

Comprehensive Assessment of Emotional Disturbance: A Cross-Validation Approach

Emily S. Fisher,
Katie E. Doyon and
Enrique Saldaña
Loyola Marymount University

Megan Redding Allen
University of California, Santa Barbara

Assessing a student for emotional disturbance is a serious and complex task given the stigma of the label and the ambiguities of the federal definition. One way that school psychologists can be more confident in their assessment results is to cross validate data from different sources using the RIOT approach (Review, Interview, Observe, Test). Because each data collection process has advantages and limitations, using all four processes together allows for comprehensive assessment for emotional disturbance. Additionally, school psychologists should strongly consider a student's strengths, cultural factors, and the interaction between the student and the environment in order to interpret assessment findings. This approach serves to tailor interventions regardless of diagnosis.

Assessing a student for emotional disturbance (ED) is a complex task both because of the ambiguities of the diagnosis in the educational code and because of the seriousness of assigning this classification to a student. While it is tempting to want to use standardized assessments to make a definitive diagnosis of ED, other forms of data collection are equally important as they allow for the cross-validation of information from various sources. Leung (1993) first wrote about a method of comprehensive assessment using the acronym of RIOT (Review, Interview, Observe, Test). Leung acknowledged that each technique has flaws and advocated using information from all four data sources to support conclusions about diagnoses. By incorporating information from the cumulative folder, interviews with parents, teachers, and the student, and observations in the classroom and alternative settings along with data from instruments and tests, school psychologists can better justify their conclusions and present information in a truly comprehensive manner that allows parents and school personnel to have confidence in the results.

At the beginning of an ED assessment, most often, school personnel have already identified social, emotional, and/or behavioral problems as a primary concern and the reason for referral is to determine the extent to which such problems are contributing to the student's overall school functioning. While the school psychologist will collect copious amounts of data about the student's functioning over the course of the assessment, it is imperative that the school psychologist also consider the ecological context in which the student's behaviors occur (Wright, Gurman, & The California Association of School Psychologists/Diagnostic Center, Southern California Positive Intervention Task Force, 2001). This allows the school psychologist to understand the reciprocal relationship between the student and the environment (Landau & Swerdlik, 2005) and to examine whether adequate interventions were implemented during the pre-referral process. Additionally, by conceptualizing the problems from an ecological perspective, school psychologists are better prepared to make recommendations for interventions at the conclusion of the assessment, regardless of the ultimate diagnosis.

REVIEW OF RECORDS

There is virtually no recent research literature on reviewing cumulative records; however, the diagnosis of emotional and behavioral problems should begin with an understanding of the student's prior school experience. A review of records provides the school psychologist guidance about what information needs to be gathered from other assessment procedures and about interventions that have been attempted to help the student be more successful in school. For example, if the school psychologist finds major changes in school functioning of a 10th grade student occurred during 7th grade, he or she will want to elicit perspectives on these changes during the parent and student interviews. Additionally, it would be helpful for the school psychologist to speak with the student's 7th grade teacher for more information and to find out what interventions, if any, were implemented during that year. Similarly, a review of records can inform the school psychologist about questions to ask during interviews, when and where to observe the student, and which tests and instruments might be most appropriate.

In the case of an ED assessment, a record review is crucial to determine if the student has had emotional, social, and/or behavioral problems "over a long period of time" as required by the federal definition of emotional disturbance (Friend, 2008, p. 203). Because interviews rely on retrospective reports of the onset of problems, the student's cumulative records provide a less biased report of the student's prior functioning in school. Report card comments can often provide some evidence of social/emotional functioning over time.

In addition to onset, there is other key information to attend to in the cumulative record, and it is as important to note a lack of findings (i.e., lack of evidence of ED) as it is to note significant findings (i.e., evidence of ED). In addition to examining grades and test scores, school psychologists should look for any early warning signs of emotional problems such as difficult transitions to school and between schools, teacher comments on social skills, discipline records, frequent visits to the nurse's office, counseling referrals, and abnormalities in attendance (e.g., excessive absences or tardiness). It is also important to note non-normative transitions such as changing schools mid-year. A review of records should also document attempts at intervention and the outcomes of such interventions. Most often, there will have been some type of pre-referral team meeting to discuss the student and develop a plan for action, including interventions. Rather than just documenting the interventions from the pre-referral meeting papers, the school psychologist should investigate whether the interventions were actually implemented with integrity and what worked as well as what did not. The school psychologist might consider examining interventions from a Response-to-Intervention approach, which provides the student with increasingly intensive interventions (Fairbanks, Sugai, Guardino, & Lathrop, 2007). A diagnosis of ED should not be considered if appropriate interventions have not been tried.

