

Navigating Practicum, Internship, and Early Career School Psychology Experiences in Light of the Pandemic

Innovations in Practica and Internships Team, NASP Graduate Education Committee

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Applied experiences during practica, internship, and early career work are a central component of training in the field of school psychology. Trainees and early career school psychologists (ECSPs) at these critical stages of professional development have been undoubtedly impacted by school closures, non-traditional instructional models, and challenges experienced in K-12 and higher education settings during the COVID-19 pandemic. A recent survey of practicing school psychologists revealed that the primary roles of school psychologists shifted away from psychoeducational assessment activities to consultation/collaboration, meeting attendance, and counseling for students (Schaffer et al., 2021). Other notable shifts included less involvement in academic and behavior intervention planning and crisis prevention and intervention, with a greater emphasis on family-school collaboration and researching of social, emotional, behavioral, or academic interventions/supports. Trainees and early career professionals entering new training and professional roles in the fall of 2021 may have a different level of preparedness for various roles and functions of school psychological work. Trainees, ECSPs and their university and district-based supervisors and mentors will need to be thoughtful in planning for a successful transition into these new positions.

The *Innovations in Practicum and Internship* subcommittee of the *NASP Graduate Education Committee* distributed a resource (Monahan et al., 2020) in the fall of 2020 with suggestions for ways school psychology trainees could gain competency through virtual experiences to accommodate the distance-learning shift that occurred both in K-12 and higher education settings. The committee has developed this additional resource to support trainees and ECSPs as they navigate through what is sure to be another challenging year in K-12 education. The resource is organized into two main sections. The first section is a table that identifies the skills and experiences of trainees most impacted by the pandemic; in columns one and two, these skills and experiences are overviewed and aligned to the NASP practice model (NASP, 2020). The third column of this table identifies key areas for training and mentoring opportunities to bolster the preparedness of trainees and ECSPs. Trainees and supervisors/mentors are encouraged to work collaboratively to identify areas of core school psychology competency that will require additional training or support as trainees and ECSPs transition into the new academic year. The second section provides an overview of specific supervision and mentoring techniques and strategies that could be used to further support professional development and growth.

NASP DOMAIN	Impacted Skills/Experiences	Training/Mentoring Opportunities
<p>Data-based decision making and accountability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Limited opportunities for in-person assessments, including observations and testing. ● Fewer assessments during school closures contributed to fewer opportunities to participate in multidisciplinary teams to review assessment data ● Limited available data to triangulate/consider in decision making across IDEA, 504 and intervention services ● Limited opportunity to help examine school-wide data (e.g., office discipline referrals, suspension, progress monitoring data) in order to help make individual student and programmatic decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide extra opportunities for assessment with feedback. ● Consider “mock” multidisciplinary team meetings to increase opportunities to practice explaining assessment findings and decision making ● Emphasize ecological perspective in decision making; some problems may be due to missing learning opportunities ● Provide opportunities and support regarding how school-wide data connects to identification of individual students who may need additional support, and programmatic decisions at all tiers ● Engage in discussions about the manner in which data collection, availability and interpretation contribute to equitable and inequitable outcomes
<p>Consultation and collaboration</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fewer opportunities for consultation and collaboration ● Increased need for teleconsultation during pandemic, but perhaps also in future ● Less experience navigating in-person school climate/culture, including 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Collaborate with students to provide targeted opportunities for consultation to address academic and behavioral needs ● Discuss the pros and cons of in person vs. tele-consultation

	<p>meeting colleagues and establishing collaborative relationships</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide opportunities for applied teleconsultation practice with supervision ● Integrate discussion of school climate/culture as part of practicum/internship experiences, and supervision for first-year psychologists
<p>Academic interventions and instructional supports</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fewer opportunities to support schools through instructional consultation. Many students returning to school will have academic deficits or delays which may overwhelm teachers and the school’s available interventions ● Limited experiences with direct intervention planning and implementation due to circumstances related to the pandemic (e.g., school closures, virtual instruction) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Supervisors should be deliberate about providing opportunities to engage interns and early career school psychologists in addressing learning loss through consultation with teachers regarding how they can meet the needs of most P-12 students through core instruction ● Engage interns and early career school psychologists in addressing learning loss through academic interventions (RtI/MTSS) when a student’s needs are not adequately recouping/developing through core instruction alone
<p>Mental and behavioral services and interventions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fewer opportunities to implement mental and behavioral services and interventions at a time when staff and K-12 students who are returning from distance or hybrid learning environments are likely to experience increased anxiety and require support adjusting to a more traditional structure and routine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Teach/learn the COVID-19 School Adjustment Risk Matrix (C-SARM) as a method of proactively identifying students most likely to require support (available on NASP website) ● Create opportunities for interns and early career school psychologists to share resources to

