduction	1
II. Literature Review	1
III. Methodology.....	7
IV. Results.....	8
V. Discussion	17
Appendix A.....	22
Appendix B.....	24
Appendix C.....	29
References.....	30

List of Tables

Table 1 Techniques to Establish Rapport with Preschool Students	10
Table 2 Techniques to Establish Rapport with Elementary Students	10
Table 3 Techniques to Establish Rapport with Middle School Students	11
Table 4 Techniques to Establish Rapport with High School Students	11
Table 5 How Often Students Attend Eligibility Meetings	14
Table 6 How Frequently Psychologists Inform Students of Assessment Result.....	15
Table 7 Considerations When Explaining Assessment Results to Student.....	16

Abstract

In order to gain more information on the current assessment practices of school psychologists in the state of Virginia, a survey was constructed that examined how rapport is established, how the assessment process is explained to students, and how assessment results are explained to students. Responses from 113 school psychologists indicated that rapport is an important part of the assessment process. There were commonalities in responses related to how rapport is established and the assessment process is explained to students. Surveyed school psychologists indicated that following up with students and informing them of assessment results is not a common practice.

Introduction

Despite engaging in various roles in the schools such as intervention, consultation, and counseling, school psychologists devote more than half of their time to assessment (Castillo, Gelley, Curtis, 2012; Sotelo-Dynega & Dixon, 2014). Assessment provides information on a student's cognitive, academic, and social and emotional functioning that is beneficial in the process for determining eligibility for Special Education and making recommendations for interventions (Bowles et al., 2016; Jellins, 2015). In assessment, for the practitioner and the student in training the most emphasis is often placed on interpretation of data rather than administration processes. External factors in administration can influence a student's performance and thus impact interpretation and ultimately recommendations for effective interventions (Bowles et al., 2016; Sotelo-Dynega & Dixon, 2014). Szarko, Brown, and Watkins (2013) argue that in addition to contextual factors such as testing location and examiner error, the child's understanding of the purpose of the assessment and the rapport the examiner has with the student have an impact on the assessment's validity. These two components of the assessment process will be further discussed.

Literature Review

Teglasi and Freeman (1983) described rapport development during testing in two stages. In the first stage, the examiner introduces him or herself and helps the student adjust to the new environment. In the second stage, the examiner takes into account the needs and concerns of the student during testing by offering encouragement and support (Teglasi & Freeman, 1983).

Research supports that establishing rapport with a student has an effect on their performance on the assessment. One aspect of rapport is the student's familiarity with the examiner. Fuchs, Fuchs, Dailey, and Power (1985) examined the effect of examiner experience and familiarity on the performance of preschool students with speech and language delays. Preschool students were randomly assigned to a group with an inexperienced practitioner or a group with an experienced practitioner. Those in the inexperienced group had Early Childhood Education Graduate Students as their examiners and those in the Experienced Group had Speech Language Graduate Students as their examiner. In each group, participants were assigned two examiners. One examiner was familiar to them and the other was unfamiliar to them. Days prior to testing, the familiar examiner met with the child and interviewed the child's parent. On the day of testing the familiar examiner played with the child prior to beginning the assessment. The unfamiliar examiner began testing immediately after meeting the child. These researchers found that regardless of the examiner's experience, the students performed best with the familiar examiner.

Szarko, Brown, and Watkins (2013) also examined the influence of examiner familiarity. They administered both the verbal and performance subtests from the Psychoeducational Profile-Revised to students with a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder and coded behavioral observations during the administration. Examiners were instructed on the administration of the exam and on how to establish rapport prior to the assessment through conversation and play. Children were divided into unfamiliar and familiar groups. Children in the unfamiliar group were administered the assessment without interpersonal interactions prior to starting testing. Children in the familiar group

interacted with the examiner prior to commencing testing. Although there were no significant differences in the behaviors of the children in the familiar and unfamiliar groups, there were differences found in test performance based on familiarity with the examiner. There was a significant difference in performance on the assessment for children in the familiar group in both the verbal ($d=.43$) and in the performance subtests ($d=.47$). Familiarity with students may serve a critical component of the assessment process as it has an influence on students' overall performance. However, familiarity with students prior to assessment is not always feasible. Therefore, the establishment and maintenance of rapport during the assessment process is an area of focus.

Techniques to Build Rapport

There is a lack of research relating to the techniques that school psychologists use to build and maintain rapport during assessment. A search of the literature, produced only a handful of articles related to rapport and assessment. However, the focus of the majority of the articles was on the effect rapport has on performance rather than developing rapport itself.

