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Debra S. Henderson

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Parents' Perception of the MUGC Graduate School Psychologist's Ability to
be a Productive Member of the Eligibility Committee and to Effectively Interpret a
Psychoeducational Evaluation Report

Thesis Submitted to
The Graduate College of
Marshall University

In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Educational Specialist in
School Psychology

Fred Jay Krieg Ph.D. Committee Chairperson
Edna Meisel, Ed.D.
Sandra Stroebel, Ph.D.

By

Debra S. Henderson

Marshall University Graduate College

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ABSTRACT

Parents' Perception of the MUGC Graduate School Psychologist's Ability to
be a Productive Member of the Eligibility Committee and to Effectively Interpret a
Psychoeducational Evaluation Report

Debra S. Henderson

The perception that Marshall University Graduate College produces students of school psychology that are well trained in the ability to develop a positive relationship with the parent during an eligibility committee meeting as well as in the interpretation of a psychoeducational report to parents was investigated. This study investigated the expectation levels and perceptions of parents when taking part in an eligibility committee meeting and when being explained a psychoeducational report by a school psychologist. The method of data collection included a survey developed in part from a survey used by permission that was originally created by Mac I. Barnett and published in the NY School Psychologist Volume XXII number 2. The survey was designed to collect qualitative data. Descriptive statistics were conducted to examine the level of success of the school psychologists in question. Based on those parents that responded to the survey with which the school psychological services was being measured, it was discovered that overall, parents, as consumers of school psychological services, are satisfied with the services they are receiving.

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CHAPTER 1

Review of Literature

Parents' Perception of the MUGC Graduate School Psychologist's Ability to be a productive member of the eligibility committee and to effectively interpret a Psychoeducational Evaluation Report

“Quality is a fascinating concept which has a very positive image.” (Hamalainen, 2003, p. 291). Quality management or quality assurance in public services has for some years been a question of rising interest. In the school psychology field the issue has not, however, been followed by much research” (Anthun, 1999, p. 163). What constitutes quality school psychological services? How can we know? One way to determine if a program produces quality outcomes is through program evaluation. Why carry out a program evaluation? There are several reasons such as to learn more about your program, to find out what is working and what is not, to discover if the program is accomplishing the goals set out for it, etc. “The main purpose of evaluation is to improve the quality of a program or project by identifying its strengths and weaknesses” (Suvedi, 2000, p. 2). What does the program do well and where is there need for improvement? “The demand for program evaluation has grown so dramatically over the past 20 years that virtually all programs-big and small, well funded and grassroots, new and veteran-are now expected to undertake it” (Jacobs, 2003, p. 62). Program evaluation is not only expedient but also imperative if one is to ensure that a program is accomplishing the goals it has set out to meet. There needs to be research backing the premise that a program is successful. Historically, program evaluation has been used extensively across genres to determine whether a program is successful. “Within an institution of higher education as well as in industry, a need exists to document professional readiness for duty” (Cantor, 1990, p. 3).

What exactly is “evaluation”? Suvedi (2000, p. 2) defined evaluation as “the process of assigning “worth” or determining the “value” of a program or activity.” He expounds on this definition by adding the following information: “When we evaluate, we collect information about a program’s actual inputs and/or outcomes and then compare that information to some preset standards or expectations and a judgment is made about the program or activity”. We

gather and analyze data about the program-how it is implemented, what are its outcomes and whether it is effective and efficient. Evaluation involves determining the results of an action. The information gained by the evaluation is then used to make decisions about the program. “Research is the one way we have of putting aside our hopes and prejudices and testing whether or not an intervention is effective. Research tells us which good ideas really do work” (Keith, 2002, p. 91, Best Practices). Educational program evaluation is especially important. Knowing whether or not students are being taught and learning the necessary skills that enable them to be successful is of vital importance.

“In education program evaluation, data is needed which will permit faculty to immediately correct individual courses or component parts (classroom lecture, laboratory, cooperative education, etc.) of the program; to assess overall outcomes of the program (in terms of graduates’ job performance) over time; and/or to redefine aspects of the program’s conceptual framework (instructional design procedural standards, performance objective formats, item writing standards, etc.)” (Cantor, 1990, p. 6).

It would be beneficial to conduct such collections of data periodically in order to ensure that an educational program continues to meet the needs of its graduates. For an educational program, “the ultimate objective of the method is to ensure that the program at hand produces competent professionals, who are capable of performing their jobs in a safe, efficient manner” (Cantor, 1990, p. 4) Through program evaluation, this can be accomplished.