Leung (1993) highlighted the limitations of information gathered through a review of a student's records, including "dated materials, incomplete records, [and] skewed opinions" (p. 6). When making inferences about what information records reveal, the school psychologist should cross-validate this information with other assessment procedures before drawing conclusions. So, if it is noted that the student has frequent absences, tardiness, and trips to the nurse's office, the school psychologist might form the hypothesis that the student may be experiencing significant anxiety or fear about school. In this case, interviews and standardized measures could be used to test if this is a correct hypothesis.

INTERVIEWS

Interviewing is a commonly used and important tool in the assessment of students for ED. An interview can be defined as an interpersonal encounter to obtain information about a person's symptoms and behaviors, while providing the opportunity for observation of verbal and nonverbal behaviors (Aklin & Turner, 2006). During a comprehensive assessment, interviews should be conducted with the student, his or her parents, and the school staff working directly with the student. Collecting information from these varied perspectives through the interviewing process is important in making eligibility decisions.

The two types of interviews generally used in an assessment are unstructured or open interviews and semi-structured or structured interviews. In an unstructured interview, the school psychologist determines what questions will be asked. School psychologists can collect information on both strengths and challenges the student is having, and tailor questions based on interviewee responses. While this type of interview allows the assessment to fit the individual needs of the interviewee, there are problems with variance and they tend to be unreliable, reflecting more the psychologist's perception than a reliable and accurate picture of the student's functioning (Aklin & Turner, 2006; Kamphaus & Frick, 2005).

Semi-structured and structured interviews consist of a set of questions that are asked to the student, parent, or teacher. A stem question is generally provided and then if it is answered affirmatively, follow-up questions are asked based on the response. Structured interviews are more rigid in terms of the questions asked and provide explicit scoring criteria, while semi-structured interviews generally provide sets of questions allowing for some flexibility to ask follow-up questions. Both show better reliability and validity than unstructured interviews, and these types of interviews have been found to increase the accuracy of diagnosis for individuals of diverse backgrounds because they rely more on standardized criteria rather than interpretation (Aklin & Turner, 2006; Kamphaus & Frick, 2005). One example of a semi-structured interview that may be appropriate for use for an ED assessment is the Child Assessment Schedule (CAS; Hodges, Kline, Stern, Cytryn, & McKnew, 1982), which has been shown to have good reliability and validity (Hodges, Cools, & McKnew, 1989; Hodges & Saunders, 1989).

Structured and semi-structured interviews have some limitations that the school psychologist should consider. First, interviews can last for 60-90 minutes, generally longer than an open interview. Additionally, there is some evidence that the student's self report on diagnostic interviews is unreliable for students younger than 9 years (Hodges & Zeman, 1993).

By using interviews, especially a semi-structured interview supplemented with other important questions, the school psychologist can better understand the parameters of a student's emotions and behaviors that are not generally assessed by a behavior rating scale or classroom observations. For example, information can be obtained about the duration of the student's behavioral difficulties, the age at which the problems began to emerge, the level of impairment that is associated with the symptoms, and when symptoms occur (Merrell, 2003). An interview can assess additional psychosocial stressors that may contribute to a student's emotional difficulties, allowing the symptoms to be understood within the context. Interviewing also allows the school psychologist to establish rapport, trust, and security with the student, family, and teacher, which may be crucial to the eventual implementation of an intervention plan.

OBSERVATIONS

Observing a student is "one of the most direct and objective" (Merrell, 2003, p. 51) ways for the school psychologist to see a student's interactions and behaviors in various naturalistic settings (e.g.,

classroom and playground) across time. There are definite limitations to observations, such as observer bias and observer influence on a student's behavior (Leung, 1993) and the time commitment that observations require is great, but observations can provide valuable information about a student's current performance. Observations also allow the school psychologist to better understand the interaction between the student and the environment, which helps determine the antecedents, consequences, and functions of behaviors and to plan interventions. The school psychologist might want to conduct observations before conducting the student interview or formal testing. This not only reduces the likelihood that the student's behavior will be influenced by the presence of the observer, but also allows the school psychologist to form hypotheses about the student that should guide the choice of testing instruments.

When conducting an ED assessment, it is important for the school psychologist to conduct both unstructured and structured observations of a student. Unstructured observations typically take the form of a running log of a student's behaviors during the observation period. The school psychologist might note such things as type of response to teacher directions, on-task behavior, responding to or ignoring other students, level of participation, and response to redirection or discipline. This type of observation should inform the school psychologist about what behaviors are problematic, what type of structured observation should be used to collect data, what type of assessment battery is appropriate, and what types of interventions should be tried.