Additionally, many assessment textbooks and manuals devote a page or two to the topic of rapport. The focus is usually on the importance and implications of rapport. The manual for the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children, Fifth Edition (WISC-V) describes the importance of maintaining rapport throughout testing to ease the child's anxiety and increase their effort and cooperation (Wechsler, 2014). The WISC-V manual suggests that conversation and play can aid in the development of rapport but factors such as the child's temperament and age influence the strategies utilized and the length of time needed (Wechsler, 2014).

Developmental considerations often guide how rapport is established. When working with preschool and early elementary school children, kneeling or squatting down when introducing yourself to the child can put them at ease (Sattler, 2008). Additionally, introducing and referring to the testing process as a game or activity rather than a test is typically less threatening (Wechsler, 2014). One method used in assessment with younger children is drawing. Asking children to draw a picture of themselves is something that most children have done frequently and is often nonthreatening (Flannagan & Motta, 2007). Drawing often serves as an ice breaker when children are reluctant (Sattler, 2008). Discussing the drawing with the child not only gives the examiner more information about the child but also can increase the child's comfort level (Flanagan & Motta, 2007).

On the other hand, when working with older children appealing to their desire to do well or competitive spirit may be helpful (Anastasi, 1976). Older children may be concerned about the length of time that they are missing from class (Sattler, 2008). Students may also have more concerns about how well they are doing. For some children, remaining supportive and explaining that they are not expected to complete all questions or get all questions correct can ease discomfort (Anastasi, 1976; Sattler, 2008).

Student's Understanding of the Assessment Process

Explaining the purpose of assessment to students falls under the larger umbrella of establishing rapport. When establishing rapport, Sattler (2008) recommends explaining to older children what they will be doing and why they need to do it. This excerpt offers an example of how to explain the purpose of the test to a student. However, the example pertains more to children who are suspected of having a learning disability. Additionally,

Sattler offers no recommendations or guidelines to explaining the purpose of the assessment to younger students. Sattler (2008) does suggest that the amount of explanation given will differ depending on the needs of the child. However, there are not many specific guidelines or recommendations on how to do so. Sattler also recommends that for some children, informing them of the results of the assessment can be beneficial.

Oftentimes, explanation of psychoeducational assessment results takes place during eligibility team meetings. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provides guidelines for who is in attendance during these meetings. Under IDEA, parents must be invited to attend these meetings in addition to the team of professionals. However, student attendance during eligibility meetings is not a common occurrence (Reddy, 2015). Additionally, the school psychologist is often not directly involved in informing students of results. Reddy (2015) surveyed 168 practicing school psychologists in the state of Virginia. She examined their practices related to informing students with a learning disability of their diagnosis and their perceptions of training needs in this area. Reddy found that Special Education teachers and parents were more likely than the school psychologist to be the person that informs the student of their disability. Additionally, when respondents were asked where they received training on informing practices, 56% of respondents selected job experience, 39% had not received training in this area, 23% received training in their graduate program, 16% while on internship, and 11% received training through professional development.

There is limited research on how school psychologists explain the assessment process to students. Minimal information was found by this researcher on how the purpose and process of assessment is explained to students prior to commencing testing.

A thorough review of the literature base was completed using the search terms: school psychologist, assessment, explanation of results, student understanding, student attendance, and special education eligibility meetings. Information found came primarily from textbooks or was related to informing or a student's understanding of disability.

Statement of the Problem

School psychologists devote much of their time to assessment. Currently, there is minimal research into how rapport is established during psychoeducational evaluations and how the assessment process is explained to the student. Preliminary research has supported that the establishment of rapport has benefits extending to performance on the assessment itself (Fuchs, Fuchs, Daily & Power, 1985). Rapport is dependent on a variety of factors, and the strategies used may differ depending on the age and the temperament of the child. Testing manuals, textbooks, and training programs offer recommendations and general guidelines for establishing rapport, however not a lot is known about what this looks like in current practice.

Research Questions

Through a review of the literature and discussions with practicing school psychologists the researcher surveyed school psychologists to answer the following research questions:

1. How do school psychologists establish rapport with students during psychoeducational assessments?
2. How do school psychologists explain the purpose of an assessment to students they are evaluating?