Professors assign tests, homework, field experience, as well as conduct lectures, question and answer sessions and meetings in their offices in an effort to ensure that their students are qualified. Another good way to ensure that the institution of higher learning is effectively educating the students who graduate from there is through program evaluation. Manning (1986) argued that if institutions identify their own strengths and weaknesses, the likelihood that they will make the changes necessary to improve the program rises. Faculty in school psychology programs are often the primary evaluators of a student of school psychology’s professional competency. The perspectives of external constituents can bring to the assessment process information that is often unique and valuable. Parents, as consumers of school psychological services can be sources of information that can aid in the obtaining of a measure of how well school psychologists generalize what they have learned in the classroom to a field setting. The input of parents provides multiple perspectives, and offers an element of objectivity that

programs may not achieve when only considering the perspectives of faculty and students within the program. This form of program evaluation affords an opportunity to determine how the consumers of school psychological services feel about the effectiveness of the school psychologists with whom they are working and, in turn, allows the college to evaluate the program within which the school psychologist is being educated.

The general patterns of professional practices used by the individuals in a profession also are norms for the entire profession and therefore define the profession itself. As such, these practices determine the validity, the vitality, and ultimately, the survivability of the field. That premise is as true for school psychology as it is for any other field. The future of school psychology will be determined by the cumulative performance of individual school psychologists” (Curtis, 1991).

Each individual school psychologist has an impact on the profession as a whole. In turn, each individual school psychologist that has graduated from MUGC has an impact on the perception that the MUGC School Psychology Program is one of quality.

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) answers the question “Who are school psychologists?” with the following definition: “School Psychologists have specialized training in both psychology and education. They use their training to ensure that every child learns in a safe, healthy, and supportive environment. School psychologists understand school systems, effective teaching and successful learning...” (Fagan & Wise, 2000). According to the MUGC School Psychology handbook (2005),

School Psychology is a profession and science that spans the disciplines of psychology and education. The school psychologist works as a specialist within school settings. The school psychologist is a databased problem solver with a broad understanding of educational and psychological foundations. The goal of school psychological services is optimal development of the individual. School psychology in diverse populations demands multifaceted practice in a variety of settings, a commitment to quality comprehensive service delivery to students, families, schools and communities, and a strong understanding and respect for individual differences.

School psychologists have innumerable duties and job descriptions. According to the National Association of School Psychologist website, school psychologists are to “help children and youth succeed academically, socially, and emotionally. They collaborate with educators,

parents and other professionals to create safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments for all students that strengthen connections between home and school.” One convenient way to strengthen the ties between home and school is through the explanation of the psychoeducational evaluation report at the eligibility meeting after a multidisciplinary evaluation has been conducted in order to investigate the potential learning obstacles a particular student might face. This meeting affords the school psychologist with the opportunity to present the psychoeducational evaluation report to the parents in a way that it can be understood and that helps the parents to truly be a part of the team that makes the informed decisions regarding the educational experience their child will have. The explaining of this report allows the school psychologist to develop a working relationship with parents. It also further enables the school psychologist to help the student to achieve academically, socially and emotionally by making sure that all who are involved with the education of the student are informed and armed with the necessary information to ensure success. The explanation of the psychoeducational report opens the door for collaboration between parents and the school psychologist and vicariously, the school, if it is done correctly. Conversely, improper explanation of the report could damage or even sever any kind of productive working relationship between parents, school and the school psychologist by parents being made to feel like it is not important for them to be a part of the team making decisions about the student. It is essential that parents feel as if the school psychologist understood the problems of their child and had specific and helpful ideas for activities that could be performed at home and at school in order to help the child be more successful. The school psychologist must be friendly and approachable and show respect for the parent’s ideas. It is important that the school psychology services offered be of quality in order to ensure the best results for all involved.

“School psychology is committed to producing demonstrable benefits to children, youth, families, and schools” (Ysseldyke, Dawson, Lehr, Reschly, Reynolds, & Telzrow, 1996, p. 12). It is a goal to positively impact the lives of children, their families and the schools in which they attend. School psychologists, of necessity, should be able to show evidence of the advantages they bring to the lives of children. Further, there is a call for accountability. School psychologists as well as school psychology programs that are not meeting the needs of children need to be held accountable.

Accountability has been an integral part of educational reform initiatives. The public demand for accountability in education has led to increased efforts to demonstrate the effectiveness of school psychological services. School psychologists must be able to provide evidence that their services result in favorable outcomes for clients” (Cooper, 2000, p. 4).

One way in which school psychologists can result in favorable outcomes is, as previously mentioned, in how the school psychologist performs during the eligibility committee meeting. This includes the explanation of the psychoeducational report in a way that parents can readily understand, which, in turn, helps parents to feel more comfortable with the process. One way to provide evidence that this need is being met is by asking the parents involved. According to Barnett, originator of the survey, which was modified, to be used in this research project, school psychology, as an organization, “must place its primary focus on the consumers.” The school psychologist must not only place its primary focus on the consumer but also keep in mind who the consumer of school psychological services is. The consumers of school psychological services are the students, parents and school systems in which the school psychologist works. Sometimes, school psychologists can lose sight of whom they are working for. “Listening and responding to the consumer is the fundamental and most important principle underlying promotion of any service” (Harvey & Struzziero, 2002, p. 209). Based on this principle, school psychologists, must listen to and respond to the students, parents, and school systems for which they work. One of the underlying questions in assessing school psychological services is whether the services provided are meeting the needs of the consumers. How would one determine if the needs of any particular consumer group were being met? Surveys may be used to assess consumer satisfaction with particular programs. Parents of students who have entered the special education process can be surveyed in order to determine if they are being made to feel comfortable during the eligibility committee meeting and if they feel that the psychoeducational evaluation report was explained in a way that they can understand as well as to determine if the school psychologist helped the parents to feel that they were an integral part of the eligibility committee making educational decisions about their child.