Structured observations typically take the form of collecting and coding data on certain observable behaviors during a defined period of time. Volpe, DiPerna, Hintze, and Shapiro (2005) provide a comprehensive review of structured observation coding systems, including characteristics, psychometric properties, strengths, limitations, and recommendations for each system. Based on this review, the Direct Observation Form (DOF; Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001) is supported for observing both externalizing and internalizing problems across group settings. This system "requires that the observer write a narrative and observe on- and off-task behavior simultaneously" (Volpe et al., 2005, p. 467) and then rate the student's behavior on items that generally correspond to the Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001). The DOF also allows for social comparison data to be collected, which helps to determine if the student's behavior is significantly different from the behaviors of peers in the same settings (Merrell, 2003).

It is important for the school psychologist to observe the student in different settings at different times. Based on the cumulative record review and the teacher interview, the school psychologist should identify a classroom time when the student is experiencing more difficulties and a classroom time when the student is experiencing fewer difficulties. This allows the school psychologist to examine the reciprocal relationship between the student and the classroom environment (Landau & Swerdlik, 2005). The information obtained from these observations can help the school psychologist make recommendations to support a student's success in the classroom. Additionally, observing a student in a non-academic setting, such as recess or lunch, will provide information on the student's behavior (e.g., peer interactions) in an unstructured setting.

Because observations are time consuming, school psychologists should consider how to make observations serve multiple purposes. One way to do this is to use the structure of a functional behavior assessment (FBA) to interpret qualitative and quantitative observation data collected. FBA requires collecting information on when and where behaviors occur most often, what is happening before the behavior occurs, and what is reinforcing the behavior (Watson & Steege, 2003). By collecting these data, the school psychologist can develop hypotheses about the function of the behavior and environmental factors that need to be changed (Wright et al., 2001). If significant external factors are present,

then environmental changes should be considered rather than a diagnosis of ED.

In addition to observing in the classroom and other school settings, school psychologists should attend to observational data collected through testing sessions. Because testing sessions are structured and tests are administered in a standardized manner, this environment allows the school psychologist to compare observations of a student to other students with whom the school psychologist has tested, as well as how the student reacts to factors unique to the testing environment, such as one-to-one interactions and few distractions (McConaughy, 2005). If school psychologists want to quantify observational data during testing, the Test Observation Form (McConaughy, 2005) provides a norm-referenced observation system. This system requires that the school psychologist keep a running log of a student's behavior during testing and then rate the behavior on items that generally correspond to other rating forms in the Achenbach System of Empirically Based Assessment (ASEBA; Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001).

TESTS

“Testing,” in the RIOT model, is loosely defined as the collection of data through various instruments, including cognitive assessments, self-report measures of behavior, behavior rating scales, and projective assessments. Most of these provide school psychologists with information about a student's strengths and challenges as compared to other students of the same age. When using standardized instruments, it is important to consider potential sources of bias in administration, scoring, and interpreting test results (Sattler, 2001). For example, Skiba, Knesting and Bush, (2002) found Caucasian teachers, compared to teachers of color, gave Mexican-American and African-American students disproportionately higher ratings for problem behaviors on behavior rating scales. Although these ratings do not necessarily indicate bias inherent to the test, they do suggest that behavior rating scales are not immune to informant bias (Skiba et. al., 2002).

Cognitive Assessment

Over 60% of school psychologists use intelligence tests as part of most ED assessments (Shapiro & Heick, 2004). At a very basic level, cognitive assessment allows the school psychologist to determine the extent to which students may be experiencing intellectual or sensory difficulties that impact their ability to learn. In more traditional districts that routinely use cognitive assessments, they may help rule out learning disabilities and mental retardation (Teeter & Korducki, 1998). However, in districts that employ a Response-to-Intervention model, cognitive assessments are not a necessary part of the ED assessment as intervention data, observations, and work samples can provide this information. If cognitive assessments are used, the school psychologist can examine data on cognitive strengths and weaknesses to better understand the interaction of the individual characteristics of the student with the classroom environment (Wright et al., 2001). For example, if a student has average cognitive abilities but slower processing speed, the student might be having inappropriate behaviors in the classroom due to frustration with timed tasks such as tests or embarrassment about being called on before having time to process the question. Thus, adequate academic and behavioral interventions would need to be employed before considering the student for a diagnosis of ED.

