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## From Research To Practice: The Process Of Training School Psychologists As Knowledge Transfer Professionals

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### Abstract

School psychologists, as scientist-practitioners, work to bring empirically-based approaches to educational settings. Knowledge Transfer (KT), the meaningful translation of research into practical settings, is vital to the profession and encompasses a central role in all areas of clinical competency. Although an integral part of practitioner education, few have explored the process of KT training in detail. This paper reviews the application of KT to the training of and learning process for a class of 8 graduate students in School Psychology at the University of Manitoba in Canada. Students met with classroom teachers to identify training and/or knowledge gaps for handling classroom challenges. Collaboratively, graduate students narrowed down areas of focus and developed a quick reference manual to address these gaps by promoting knowledge about mental health, providing effective and practical classroom strategies, and equipping educators with additional resources for working with children of special populations. The training process involved a needs assessment with teachers, a synthesis of results to identify the most prevalent challenges encountered by new educators, an iterative process of editing and revising multiple drafts to create a refined product, the delivery of a preliminary product to teachers, gathering feedback about the usefulness and value of the product, and the creation of a final product designed to meet identified knowledge needs. KT is integral to the profession of School Psychology and warrants further exploration for both training and practical applications.

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### 1. Introduction

Knowledge Transfer (also known as knowledge translation in some fields) is in essence the process of putting

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research into action. The Canadian Institutes of Health Research defines Knowledge Translation as a complex and dynamic process that requires the individual disseminating knowledge to synthesize, exchange, and ethically apply information in the way that benefits and provides more effective services to individuals, and that best suits the needs of a particular audience [1]. Such distribution of information is based on a cooperative partnership between researchers and knowledge-users, a feature that is paramount to the success of KT [2, 3].

Psychologists who work in schools are unique among those in their field as they hold expertise in mental health, learning, and education. School psychologists are trained as scientist-practitioners, a professional model that emphasizes conducting, analysing, and synthesizing research, providing evidence-based practices in their own work, and communicating and applying research results in effective and understandable ways [4, 5]. Because school psychologists provide a wide variety of educational and mental health services to schools, families, and other educational professionals, they must be especially proficient at KT so that they can integrate research findings and apply them to practical settings in appropriate and meaningful ways.

Although KT is not explicitly identified as an area of expertise in the professional practice guidelines outlined by the National Association of School Psychologists [6], considerable skill in KT is required across all domains of competency. For example, school psychologists may provide others with opportunities for professional development by holding workshops and presentations, guiding knowledge users to reliable research information, and communicating research to parents and school teams in usable forms (e.g. newsletter entries, brochures for parents and teachers, fact sheets). School psychologists must also be able to communicate to parents, teachers, and other educational professionals about how individual assessment results relate to prevention and intervention plans, relay information to other clinicians about the effectiveness of tests and programs, translate and apply research in practical ways to home and school environments, design and implement evidence-based programs, translate theory to instructional practice, and to maintain knowledge about empirically supported educational strategies and instruction.

Knowledge Transfer overarches all areas of competency in school psychology, yet there have been few reports explicitly outlining the steps involved in this process [7]. This paper will describe a specific project applying KT principles conducted by a class of 8 graduate students training as School Psychologists at the University of Manitoba in Canada. A resource and reference manual was created to address challenges faced by teachers in educating children with exceptionalities. This product was collaboration between graduate students, their instructor and the instructional assistant, and classroom teachers. The primary goal of this project was to prepare students to conceptualize their roles as scientist-practitioners via the Knowledge Transfer paradigm. A needs assessment with new educators, a synthesis of survey results to identify the most prevalent areas of need, the development of a work plan, the editing and revision process, and an overview of the final product will be discussed.

## 2. The Need

It is becoming increasingly difficult for educators to cope with the growing demands of classroom settings. Classroom sizes are increasing, as are the numbers of identified children with exceptionalities [8]. Having adequate mental health training is particularly important for school professionals as they are in an excellent position to monitor students' social, emotional, behavioural and academic functioning on a regular basis. As well, teachers remain in close contact with students' primary healthcare providers: their parents [9]. Although educators may be ideally situated to take on this role, a majority of teachers believe that their training in mental health is limited, do not feel confident in their ability to manage mental health-related issues in their classrooms, and feel a need for more tools and resources in this area [10, 11], which school psychologists are often requested to provide. This lack of training has been identified by teachers as one of the greatest barriers to surmounting disruptive behaviours and mental health issues in schools [11]. Tremendous pressure is placed on teachers to provide students with opportunities to succeed in all facets of education, including literacy, numeracy, fostering knowledge in sciences, history, and arts, as well as promoting students' cultural and societal awareness. Because of these and countless other demands of teaching school curricula, there is often limited time available for teachers to consult with psychologists and attend in-service education.

To address these concerns, a graduate school psychology class conducted a resource-development project as part of the course requirements of PSYC 7830 (Intervention II). The project idea emerged from students' practicum experiences in the field, with school staff indicating that teachers felt overwhelmed and unsure of how to address various challenges in their classrooms. Although the primary goal of this project was to assist school psychology students operationalize their roles as scientist-practitioners and KT professionals, the product of this training

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