With the reauthorization of IDEA, parents of handicapped children are being called upon to serve an even more active role in determining the educational services needed for their children. It would be quite difficult for the parents to perform an active role without being

informed of what information the multidisciplinary evaluation has brought to light as to the educational needs of their child. This information is shared with the parents at the eligibility committee meeting during the time that the psychoeducational report is explained to the parents. “The psychoeducational report is the primary vehicle for information dissemination within school systems” (Cornwall, 2001, p. 413). The explanation of the psychoeducational report must be done in a way that helps parents to understand the information contained within. The school psychologist must conduct himself/herself in way that allows parents to be a productive member(s) of the committee. Through The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or IDEA, parents of handicapped children are provided with opportunities for involvement in the planning of appropriate educational services for their children. It is mandatory that parental input be obtained in the making of educational decisions for each child.

Since decisions made at the placement meeting are often based at least in part on the psychological report, it may be useful for parents to comprehend the report if they wish to participate fully in the decision-making process. Parents who wish to support their children’s educational programming would benefit from a clear understanding of the recommendations of the psychological report. (Weiner & Kohler, 1986, p. 265).

The psychoeducational evaluation report must be written and explained at a level that the parents are able to understand. “A major finding was that use of professional terminology or jargon often results in misunderstanding of content” (Weiner & Kohler, 1986, p. 265). It is essential for parents to be able to understand the report in order for the parent(s) to truly be a member(s) of the eligibility committee. “The existing knowledge of readers of psychological reports (parents, teachers, principals, psychologists, and other professionals) needs to be considered when the report is being written.”(Weiner, 1987, p. 125) as well as when it is being interpreted. Often times, the eligibility committee meeting is the parent’s first exposure to the world of special education. This lack of experience in schools can pose a challenge to the school psychologist as it might make it more difficult to explain the psychoeducational evaluation report in a way that the parents can understand. In previous studies, “readers with less background in special education found it easier to comprehend reports that minimized or explained technical terms and provided examples for the concepts discussed” (Weiner, 1987, p. 125). Many parents have little background in Special Education.

Since teachers, principals and parents are part of the multidisciplinary teams that make decisions about placement and programs for handicapped children and most often are the implementers of recommendations made by psychologists, psychologists have an obligation to communicate the findings clearly to them. (Weiner, 1987, p. 126).

The psychologist must use language and words that the consumers can understand. The role of the school psychologist in the educational programming of the child ends with the psychological assessment and the parents, teachers and principals must pick up where the school psychologist has left off. Psychoeducational assessment, however, includes more than simply administering a battery of tests. "Psychoeducational assessment is "evaluations for diagnosis of handicapping conditions, testing, scoring and interpretation, report writing, eligibility and placement conferences with teachers and parents, and re-evaluations" (Reschly & Wilson, 1995, p. 13). This multifaceted definition of psychoeducational assessment clarifies the role of the school psychologist in the educational planning of the child. As is included in the definition, it is the responsibility of the school psychologist to not only write the psychoeducational evaluation report but to also interpret the report to the members of the eligibility committee. This responsibility includes the parents of the child in question. Parents have more than one role as consumer of school psychological services. They have the obvious role of parent but, they, like the teacher, will be expected to implement the plans of the I.E.P., therefore, they take on the role of teacher as well. An effective way to evaluate whether a school psychologist is meeting the needs of the parents is by simply asking the parents. One way to do this is through the use of surveys. Surveys are a common tool used to evaluate the efficacy of school psychological services. "Effective evaluation can increase a program's ability to serve its targeted population"(Goirdino, 1996, p. 1).

Marshall University Graduate College graduates, with an Educational Specialist degree enter the work force each year as certified/licensed school psychologists. School psychologists educated at MUGC are expected by MUGC professors of school psychology to perform in an exemplary fashion across the myriad of job expectations. One such expectation is that the school psychologist present him or herself at the eligibility committee meeting in a way that makes the parents comfortable and to feel that their input is not only welcome but also needed in order to make decisions about the educational needs of their child. Coupled with this expectation is that the school psychologist is able to explain the psychoeducational report to the parents of the

student evaluated in a way that is understandable and beneficial. It is of vital importance that parents, as part of a multidisciplinary team created to ensure the success of the student in question, are able to understand the results of any evaluations their child has completed. Without a thorough understanding, parents would be unable to aid in the making of any informed decisions about their child. It is also prudent that the parents feel at ease with the school psychologist, who is often times seen as the “gate keeper” to special education. (1990, p. 4).