Issues of bias in intelligence tests pervade the literature, and perhaps the most significant source of bias concerns the use of these assessments with ethnic minority students. This may be especially true for African American students, who, on average, score one standard deviation below Caucasian students on standardized cognitive measures (Chung-yan & Cronshaw, 2002; Kwate, 2001). Given the overrepresentation of minority students labeled as ED, school psychologists should strongly consider using other

sources of data to determine eligibility.

Behavior Rating Scales

Behavior rating scales are the most commonly used assessment modality of childhood psychopathology (Achenbach & McConaughy, 1987) due to their many advantages. Rating scales are easy to administer and score, cost-efficient, based on normative data, and organized by grouping problems into larger scales (McConaughy & Ritter, 2002). They also provide information on a large range of problems and allow for systematic comparison across informants (McConaughy & Ritter, 2002).

For an ED assessment, behavior rating scales are typically completed by teachers, parents, and other adults who know the student well (e.g., administrator or day-care provider). Parent reports are especially important as they can provide information about the severity, duration, and frequency of behaviors (Kovacs, 1986). Similarly, teacher reports are beneficial, especially in elementary school, where teachers spend a large part of the day with the student and are able to observe the student over the course of the day (Epkins, 1995).

Two broad social-emotional rating scales that are commonly used are the Behavior Assessment System for Children – Second Edition (BASC-2; Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004), which has a parent rating form and a teacher rating form, and the Achenbach System of Empirically Based Assessment (ASEBA; Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001), which contains the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL; to be completed by parents) and the Teacher Report Form (TRF; to be completed by teachers). Both systems have good reliability and validity, and are based on large normative samples of students from backgrounds representative of the population of the United States. Both systems are appropriate for use in an ED assessment, as they provide information in internalizing and externalizing domains. Once the school psychologist determines the areas of most concern based on these broad-based systems, he or she can conduct more targeted assessment of specific problem areas. For example, if both parents and teachers rate the student high for anxiety, the school psychologist may want to explore specific symptoms of anxiety with the student through interviews, self-report measures, or a more narrow-band rating scale, such as the Multidimensional Anxiety Scale for Children (MASC; March, Parker, Sullivan, Stallings, & Conners, 1997).

Despite their many advantages, behavior rating scales have limitations that should be considered by the school psychologist. There may be gender differences in how teachers and parents rate a student's temperament (Else-Quest, Hyde, Goldsmith, & Van Hulle, 2006). For example, what is considered "cries easily" for boys might be different than for girls. Also, as previously mentioned, characteristics of the rater can impact ratings (Skiba et al., 2002). Additionally, while parents have been found to be good at reporting overt behaviors such as conduct problems (Dollinger, 1992), they tend to underreport depressive symptoms (Angold et al., 1987; Jensen, Rubio-Stipec, & Canino, 1999). Therefore, the school psychologist should use other sources of data, such as observations and interviews, to ensure that their conclusions about a student's functioning are supported.

Self-Report Measures

Self-report measures share similar advantages with behavior rating scales, and are especially important in assessing feelings and behaviors that are difficult to observe directly. The two systems previously discussed, the BASC-2 and ASEBA have self-report forms. Reliability of self-reports increases with age (Edelbrock, Costello, Dulcan, Kalas, & Conover, 1985). Consequently, it is important to put more weight on parent and teacher reports for younger students.

Merrell (2003) identified a number of different response biases that can affect the results of self-report measures. The first, acquiescence, refers to the tendency among children to answer dichotomous questions (those requiring a true/false or yes/no response) consistently in one direction. This can be particularly problematic when test items are unclear. The second, social desirability, refers to either a conscious or unconscious tendency to respond to test items in a manner that makes the student appear favorable to others. The third, faking, refers to deliberate actions taken by the student to create either favorable or negative impressions of him or herself. Because of the errors that occur through response bias, it is important that the school psychologist cross-validate findings with other sources of information.

Projective Tests

Projective tests, such as sentence completion tasks, storytelling techniques, and drawings, are thought to access information about a student's internal experience through the use of ambiguous stimuli. In a recent study by Hojnosi, Morrison, Brown, and Matthews (2006), over half of the school psychologists surveyed indicated using projective tests in their practice, including using them to make eligibility decisions. However, since their inception, projective tests have been plagued by controversy, generally due to their lack of adequate reliability and validity (Miller & Nickerson, 2006). Because of the major concerns with the psychometric properties of projective techniques with students, their use in determining ED eligibility is not recommended (Miller & Nickerson, 2006; Smith & Dumont, 1995). Instead, school psychologists should consider using the tests as a way to build rapport and generate hypotheses rather than using them to draw conclusions about a student's social and emotional functioning (Garb, Wood, Lillienfeld, & Nezworski, 2002; Miller & Nickerson, 2006).