3. How do school psychologists explain assessment results to the students they have evaluated?

Methodology

Participants

One hundred thirteen school psychologists practicing in the state of Virginia participated in this study. The participants were licensed school psychologists practicing in K-12 schools during the 2017-2018 school year. Participants were recruited from the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) email list serv. Of the 495 school psychologists included in the listing, 485 received an invitation to complete the survey via email as ten email addresses were invalid. Of the 485 school psychologists who received the invitation, 114 participated in the study resulting in a response rate of 23 percent. One participant did not practice in K-12 schools which was an exclusionary factor. Therefore, data from 113 participants was analyzed. Eighty four percent of participants were female, 12.28% were male, and 3.5 percent did not specify. In regard to racial background, 84.48% of participants identified as white, 8.62% identified as Black, 2.59% identified as Asian, and 4.31 % identified as other. The average number of years practicing as a School Psychologist was 15.74 years (Min: 3, Max: 44).

Procedure

Participants were practicing school psychologists recruited from the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) email list serv. The School Psychologist Specialist on staff at the VDOE gave approval to use the School Psychologist email list serv after receiving JMU IRB approval. Participants received an invitation to complete the survey via email (see Appendix A). The invitation included instructions for completing the

survey, information about informed consent, and a link to complete the online survey via Qualtrics. Four weeks after the initial email, the invitation was sent out again. Participant responses were stored electronically through Qualtrics.

Measure

The 22 item survey developed by the researcher was composed of multiple choice, likert scale, and open ended questions (see appendix B). The survey included 6 demographic and background questions that consisted of items related to the participants' race and gender, their licensure or certification as a School Psychologist, whether they practiced in K-12 schools, what age level of students they assess, and the years they have been practicing as a School Psychologist. The remaining 16 survey items addressed the research questions. Survey items 1-7 and 14 addressed research question 1, Survey items 8, 9, and 15 addressed research question 2, and survey items 10-13 and 16 addressed research question 3. The demographic and background questions determined how many and which survey items participants received.

Results

Participant responses were analyzed qualitatively using a cut and sort technique to identify themes in response to open ended survey questions. Descriptive statistics were collected for the multiple choice and likert survey questions.

Research Question 1

In order to examine how Virginia school psychologists establish rapport with students during psychoeducational assessments participants were first asked "How likely are you to meet a student prior to conducting an assessment with that student?" (response options included: extremely likely, somewhat likely, neither likely nor unlikely,

somewhat unlikely, or extremely unlikely). Twelve percent of participants indicated extremely likely, 29.20% indicated somewhat likely, 14.16 % indicated neither likely nor unlikely, 36.28% indicated somewhat unlikely, and 7.96% of participants indicated extremely unlikely.

Depending on information provided in the demographic and background portion relating to the age levels of students they assess, survey participants were then asked about the strategies they utilized when establishing rapport with preschool, elementary, middle, and high school students. Of the 113 participants, 66 indicated that they assess preschoolers, 105 indicated that they assess elementary school students, 71 indicated that they assess middle school students, and 82 indicated that they assess high school students. Survey Items two through five asked the following question “Using the definition provided above for rapport, which strategies do you use to establish and maintain rapport when working with a _____ student?” Participants were given a drop down list of items to select from. Participants were able to select multiple items from the list. At the preschool level (see Table 1), 90.9% of participants selected “Casual Conversation,” 74.21% of participants selected “play,” 72.2% of participants selected reinforcers, 72.2% of participants selected “breaks” 60.6% of participants selected drawing, 59.9% of participants selected “appropriate level furniture,” 42.4% selected “exploring the room,” and 13.63% of participants selected other. Common themes endorsed in those that selected other included “prior classroom visits,” and “reading books.”

Table 1
Techniques to Establish Rapport with Preschool Students

	n	%
Casual conversation	60	90.90
Play	49	74.24
Drawing	40	60.60
Reinforcers	48	70.2
Breaks	48	70.2
Exploring the room	28	42.2
Appropriate level furniture	39	59.7
Other	9	13.63
Total	66	

At the elementary level (see Table 2), 82.80% of participants selected “Casual Conversation,” 72.3% of participants selected “breaks,” 68.52% of participants selected “reinforcers,” 52.3 % of participants selected “drawing,” 38% selected “play,” 36.1% selected “appropriate level furniture,” 23.8% selected “exploring the room,” and 15.23% selected other. Common themes endorsed in those that selected other included “prior classroom visits” and “student interview.”