As part of an ongoing effort to ensure that school psychologists who enter the work force, as MUGC graduates are qualified and competent, evaluation of the myriad of roles undertaken by the school psychologist must be performed. As it would present as an insurmountable task to evaluate every aspect of the school psychologist role, in this study, only one facet will be investigated-the eligibility committee meeting, which includes the ability to communicate with the parent the results of a psychoeducational evaluation as well as the capability to help the parent feel at ease. While looking at the performance of the school psychologist, one can get an idea of what is working pertaining to the conducting of the role the psychologist plays in the eligibility committee meeting and what is not in the School Psychology Program at Marshall. Information garnered from an investigation of the school psychologists that have graduated from the School Psychology program at MUGC can then be used to justify the current program at Marshall University or to indicate areas where there might be benefit from change.

“Graduate training programs face challenges as well as opportunities, in the fulfillment of their responsibilities to prepare school psychologists for entry into professional practice” (Curtis & Batsche, 1991, p. 1). Much time and effort is spent in the endeavor to educate school psychology students. MUGC requires a student complete 75 hours of course work, a comprehensive exam, a research project, practicum, an internship and PRAXIS exams in order to graduate and to be considered qualified to practice school psychology. These requirements are not out of the norm. As a general rule,

“school psychology training programs employ systematic, valid evaluation of candidates, coursework, practica, internship, faculty, supervisors, and resources and use the resulting information to monitor and improve program quality. A key aspect of program accountability is the assessment of the knowledge and capabilities of school psychology candidates and of the positive impact that interns and graduates have on services to

children, youth, families, and other consumers” (Standards For School Psychology, 2000, p. 19).

Jennings’ research (1989) indicates that accreditation standards should not be used as the sole measure of a program’s impact on educational outcomes for students. He further stated that programs must evaluate their output-or graduates. Graduates that train in a program that is not designed or outfitted to equip them with the tools necessary to be effective as school psychologists enter the work force unable to positively impact the student’s, teachers, parents and school systems with whom they work. “It is the responsibility of graduate training programs in school psychology to provide students with the building blocks for effective practice” (Ysseldyke, Dawson, Lehr, Reschly, Reynolds & Telzow, 1997, P. 6).

The School Psychology program at Marshall University Graduate College provides students with several opportunities to learn the role of the school psychologist during the eligibility committee meeting. Students learn the importance of consultation and how to consult with teacher and parents in School Psychology 617, which is aptly named Indirect Service Delivery I-Consultation. The goal of this class is to provide the student of school psychology with the necessary tools and information to develop a conceptual framework for providing consultative services to parents, teachers and other educational professionals. In this class, the student is taught communication skills. School Psychology 738, 739, and 740-Practicums I, II, and III, provides the student with a link between skill courses and practical experience. Students begin to learn early in the school psychology program of the importance of communication and of legal and ethical issues involved when working as a school psychologist. Students are afforded opportunities to demonstrate their acquired skills and to hone them while working with actual consumers of school psychology services is true-life situations. Finally, after all of the time spent in the classroom and all of the time spent in actual practice of school psychology through the constraints of the practicum experiences, the school psychologist is required to complete an internship which consists of working in the field of school psychology under the supervision of a certified school psychologist that has experience and under the supervision of a professor of school psychology at Marshall University Graduate College. The internship affords the school psychologist in training more opportunities to learn. How effective at preparing students to be successful as school psychologists are all of these opportunities to learn? A program evaluation of the School Psychology Program at MUGC could answer that question.

CHAPTER 2

Methods

Participants:

The subjects included in this survey analysis included five parent participants of eligibility committee meetings of each school psychologist who is a graduate of Marshall University Graduate College, is practicing in the field of school psychology and is a member of the West Virginia School Psychologists Association. The list of names and current addresses were obtained from Tanya Cook, Treasurer of the WVSPA. All psychologists on the list that met the above criteria were mailed the survey, a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study, and five postage paid envelopes.

Instrumentation:

The current study is a program evaluation of the MUGC school psychology program, more specifically, one aspect of the training program; the training of school psychologists in the participation in the eligibility committee meeting, including the interactions with the parent(s) and the interpretation of the psychoeducational report. Practicing school psychologists that met the above criteria were mailed five copies of a survey questionnaire developed for this research (Appendix A), which also included a cover letter of explanation. The survey was designed to produce both qualitative and quantitative data and developed primarily from a survey developed by Mac I. Barnett that was published in the NY School Psychologist. The survey, which consisted of ten questions, was structured in a logical order following the pattern of the eligibility meeting. The survey was completely anonymous. The survey was structured on a Likert-format rating scale of one through five. The choices were as follows: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Somewhat Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree, and Does Not Apply. The survey yielded quantitative data of the parent's level of satisfaction with the services rendered by the school psychologist during the eligibility meeting. Additional spaces for further comments or concerns followed at the end of the survey. This quality portion of the survey was added to produce information that may not have been specifically addressed in the survey.