		<p>have in their “toolbox” for the provision of mental health services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide additional supervision for the development and implementation of behavior plans
<p>School-wide practices to promote learning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Limited exposure to school or district-wide practices compared to previous cohorts of trainees/ECSPs ● Increased need for academic remediation and behavioral support post-pandemic due to limitations of distance learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Make a more intentional, concerted effort to learn about practices/policies that impact support learning at the school and district level. ● Utilize the opportunity to examine instructional needs across the school environment and participate in planning, development, and implementation of a MTSS to address those needs across all tiers
<p>Services to promote safe and supportive schools</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lack of exposure to school-wide implementation for SEL expectations and SEL instruction in traditional school setting; may also be an increased need for these supports post-pandemic ● Limited opportunities to observe or participate in risk assessments (suicide, self-injury or threat) or manifestation determinations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide additional support to interns and early career school psychologists as they participate in establishing Tier 1 supports, as well as tiered interventions and crisis planning/drills ● Encourage graduate students to advocate for additional experiences and training to fill in any gaps they may have missed ● Consider “mock” risk assessments or manifestation determination meetings to provide opportunities for practice

<p>Family, school, and community collaboration</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited exposure to and experience working with students and families with high needs or most vulnerable during the pandemic (i.e., those that faced many challenges with distance learning, such as limited access to the internet or students with disabilities) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase opportunities and support for trainees and early career school psychologists to work with families and students experiencing challenges or situational social-emotional concerns, such as anxiety about returning to in-person instruction Increase opportunities for experience with P-12 students with a range of disabilities, including low-incidence disabilities
<p>Equitable practices for diverse student populations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased need for minoritized families and those from lower SES backgrounds to gain access to resources, as the pandemic and distance learning inequitably, negatively impacted specific student groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training programs can emphasize discriminating learning losses from lack of instruction from learning challenges due to disability or lack of access Training programs and supervisors can explicitly discuss the role and impact of bias, power, and privilege within their local systems as well as their roles as school psychologists
<p>Research and evidence-based practice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There may be increased referrals for retention and special education assessments following a year of varied instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support interns and early career school psychologists as they work toward implementation of best practices. Make sure they have resources/research to share on (in)effectiveness of retention, evidence-based curriculum and programs

<p>Legal, ethical, and professional practice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Schools may struggle to provide services due to an increase in need coupled with limited resources and personnel ● Limited exposure to a robust set of mentors and professionals in school settings due to social distancing restrictions and limitations of virtual meetings and spaces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Help interns and early career school psychologists explore how to utilize the resources that are present to help ensure best practices, as well as explore other low-cost or free resources to better meet the needs of the system ● Create opportunities for individual and group supervision and formal and informal mentorship activities
<p>PROFESSIONAL DISPOSITIONS</p>		
<p>Oral and written communication</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Limited opportunity for oral presentations and communications in-person 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review and reinforce best practices in formal and informal communication. ● Provide practice with meeting facilitation, participation, and oral presentation
<p>Technology skills</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Enhanced technology skills after a year of virtual classes and meetings (using platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams) ● Increased familiarity and skills in telepsychology and telesupervision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Have experienced graduate students share their techniques, tricks, and skills with their peers and colleagues ● Discuss appropriate use of telepsychology and telesupervision with return to in-person schooling
<p>Initiative and professional accountability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● School psychology trainees and professionals demonstrated resilience during this challenging year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identify strengths, resources, and assets after a year of pandemic training or work
<p>Interpersonal skills</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Limited access to in-person contacts over the course of the year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Discuss subtle interpersonal skills for working with teachers and parents