Table 2
Techniques to Establish Rapport with Elementary Students

	n	%
Casual conversation	87	82.80
Play	40	38.51
Drawing	55	52.33
Reinforcers	72	68.52
Breaks	76	72.30
Exploring the room	25	23.80
Appropriate level furniture	38	36.12
Other	16	15.23
Total	105	

At the middle school level (see Table 3), 94.3% of participants selected “Casual Conversation,” 77.4% of participants selected “use of humor,” 74.6% of participants selected “breaks,” 69% of participants selected “reinforcers,” 59.1% of participants selected “clinical interview,” 33.8% of participants selected “taking a walk,” 14%

indicated other, and 2.8% indicated “play.” Common themes endorsed in those that selected other included “alternative seating” and “music.”

At the high school level (see Table 4), 100% of participants selected “Casual Conversation,” 84.1% of participants selected “use of humor,” 65.8% of participants selected “reinforcers,” 60.9% selected “breaks,” 60.9% selected “clinical interview,” 19.5% selected “taking a walk,” 13.4% selected “drawing,” 10.9% of participants selected “other,” and 2.4% of participants selected “play.” Common themes endorsed in those that selected other included “student’s input into testing schedule” and “alternative seating.”

Table 3
Techniques to Establish Rapport with Middle School Students

	n	%
Casual conversation	67	94.3
Play	2	2.8
Clinical Interview	42	59.1
Drawing	19	26.76
Reinforcers	49	69.01
Breaks	53	74.64
Use of Humor	55	77.46
Taking a Walk	24	33.80
Other	10	14.08
Total	71	

Table 4
Techniques to Establish Rapport with High School Students

	n	%
Casual conversation	82	100
Play	2	2.4
Clinical Interview	50	60.9
Drawing	11	13.4
Reinforcers	54	65.8
Breaks	50	60.9
Use of Humor	69	84.1
Taking a Walk	16	19.5
Other	9	10.9
Total	82	

Participants were then asked, “If you knew a student from previous interactions, would that change how you establish rapport?” Sixty five percent of participant

responses indicated yes and 34.5% of participant responses indicated no. Participants who responded yes to this question were asked, “How would that change how you establish rapport?” A participant shared that “having known a student from before would let me revisit things to talk about such as their hobbies and not have to start from scratch. Also, in the rare case that a previous interaction did not go particularly well, I can tailor my approach to help things go better this time.” Themes endorsed among participant responses indicated that knowing a student from previous interactions would be beneficial because “less time would be involved in establishing rapport,” “conversations would be more personalized,” and “previous interactions can be discussed.” A participant indicated that they “would reference past interactions and discuss what we are going to do now and how that may differ from past interactions.”

Following this question, participants were asked “How important do you believe it is to establish rapport with students prior to an assessment?” (response options included: extremely important, very important, moderately important, slightly important, and not important at all.) Sixty five percent of participants indicated that establishing rapport with students prior to an assessment is extremely important, 30.9 % indicated that it is very important, and 4.4% indicated that it was moderately important.

The last survey item related to the first research question asked participants, “What general advice would you give a new School Psychologist in regard to establishing rapport with students during an evaluation?” One hundred six participants responded to this question. Participants reported that it is important to “take your time so that the student feels comfortable with you and with the evaluation process,” “be yourself, be authentic, listen, and talk to them about their interests,” “never start testing

until you observe that the student is comfortable and ready to participate,” and “ask the students questions about their strengths and interests.” The most prevalent participant responses generally included one or more of the following themes: be yourself, be genuine, and be friendly, take time to get to know the student, and find out about the student’s interests or strengths. Other common themes included: create a relaxed environment, make sure the student is comfortable, and listen to what the students are telling you.

Research Question 2

In order to examine how Virginia school psychologists explain assessment results with students during psychoeducational assessments participants were first asked “What are common phrases you use at the beginning of an assessment to explain the test to a student?” One hundred eight participants responded to this question. Common phrases endorsed across respondents included “the activities we are completing help us understand how you learn best,” “this is not for a grade/not a test,” “some activities are easy and some are hard, just try your best,” and “the activities help us understand your strengths and weaknesses as a learner.”

Participants were then asked “What questions do students ask you about the assessment process?” One hundred ten participants responded to this question. Common themes in participant responses indicated that students frequently ask “How long will this take?” “Why are we doing this?” “Is this for a grade?” “Will I miss class, recess, or lunch?” and “Did I do okay?”