Procedures:

A specific sample method (which is a nonrandom sample that is chosen to look at a specific population) was used to select the sample group. In this case, the sample group consisted of graduates of MUGC who are both members of WVSPA and practicing school psychology. The survey, with the cover letter and 5 postage-paid envelopes were mailed from MUGC to the psychologists listed residential address. The psychologists were asked to deliver the surveys to the parents of the next 5 eligibility meetings they conducted and wait for them to be returned to the psychologist in the postage-paid envelope, who would, in turn, forward the survey to the MUGC school psychology department, where they were accepted by the researcher for data analysis. The data were analyzed by descriptive statistical measures. Each question was assigned a numerical value and a mean and standard deviation calculated. Responses provided in the additional space at the end of the surveys were analyzed qualitatively.

CHAPTER 3

Results

A total of 350 surveys were mailed to each of 70 school psychologists (5 per psychologist) that are graduates of Marshall University and are practicing in the field of School Psychology in the state of West Virginia. Of the 350 surveys mailed, 46 were returned to the Psychology department. One of the 46 could not be utilized as the ratings were not clearly marked and the researcher could not determine which rating the participant wished to mark. Response to the survey was overwhelmingly positive. Mean responses for all of the statements presented fell at 3.7 or higher with the total possible rating being a 5. Statements with a mean falling below 4, which is represented on the survey as “Agree”, include only Statement number 6 which reads; I was given specific and helpful ideas for activities myself and my child could perform at home to help my child be more successful. 20 of the 450 possible answers were rated as 0 “Does Not Apply” by the respondents. These zeros were treated as missing data for the purpose of this study as, according to the parents who responded with the 0, these statements did not apply to them. As a result of the zeros being considered as missing data, the total number of participants may differ from question to question.

A breakdown of the individual statements presented on the survey indicates that parents are mostly satisfied with the school psychological services they are receiving. When addressing the first statement presented (The school psychologist was friendly and approachable), 32 of 45 or 71% of respondents indicated that they strongly agreed with that statement. A full 93.3% or 42 of 45 respondents rated this question with either a 4 or a 5 indicating that they either agreed or strongly agreed to this statement. One respondent disagreed and 2 respondents somewhat agreed. When considering if the psychological evaluation done of their child was accurate, clear, and understandable (Question # 2), 25 respondents indicated that they strongly agreed with this statement. This result represents over one half of all respondents or 55.6 %. 91.2 % of respondents indicated that they either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. One respondent indicated that this statement did not apply to their experience and 3 respondents indicated that they somewhat agreed with this statement. Concerning statement number 3 (The school psychologist explained the test results to me in a way that I could understand.), 57.8 % of respondents indicated that they strongly agreed with this statement and 33.3 % indicated that they agreed which signifies that 91.1 % of survey participants at least agree that the test results

were explained in a way that they could be understood. Again, one respondent indicated that this statement did not apply to their experience and 3 respondents indicated that they somewhat agreed.

How well did the parents feel that the psychologist understood their child's problems statement number 4)? 60 % of respondents indicated that they strongly agreed with this statement with a total of 93.3 % indicating that they at least agreed with this statement. 2 of the respondents indicated that this statement did not apply to their experience and 1 somewhat agreed. How do the parents perceive the ability of the school psychologist to offer ideas as to how the school can help their child (statement number 5) and/or ideas for activities at home (statement number 6)? These statements represent areas where the ratings were somewhat lower than the other areas measured. 46.7 % of parents surveyed strongly agreed that they were given specific ideas as to how the school could help their child with a total of 86.7 % of parents at least agreeing with this statement. One parent indicated that this statement did not apply to their experience and two parents offered negative ratings. One parent strongly disagreed with this statement and another disagreed. Three parents, or 6.7 %, somewhat agreed with the statement. When concerning ideas for home, 40 % of parents surveyed agreed that specific and helpful ideas for activities they and their child could perform at home were offered with 86.7 % of parents at least agreeing with this statement. However, one parent responded that this statement did not apply to their experience, 3 parents strongly disagreed with this statement (6.7%), 3 parents disagreed with this statement (6.7%), and 8 parents somewhat agreed with the statement (17.8%).

60 % of parents surveyed strongly agreed that the school psychologist showed respect for their ideas (statement number 7) with 88.9 % of those surveyed at least agreeing with this statement. Two parents (4.4%) indicated that this statement did not apply to their experience as consumers of school psychological services and 6.7%, or three parents, indicated that they somewhat agreed. How do parents feel about the program their child has been placed in? Do they believe it was appropriate and the least restrictive environment (statement number 8)? 60 % of parents surveyed strongly agreed with this statement with 17.8 percent more agreeing. 7 parents (15.6 %) indicated that this statement did not apply to their experience. 1 parent strongly disagreed and 2 parents somewhat agreed. What about the due process rights? Are they being explained to parents in a manner that is understandable (statement number 9)? According to the

parents surveyed, 44.4 % strongly agree. A total of 68.8 % of respondents indicated that they at least agree with this statement. 5 parents, or 11.1 % indicated that this statement did not apply to their experience, one parent strongly disagreed, one parent disagreed and 7 parents (15.6 %) somewhat agreed. Finally, when asked if they would feel comfortable talking to the school psychologist again (statement number 10), 73.3 % of respondents indicated that they strongly agreed with 93.3 % at least agreeing with this statement. 2 parents or 4.4 % somewhat agreed and 1 parent disagreed.