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Overreliance on virtual interactions may create personal anxiety and stress to return to in-person social interactions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Utilize “mock” meetings and role plays with supervisors to practice engagement opportunities ● Discuss personal adjustment to increased demand for social interactions and monitor wellbeing
Professional identity development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increased access to professional development resources available via TSP, NASP, and other professional organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Encourage continued utilization of professional resources while in graduate school and in career
Reflective practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fewer cases/experiences, so less opportunity to engage in “critical thinking” ● Fewer informal opportunities with peers and colleagues to debrief and discuss cases/experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Encourage self-assessment of skill and knowledge development and self-advocacy for needed experiences and resources ● Discuss importance of informal social connections and activities (e.g., shared lunch breaks, casual conversations, open-door policies, etc.); model for trainees and early career professionals

Supervision and Mentorship Activities to Support Professional Development and Growth

Self-Assessment: Self-assessment promotes self-reflection of one's strengths and deficiencies (Newman, 2020) and is a skill that should be fostered in both pre-service and professional settings. Trainees and ECSPs should closely consider their own training, experiences, and current skills in the context of the various domains of school psychological practice. NASP offers its members an online self-assessment tool (https://apps.nasponline.org/standards-and-certification/survey/survey_launch.aspx) aligned to the Practice Model that can be used to identify various strengths and limitations and develop professional development goals. Practicing psychologists that complete the assessment and corresponding *NASP Professional Growth Plan* are also eligible for NASP-approved Continuing Professional Development (CPD) credit.

I Do it, We Do It, You Do it Approach: Within a developmental model of supervision, it is important to consider that an individual's skills may be unevenly developed across the broad roles and functions of school psychological practice. Competency in any given domain is, in part, a function of applied experience with an activity. For example, an intern's skills in the area of behavioral intervention may be approaching those of an entry-level practitioner at the start of the internship, while the same trainee's skills in the area of consultation may be closer to a competent level. Supervisor's can use an I do it (supervisor models with trainee or ECSP observation), we do it (supervisor and trainee or ECSP conduct the activity collaboratively), you do it (trainee or ECSP completes activity independently with coaching/supervision supports) approach to help trainee's develop skills in areas that fall toward the novice range. A plan to use this approach with specific activities identified through self-assessment and professional growth planning may be identified early in the year.

Self-Supervision: Empowering trainees and ECSPs with the ability to self-supervise in new settings will also help them thrive and navigate novel and unexpected challenges. Helping trainees and ECSPs work toward self-sufficiency as a school psychologist can be achieved by teaching them self-assessment, stress management, and time management (Harvey & Struzziero, 2008) skills. Further, supervisees should be supported in recognizing the boundaries of their competence so as to not engage in practices beyond their knowledge and skill levels.

Formal Mentoring for ECSPs: Mentoring and professional support is important throughout a school psychologist's career and particularly critical during the early stages of practice. Early career school psychologists (ECSPs) entering the field should advocate for and establish formal mentorship that will promote success and positive development of one's professional identity. NASP has several resources for mentorship available to its members, including a formal mentorship program (www.nasponline.org/mentorship) and guidelines for obtaining meaningful mentorship in the *Guidance for Postgraduate Mentorship and Professional Support* (NASP, 2021).

Resources: The following are supervision and mentoring resources that may be helpful to support training and professional development.

Websites with general information on learning and behavioral interventions:

Intervention Central <https://www.interventioncentral.org/>

Evidence-based Intervention Network <https://education.missouri.edu/ebi/>

National Center on Intensive Interventions <https://intensiveintervention.org/>

Websites focusing on literacy:

Reading Rockets <https://www.readingrockets.org/>

Florida Center on Reading Research <https://www.fcrr.org/>

Media Resources:

APM Reports/Reading Emily Hanford's podcasts: <https://features.apmreports.org/reading/>

Science of Reading <https://www.facebook.com/groups/729021010879697>

School Psyched Podcast <https://www.facebook.com/SchoolPsychedPodcast>

References

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