The last survey item asked participants, “What general advice would you give a new school psychologist in regard to explaining the purpose of an assessment to students

they are evaluating?” One hundred five participants responded to this question. Participants indicated: “I try to avoid the word testing. This often makes students anxious” and “make the explanation simple and age appropriate. I typically say it is determine how you learn best.” Many participants’ responses specified the age of students they worked with and the strategies they used. “For middle and high school students I explain that the testing results will help their teachers better understand their areas of strength and the areas they struggle in so that they can make sure they are doing everything they can to ensure the student’s success in school.” Overall, Participant responses generally indicated one or more of the following themes: keeping the explanation age/developmentally appropriate, telling the student that this process will help with understanding how they learn best, avoiding the use of the word test, and discussing strengths and weaknesses.

Research Question 3

In order to examine how Virginia school psychologists explain assessment results to the students they have evaluated, participants were first asked, “How often do your students attend their eligibility meetings?” (response options included: always, most of the time, about half of the time, sometimes, and never). Three percent of respondents indicated about half of the time, 12.38% of respondents indicated sometimes, and 84.45% of respondents indicated never (see Table 5).

Table 5
How Often Students Attend Eligibility Meetings

	n	%
Always	0	0
Most of the time	0	0
About Half of the Time	3	2.65
Sometimes	14	12.38
Never	96	84.95
Total	113	

Participants were then asked, “How frequently do you follow up with students by informing them of the results of the assessment?”(see Table 6) (response options included: always, most of the time, about half of the time, sometimes, and never) Four percent of participants indicated that they always inform students of assessment results, 10.62% of participants indicated that they do most of the time, 7% indicated that they inform students half of the time, 56.6% of participants indicated sometimes, and 22.12% indicated that they never inform students of assessment results.

Table 6
How frequently Psychologists Inform Students of Assessment Results

	n	%
Always	4	3.54
Most of the time	12	10.62
About Half of the Time	8	7.08
Sometimes	64	56.60
Never	25	22.12
Total	113	

Participants were also asked, “What methods do you use when explaining assessment results to students?” Fifty four percent of respondents indicated that they use verbal explanation, 43.83% of respondents indicated that they use visuals, and 2.47 % of respondents indicated other. Of the four participants that selected other, one indicated that they relate the student’s skills and abilities to real world applications and three indicated they use the eligibility meeting as the arena to explain assessment results.

Participants were then asked, “What helps you determine how to explain assessment results to students?” Participants were given multiple options to choose from and were permitted to select more than one option (see Table 6). Seventy one percent of participants indicated that they consider “Age/grade,” 64.60% indicated that they consider “developmental considerations,” 37.16% of participants indicated that they consider “suspected special education category,” and 15.92% of participants indicated

other responses. For those that selected other, “parental request” and “student interest were common responses.”

Table 7

Considerations When Explaining Assessment Results to Students

	n	%
Age/Grade	80	70.79
Developmental Considerations	73	64.60
Suspected Special Education Category	42	37.16
Other	18	15.92
Total	113	

The last question relating to Research question 3 asked participants “What general advice would you give a new School Psychologist in regard to explaining assessment results to students?” One hundred six participants responded to this question. Participants frequently referred to the student’s strengths and weaknesses in their responses. “For every weakness (academic or cognitive) I try to talk about one or two strengths. This way the conversation does not feel as though I am only pointing out their areas of difficulty” and “Stay away from numbers and jargon. Focus on strengths first, then touch on weaknesses. Finish up with ways the students can be supported, and ways the student can support/advocate for themselves.” Another common theme in participant responses was related to the student’s age/developmental level. Participants indicated “I only do this for older students (ages 10-12) and on a very basic level. I always mention strengths, not just from testing, but also nice things people said about them on rating scales, and in previous meetings” and “consider the student’s age and level of interest when determining how to explain assessment results. After obtaining parent permission, I generally have a strength based discussion with the student.” In addition to addressing the student’s strengths and weaknesses and considering their age and developmental level, participant responses also included one or more of the following themes: incorporating the use visuals, keeping the

discussion positive, keeping the discussion simple and short, having parent permission, and not focusing on the scores.

Discussion

This study aimed to gain more information regarding the assessment practices of school psychologists in the state of Virginia in reference to how they establish and maintain rapport, explain the assessment process, and explain assessment results to the students that they are assessing. There was minimal prior research available on these areas of interest. Much of the information that we have on the psychoeducational assessment process comes from training manuals and textbooks. This study aimed to explore current practices.