Space afforded on the bottom of the survey for suggestions or comments was utilized by 20 of the 45 parents that responded. Primarily, this space was used for positive comments such as “Everyone that assisted in the evaluation of my child was very helpful.” Or “This was a good experience for my family. Lots of positive since placement.” One psychologist was named by two of her respondents that indicated a positive experience. Two of the parents indicated that they felt rushed or needed more time. One parent indicated that the ideas to help the child at home were not helpful because the child will not do them for the parent. Two parents indicated that some of the information was confusing. Two parents indicated that they were simply given a copy of “due process” and that they were not explained and one parent indicated that no at home activities or due process rights were discussed. One parent indicated that testing should be done at the beginning of the school year instead of when so little time is left and finally, one parent offered that the psychologist was cold and impersonal. The parent had a daughter tested for the gifted program and the child did not qualify. This is the most negative of all of the surveys returned with the rating of 0 on statements 4-9, a 2 (Disagree) when presented with the statement “The school psychologist was friendly and approachable.” And a 2 (disagree) when rating the statement “I would feel comfortable talking to the school psychologist again if I needed to.

CHAPTER 4

Discussion

The rating of the performance of school psychologists that have graduated from MUGC is an expedient way to evaluate the school psychology program at MUGC. Overall, the majority of parents who participated in the survey indicate a positive experience when interacting with the school psychologist during the eligibility committee meeting. This result would tend to indicate that psychologists have been well educated and trained through their participation in the MUGC school psychology program. All statements rated yielded a mean score that fell in at least the “Agree” range of classification with the exception of number 6 which concerns activities for home. Statement number 8 yielded the highest number of 0-Does not apply responses. This result may have resulted from students not qualifying for the program for which they were being evaluated or from parents misunderstanding the question. Explaining due process rights appears to be an area where school psychologists are falling short and it might be advantageous to provide more ideas for the parent to utilize at home in order to help the child be more successful.

Limitations of this study are numerous. First of all, the school psychologists being rated read the survey before presenting it to the parents. Knowing what is expected, they could have modified their behavior and it is possible that eligibility meetings were conducted in a way that would yield positive ratings with the parents that would be completing the surveys but not with all parents. Statement number 8, which addresses the placement of the child in the least restrictive environment, by design yielded several does not apply answers which then colored the rest of the statistics for that particular statement. Parents, if unhappy with the placement of their child, might be eager to rate a school psychologist lower than he or she deserves out of disappointment or frustration. No control for this aspect of the study was offered. Along the same vein, parents who participate in an eligibility meeting for their “gifted” child are probably more likely to rate the psychologist favorably than parents who participate in a meeting concerning their “behavior disordered” child simply because one meeting would probably be more positive and up-beat than the other. Because of the number of “Does not apply” answers, it appears that parents might have had difficulty understanding some of the statements presented on the survey.

Further investigation might include re-administering the survey early in the school year in order to obtain a higher participation rate. Statement 8 should be reworded so that it says something like “I believe the program my child was placed in (or left in if left in the regular education setting) was appropriate and the least restrictive environment. The option of 0-Does not apply should be removed from the survey. Terms such as “least restrictive environment” should be explained to the parents participating in the survey. It should be noted somewhere on the survey if the child evaluated was placed in a program and if so, which program. It should also be noted on the survey whether or not the parent agreed with the placement. The statements on the survey would be less likely to lead the school psychologist if they were presented to the parents without the psychologist ever seeing them. It might also be beneficial to determine a way to ensure that the psychologist actually gave the survey to the next five parents instead of “hand picking” the parents as might have happened in this situation. It might be beneficial to the individual psychologist to identify him or herself in some way so that results could be shared with the individual psychologist and so that feedback could be provided with the individual psychologist to improve performance. Useful information about the school psychology program at MUGC could be gained if this study was repeated but with interns, practicum students and graduated/practicing school psychologists were measured. This diversity of levels might allow the faculty some insight into how to improve the School Psychology Program at MUGC-what works and what needs to be changed. Only through evaluation data can the MUGC School Psychology Program know the effectiveness of their product.

CHAPTER 5

Summary and Conclusion

Program evaluation is a useful tool for determining what aspects of a particular program need improvement. The School Psychology Program at Marshall University Graduate College is considered by many to be a program of quality and to produce quality graduates. How can we know if this is true? Through program evaluation of the School Psychology program, it can be determined the merit of the program. By measuring the effectiveness of School Psychologists that have graduated from MUGC when conducting an eligibility committee meeting and in the explanation of the psychoeducational evaluation report, it can be determined if the School Psychology program at MUGC is teaching students the correct and most effective ways to participate in the eligibility committee meeting and/or if there are aspects of the program that need to be modified in order to better meet the needs of the consumers of school psychology services.