Overall, those surveyed indicated that they believe establishing rapport with the students they assess is important part of the assessment process. When asked about advice given to a new school psychologist in regard to establishing rapport, a participant shared that “without taking the time to build rapport your results will not be accurate, valid, or meaningful and so it is very important to do so.” Another participant suggested “if establishing rapport is not natural to you, find a way to practice such as getting into classrooms or working with your counselors to do lessons.” In regard to how most Virginia school psychologists establish rapport with the students they assess, there were differences in the strategies they utilize when assessing different grade levels. For the preschool and elementary age levels, responses indicated that School Psychologists were more likely to engage in casual conversation, take breaks, and engage in play with the students they were assessing. A participant indicated “in working with primary aged children I would say play is a great way to get them talking and comfortable prior to the

assessment. Small talk on the long walk to my room is helpful too.” In contrast, school psychologists were more likely to engage in casual conversation and use humor when assessing middle and high school students.

There were also similarities in regard to how surveyed Virginia School Psychologists describe the assessment process. Participant responses indicated that they often tailor responses to a student’s age or grade level. When describing the process, School Psychologists explained to their students that the assessment will assist with understanding how they learn best. A participant shared that “depending on the age of the student and the purpose of testing, I usually try to explain it as a way to get a good picture of how the student learns, that way we can give their teachers ideas about how to teach better.” Additionally, many indicated that they often discuss strengths and weaknesses when explaining the assessment process. Another participant shared that they explain to the students that “the activities that they will be completing help in determining that student’s strengths and weaknesses” the participant indicated that for younger students they say “these activities help us to see what you do very well with and what you might need more help with.”

There were also similar responses given when school psychologists were asked what questions students ask them about the assessment process. Many students were concerned with how long the process would take, if they would miss time from recess or lunch, or whether they would be graded. Many of the questions students asked are in reference to concerns that they have. Information from the rapport section of an assessment textbook indicated that students commonly have concerns relating to missing time from class and their overall performance (Sattler, 2008).

Information obtained from the present study indicated that School Psychologists do not frequently share assessment results with students. A participant indicated “I usually do not explain results to the students. I usually review results with the students’ parents.” Another participant indicated that “older (upper middle and high school) students are invited to their eligibility meetings, but other than that, being one of two psychologists in the entire county, unfortunately I do not have time to explain assessment results to other students.”

Additionally, participants indicated that students are not frequently in attendance during their eligibility meetings. Reddy (2015) found that Special Education teachers and parents were more likely than the School Psychologist to inform students of assessment results. For those School Psychologists that share assessment results, responses indicated that informing students of results is dependent on the student’s age, level of interest and whether parental permission was obtained. A participant indicated “I only share results if the parents ask me to. Some parents do not want their child to know the results and I respect their decision.” Another participant shared that “I have only done this a few times in my career. When I have done this, I gauge the student’s understanding and interest. I explain as much as possible and use the normal curve.”

In conclusion, the information obtained from this study provides us with current practices regarding how school psychologists establish and maintain rapport, explain the process, and inform students of assessment results. Preliminary research has supported that the establishment of rapport has benefits extending to performance on the assessment itself (Fuchs, Fuchs, Daily & Power, 1985). It is evident that those surveyed feel that rapport is an important part of the assessment process. The time that practitioners take to

develop and maintain the relationship with the students that they are assessing not only helps put that student at ease but also provides information that may be useful later in the assessment process. When generating recommendations or consulting with teachers, practitioners will have more specific information relating to a student's strengths or interests that may be beneficial.

A review of the current literature suggested that rapport is dependent on a variety of factors, and the strategies used may differ depending on the age and the temperament of the child. Like the literature suggested, the strategies the surveyed school psychologists utilized varied depending on the student's age and developmental level. Similar to findings from Reddy (2015), the current research shows that many School Psychologists do not choose to follow up with students on assessment results. Although, there were commonalities in responses participants gave, there was some variability present as well. It is not yet clear why sharing assessment results with students is not a common practice. Barriers understood through this study indicated that a student's age and their attendance at the eligibility meeting determined whether results were shared. Also, obtaining parental permission was seen as a prerequisite to sharing results with students.

The present study provided some preliminary information. Future research examining what guides psychoeducational assessment practices may be beneficial. Examining the influence and interplay of graduate training, field experience, and continuing education on the School Psychologist's practices can provide additional information. Although there were commonalities and themes among responses participants gave, there still was some variability present. Having a better understanding

of what training guides the School Psychologists assessment practices may be helpful in better understanding the source of this variability.

Future research can also provide more information on the student's understanding of their disability and of the special education process as a whole. Many surveyed indicated that they do not inform students of assessment results. Surveying students directly may provide more information on their understanding of the process and the experiences that they have had. This information can help us determine if there are any particular needs that can be addressed or areas to highlight when training future School Psychologists. Additionally, training programs may wish to consider incorporating opportunities for graduate students to practice building and maintaining rapport with students, practice explaining the assessment process, and practice following up with assessment results. Role play and field experience may be beneficial. Programs may begin by having students practice among themselves in the classroom they may also want to incorporate field experience opportunities where students can spend time in classrooms, practice explaining the assessment process, and directly inform students of assessment results.

Appendix A

Email Invitation

Hello,

My name is Ebony Mason and I am a student in the School Psychology program at James Madison University. As a part of my thesis research project, I am interested in investigating the assessment practices of School Psychologists. My study involves surveying practicing School Psychologists to gather information on how they establish rapport during psycho-educational evaluations, explain the assessment process, and relay assessment results to students. I am requesting your participation in an online survey. Thank you for your time and consideration.

You can find the link to the survey and information about informed consent by clicking the link below.

http://jmu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0PYfqVaKz7uqQbH

Consent to Participate in Research (confidential research) – Survey Landing Page

Identification of Investigators & Purpose of Study

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Ebony Mason from James Madison University. The purpose of this study is to obtain information about the assessment practices of School Psychologists. This study will contribute to the student's completion of her graduate thesis.

Research Procedures

This study consists of an online survey that will be administered to individual participants through *Qualtrics (an online survey tool via email)*. You will be asked to provide answers to a series of questions related to how you establish rapport with students, explain the testing process, and inform them of assessment results. Should you decide to participate in this confidential research you may access the anonymous survey by following the web link located under the "Giving of Consent" section.

Time Required

Participation in this study will require 10 minutes of your time.

Risks

The investigator does not perceive more than minimal risks from your involvement in this study (that is, no risks beyond the risks associated with everyday life).

Benefits

There are no direct benefits to individual participants. However, there are benefits to research as a whole. Themes garnered from participant responses will help fill a portion of the gap that exists in understanding the practices and strategies School Psychologists

utilize when explaining what happens during a psychoeducational evaluation to their students.

Confidentiality

The results of this research will be presented at a graduate thesis defense meeting and a graduate research symposium. While individual responses are anonymously obtained and recorded online through Qualtrics, a secure online survey tool, email data is kept in the strictest confidence. The results of this project will be coded in such a way that the respondent's identity will not be attached to the final form of this study. Aggregate data will be presented representing averages or generalizations about the responses as a whole. All data will be stored in a secure location accessible only to the researcher. The researcher retains the right to use and publish non-identifiable data. Upon completion of the study, all information will be destroyed. Final aggregate results will be made available to participants upon request.

Participation & Withdrawal

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You are free to choose not to participate. Should you choose to participate, you can withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. However, once your responses have been submitted and anonymously recorded you will not be able to withdraw from the study.

Questions about the Study

If you have questions or concerns during the time of your participation in this study, or after its completion or you would like to receive a copy of the final aggregate results of this study, please contact:

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Questions about Your Rights as a Research Subject

Dr. David Cockley
Chair, Institutional Review Board
James Madison University
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Giving of Consent

I have read this consent form and I understand what is being requested of me as a participant in this study. I freely consent to participate. The investigator provided me with a copy of this form through email. I certify that I am at least 18 years of age. By clicking next, and completing and submitting this confidential online survey, I am consenting to participate in this research.

Appendix B

Survey Questions

Demographic Questions:

1. Gender
2. Race
3. Are you a licensed or certified school psychologist?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - i. End of survey
4. Do you practice in K- 12 Schools?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - i. End of survey
5. How many years have you been a school psychologist?
 - a. Text entry box: ENTER NUMBER
6. In your current practice, what grade levels of students do you assess?
 - a. DROP DOWN MENU- SELECT ALL THAT APPLY
 - i. Preschool
 - ii. Elementary (K-5)
 - iii. Middle (6-8)
 - iv. High (9-12)