The current study was conducted to measure the perception of one consumer of school psychology services, the parent. The survey was designed with 10 statements that required the respondent to rate how much he or she agreed. These statements were tailored in order to cover several aspects of the eligibility committee meeting. Surveys were collected and calculated in order to ascertain the level of satisfaction. Overall, the parents who participated in this study are pleased with the school psychology services they have received. Survey results were mostly positive with only a few negative comments. It would appear, from the results of the current study, that MUGC has been producing quality graduates for several years.

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Appendix 1

Date: May 9, 2005

Dear School Psychologist;

Attached to this letter you will find a survey, which was adopted from a survey created by Mac.I Barnett that was published in the NY School Psychologist. The results of this survey are to be used as part of a thesis research project, which is evaluating the effectiveness of the school psychology program at MUGC. By investigating the effectiveness of school psychologists graduates in thir role in the eligibility committee meeting and in the explanation of the Psychoeducational evaluation report, this study will evaluate MUGC school psychology program effectiveness.

Please ask the parents from the next five eligibility meetings you take part in after you receive the survey to complete the survey and place it in the envelope provided which they can then seal. Your name need not be on the survey. Please ask the parent to complete the survey before they leave the meeting so that they can give it to you. After the parent completes the survey and returns it to you in the sealed envelope, return the completed surveys to me at MUGC in the envelopes provided. I thank you in advance for you help in the completion of this thesis project. If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Fred Jay Krieg at Marshall University Graduate College or myself at (304) 622-0899.

Debbie Henderson

Psychology Graduate Student

Sincerely,

Fred Jay Krieg, Ph. D.

Professor of School Psychology

Program Director

*Please return to MUGC by June 2, 2005.

Appendix 2

How Am I Doing?

Following is a short survey I would like you to complete as a part of a research project concerning the effectiveness of School Psychologists. Please take the time to answer the following questions and return this survey to the psychologist sealed in the envelope provided. Another School Psychologist will calculate results of the survey. I will not see your survey. Your answers will be confidential.

	Strongly disagree 1	Disagree 2	Somewhat agree 3	Agree 4	Strongly agree 5	Does Not apply 0
1. The School Psychologist was friendly and approachable.						1 2 3 4 5 0
2. I believe the psychological evaluation done of my child was accurate, clear, and understandable.						1 2 3 4 5 0
3. The School Psychologist explained the test results to me in a way that I could understand.						1 2 3 4 5 0
4. The School Psychologist seemed to understand my child's problem(s).						1 2 3 4 5 0
5. I was given ideas as to how the school might be able to help my child.						1 2 3 4 5 0
6. I was given specific and helpful ideas for activities myself and my child could perform at home to help my child be more successful.						1 2 3 4 5 0
7. The School Psychologist showed respect for my ideas.						1 2 3 4 5 0
8. I believe the program my child was placed in was appropriate and the least restrictive environment.						1 2 3 4 5 0
9. My due process rights were explained to me in a manner that was understandable.						1 2 3 4 5 0
10. I would feel comfortable talking to the school psychologist again if needed to.						1 2 3 4 5 0

Please feel free to write further comments about how your interacting with the School Psychologist could have been made better.

Frequencies

Statistics

The School Psychologist was friendly and approachable.

N	Valid	45
	Missing	0
Mean		4.6222
Std. Deviation		.68387
Minimum		2.00
Maximum		5.00

The School Psychologist was friendly and approachable.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	1	2.2	2.2	2.2
	Somewhat Agree	2	4.4	4.4	6.7
	Agree	10	22.2	22.2	28.9
	Strongly Agree	32	71.1	71.1	100.0
	Total	45	100.0	100.0	

Statistics

I believe the psychological evaluation done of my child was accurate, clear, and understandable.

N	Valid	44
	Missing	1
Mean		4.5000
Std. Deviation		.62877
Minimum		3.00
Maximum		5.00

I believe the psychological evaluation done of my child was accurate, clear, and understandable.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Somewhat Agree	3	6.7	6.8	6.8
	Agree	16	35.6	36.4	43.2
	Strongly Agree	25	55.6	56.8	100.0
	Total	44	97.8	100.0	
Missing	System	1	2.2		
Total		45	100.0		

Statistics

The School Psychologist explained the test results to me in a way that I could understand.

N	Valid	44
	Missing	1
Mean		4.5227
Std. Deviation		.62835
Minimum		3.00
Maximum		5.00

The School Psychologist explained the test results to me in a way that I could understand.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Somewhat Agree	3	6.7	6.8	6.8
	Agree	15	33.3	34.1	40.9
	Strongly Agree	26	57.8	59.1	100.0
	Total	44	97.8	100.0	
Missing	System	1	2.2		
Total		45	100.0		

Statistics

The School Psychologist seemed to understand my child's problems.