Survey Items

1. How likely are you to meet a student prior to conducting an assessment with that student?
 - a. Likert Item
2. Using the definition provided above for rapport, which strategies do you use to establish and maintain rapport when working with a preschool student?
 - a. DROP DOWN BOX: SELECT ALL THAT APPLY
 - i. Casual Conversation
 - ii. Play
 - iii. Drawing
 - iv. Reinforcers (example: stickers)
 - v. Breaks
 - vi. Exploring the room
 - vii. Appropriate level furniture
 - viii. Other: ITEM ENTRY BOX
3. Using the definition provided above for rapport, which strategies do you use to establish and maintain rapport when working with a elementary school student?
 - a. DROP DOWN BOX: SELECT ALL THAT APPLY
 - i. Casual Conversation
 - ii. Play
 - iii. Drawing
 - iv. Reinforcers (example: stickers)
 - v. Breaks

- vi. Exploring the room
 - vii. Appropriate level furniture
 - viii. Other: ITEM ENTRY BOX
4. Using the definition provided above for rapport, which strategies do you use to establish and maintain rapport when working with a middle school student?
- a. DROP DOWN BOX: SELECT ALL THAT APPLY
 - i. Casual Conversation
 - ii. Play
 - iii. Clinical interview
 - iv. Drawing
 - v. Reinforcers (example: encouragement)
 - vi. Use of humor
 - vii. Taking a walk
 - viii. Breaks
 - ix. Other: ITEM ENTRY BOX
5. Using the definition provided above for rapport, which strategies do you use to establish and maintain rapport when working with a high school student?
- a. DROP DOWN BOX: SELECT ALL THAT APPLY
 - i. Casual Conversation
 - ii. Play
 - iii. Clinical interview
 - iv. Drawing
 - v. Reinforcers (example: encouragement)

- vi. Use of humor
 - vii. Taking a walk
 - viii. Breaks
 - ix. Other: ITEM ENTRY BOX
6. If you knew a student from previous interactions, would that change how you establish rapport?
- a. YES
 - i. How would that change how you establish rapport?
 - 1. OPEN ENDED ITEM ENTRY BOX
 - b. NO
7. How important do you believe it is to establish rapport with students prior to an assessment?
- a. LIKERT ITEM
8. What are common phrases you use at the beginning of an assessment to explain the test to a student?
- a. OPEN ENDED ITEM ENTRY BOX
9. What questions do students ask you about the assessment process?
- a. OPEN ENDED ITEM ENTRY BOX
10. How often do your students attend their eligibility meetings?
- a. LIKERT ITEM
11. How frequently do you follow up with students by informing them of the results of the assessment?
- a. LIKERT ITEM

12. What methods do use when explaining assessment results to students?
- a. DROP DOWN BOX: SELECT ALL THAT APPLY
 - i. Verbal explanation
 - ii. Use of visuals
 - iii. Other: open ended item entry box
13. What helps you determine how to explain assessment results to students?
- a. DROP DOWN BOX- Select al that apply
 - i. Age/grade
 - ii. developmental considerations
 - iii. suspected special education category
 - iv. OTHER- item entry box
14. What general advice would you give a new School Psychologist in regards to establishing rapport with students during an evaluation?
- a. OPEN ENDED ITEM ENTRY BOX
15. What general advice would you give a new School Psychologist in regards to explaining the purpose of an assessment to students they are evaluating?
- a. OPEN ENDED ITEM ENTRY BOX
16. What general advice would you give a new School Psychologist in regards to explaining assessment results to students?
- a. OPEN ENDED ITEM ENTRY BOX

Appendix C

Developmental Considerations During the Assessment Process

Information gathered from practicing School Psychologists in the state of Virginia

Age Level	Rapport Building	Explaining the Process	Following up with Results
Preschool/Elementary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Casual Conversation • Play • Drawing • Reinforcers (stickers) • Breaks • Appropriate Level Furniture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Lets us see how you learn best” • Keep the explanation age appropriate • Don’t use the word test instead consider using the word activities • Let students know that they are not receiving a grade • Address student’s concerns (missing class/recess) • Ask student if they have any questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtain parent permission • Keep the conversation positive • Keep the explanation simple and age appropriate • Use visuals • Don’t focus on the scores
Middle/High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Casual Conversation • Breaks • Use of Humor • Clinical Interview • Taking a Walk • Reinforcers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Lets us understand strengths and weaknesses as a learner” • Address student’s concerns • Ask student if they have any questions • Let student know this is not like a test they take in class 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtain parent permission • Focus on strengths and weaknesses • Keep the explanation simple/positive • Relate information to real world applications • Gauge student’s level of interest

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