N	Valid	43
	Missing	2
Mean		4.6047
Std. Deviation		.54070
Minimum		3.00
Maximum		5.00

The School Psychologist seemed to understand my child's problems.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Somewhat Agree	1	2.2	2.3	2.3
	Agree	15	33.3	34.9	37.2
	Strongly Agree	27	60.0	62.8	100.0
	Total	43	95.6	100.0	
Missing	System	2	4.4		
Total		45	100.0		

Statistics

I was given ideas as to how the school might be able to help my child.

N	Valid	44
	Missing	1
Mean		4.2955
Std. Deviation		.87815
Minimum		1.00
Maximum		5.00

I was given ideas as to how the school might be able to help my child.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	1	2.2	2.3	2.3
	Disagree	1	2.2	2.3	4.5
	Somewhat Agree	3	6.7	6.8	11.4
	Agree	18	40.0	40.9	52.3
	Strongly Agree	21	46.7	47.7	100.0
	Total	44	97.8	100.0	
Missing	System	1	2.2		
Total		45	100.0		

Statistics

I was given specific and helpful ideas for activities myself and my child could perform at home to help my child be more successful.

N	Valid	44
	Missing	1
Mean		3.8864
Std. Deviation		1.22410
Minimum		1.00
Maximum		5.00

I was given specific and helpful ideas for activities myself and my child could perform at home to help my child be more successful.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	3	6.7	6.8	6.8
	Disagree	3	6.7	6.8	13.6
	Somewhat Agree	8	17.8	18.2	31.8
	Agree	12	26.7	27.3	59.1
	Strongly Agree	18	40.0	40.9	100.0
Total		44	97.8	100.0	
Missing	System	1	2.2		
Total		45	100.0		

Statistics

The School Psychologist showed respect for my ideas.

N	Valid	43
	Missing	2
Mean		4.5581
Std. Deviation		.62877
Minimum		3.00
Maximum		5.00

The School Psychologist showed respect for my ideas.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Somewhat Agree	3	6.7	7.0	7.0
	Agree	13	28.9	30.2	37.2
	Strongly Agree	27	60.0	62.8	100.0
	Total	43	95.6	100.0	
Missing	System	2	4.4		
Total		45	100.0		

Statistics

I believe the program my child was placed in was appropriate and the least restrictive environment.

N	Valid	38
	Missing	7
Mean		4.5789
Std. Deviation		.82631
Minimum		1.00
Maximum		5.00

I believe the program my child was placed in was appropriate and the least restrictive environment.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	1	2.2	2.6	2.6
	Somewhat Agree	2	4.4	5.3	7.9
	Agree	8	17.8	21.1	28.9
	Strongly Agree	27	60.0	71.1	100.0
Total		38	84.4	100.0	
Missing	System	7	15.6		
Total		45	100.0		

Statistics

My due process rights were explained to me in a manner that was understandable.

N	Valid	40
	Missing	5
Mean		4.2000
Std. Deviation		.99228
Minimum		1.00
Maximum		5.00

My due process rights were explained to me in a manner that was understandable.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	1	2.2	2.5	2.5
	Disagree	1	2.2	2.5	5.0
	Somewhat Agree	7	15.6	17.5	22.5
	Agree	11	24.4	27.5	50.0
	Strongly Agree	20	44.4	50.0	100.0
Total		40	88.9	100.0	
Missing	System	5	11.1		
Total		45	100.0		

Statistics

I would feel comfortable talking to the School Psychologist again if I needed to.

N	Valid	45
	Missing	0
Mean		4.6444
Std. Deviation		.67942
Minimum		2.00
Maximum		5.00

I would feel comfortable talking to the School Psychologist again if I needed to.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	1	2.2	2.2	2.2
	Somewhat Agree	2	4.4	4.4	6.7
	Agree	9	20.0	20.0	26.7
	Strongly Agree	33	73.3	73.3	100.0
	Total	45	100.0	100.0	

Curriculum Vitae

Debra S. Henderson

261 Magnolia Avenue
Clarksburg, West Virginia
(304) 622-0899
upwardbound2@hotmail.com

Objective

To complete a thesis research project implementing surveys to evaluate the effectiveness of a portion of the school psychology-training program at Marshall University Graduate College.

Education and Training

Marshall University Graduate College, South Charleston. West Virginia-will graduate summer 2005 with a Masters of Arts degree in Psychology and an Educational Specialist Degree.

West Virginia University, Morgantown West Virginia-Regents Bachelor's of Arts-Spring 1999.

Ritchie County High School, Harrisville, West Virginia-graduated in 1998.

Experience

October 2004 to present-working as a part time school psychologist with the Harrison County West Virginia school system. Responsible for evaluation, consultation, psychoeducational reports, attending eligibility committee meetings, crisis intervention, and many other aspects of the job of a school psychologist.

Fall 2002 to Spring 2003-completing an internship in school psychology in the Pleasants County West Virginia school system. Responsible for evaluation, counseling, consultation, Psychoeducational reports, attending eligibility committee meetings, crisis intervention, and many other aspects of the job of a school psychologist.

December 1999 to June 2002-substitute teacher in the Ritchie County West Virginia school system. Responsible for teaching in a variety of classroom situations in every age range and subject found in the public school system.