Sentence completion tasks are the most commonly used projective technique by school psychologists (Hojnoski et al., 2006). They come in a variety of forms that focus on different areas of psychological functioning and have different purposes (Rabin & Zltogorski, 1981) and are generally quick to administer. The open-ended nature of the tests may facilitate students' ability to express their attitudes and feelings because they allow for a wide variety of responses (Holaday, Smith, & Sherry, 2000). Rogers, Bishop, and Lane (2003) suggest that sentence completion tasks can be used as a quick screening of feelings toward self and others. However, sentence completion tests are often administered in a nonsystematic way, are not formally scored, and are rarely individualized based on the presenting problem (Holaday et al., 2000). If school psychologists are going to use them, they should consider administering more specific sentence completion tests, such as the Sentence Completion Test for Depression, for which there is evidence of reliability and validity in assessing depressive thinking (Barton, Morley, Bloxham, Kitson, & Platts, 2005).

Over a quarter of school psychologists who responded to the survey reported using drawing techniques in their practice (Hojnoski et al., 2006). Drawing tasks, such as the Draw-A-Person: Screening Procedure for Emotional Disturbance (DAP:SPED; Naglieri, McNeish, & Bardos, 1991), are quick and require little verbal skills, which can help in working with younger students or students with lower verbal abilities (Matto, 2002). The DAP:SPED, which is normed on a large standardization sample, has been found to be able to distinguish students with emotional disturbances from typically developing peers (Matto, Naglieri, & Clausen, 2005) and has been found to be appropriate for use with African-American, Hispanic, and Caucasian students (Matto & Naglieri, 2005). While the DAP:SPED has been shown to be an adequate assessment of internalizing behaviors, it is not as useful for assessing externalizing behaviors (Matto, 2002). In order to assess externalizing behaviors, observations, behavior rating scales, and

interviews provide more useful data.

Storytelling techniques, such as the Roberts-Second Edition (Roberts-2; Roberts & Gruber, 2005) and the Thematic Apperception Technique (TAT; Murray, 1943) are reported to be used by 16-30% of school psychologists (Hojnoski et al., 2006) and are thought to be non-threatening and fun for children (Kamphaus & Frick, 2005). In general, storytelling techniques can inform the school psychologist about how the student constructs his or her world, the quality of interactions between the student and others, and how the student resolves conflicts. While the TAT is generally interpreted by examining recurrent themes, the Roberts-2 has explicit scoring procedures, resulting in adequate reliability. It should be noted that the developers of the Roberts-2 describe this instrument as a means to assess social cognitive understanding (Roberts & Gruber, 2005). Limitations of storytelling techniques include their heavy reliance on the student's verbal abilities and questionable reliability and validity resulting from inconsistent administration, scoring, and interpretation (Kamphaus & Frick, 2005). Like all projective tests, storytelling techniques should not be used as a sole means of determining eligibility and might be better used to build rapport with students.

CONSIDERING STRENGTHS

Historically, psychoeducational assessments focus on a student's deficits (Epstein, 1999), and this seems to be particularly true in the case of ED assessment. It is as if the assessor has to point out that the student is failing in all areas to make the case for ED, but this is unnecessary. The federal definition requires that a student only meet one of the criteria to be considered ED, although a student often meets several criteria. In addition, it is to the benefit of everyone, especially the student and family, to not only include but to highlight a student's strengths because this provides hope to everyone and aids in the development of interventions (Epstein & Sharma, 1998).

Information about a student's strengths should be gleaned from all of the aforementioned data-collection processes. From the cumulative record review, the school psychologist might highlight positive comments from teachers and growth in an academic area (e.g., high math ability). During observations, the school psychologist might note a student's positive attributes such as an ability to persist during a difficult task, offers to help other students, attention to the teacher, or sense of humor. During interviews with the teacher, parents, and student, the school psychologist should ask more than one question about a student's strengths or interests, and should follow up with other questions to more fully understand the student's positive attributes. These strengths and interests should inform interventions to ensure success.

There has been a movement to develop strength-based assessments, and research indicates that these are an important component of a comprehensive ED assessment (Reid, Epstein, Pastor, & Ryser, 2000). Specifically, the Behavior and Emotional Rating Scale-Second Edition (BERS-2), which has teacher, parent, and youth rating scales, can be used to quantify a student's strengths as an overall score (strength index) and in the following domains: interpersonal strength, family involvement, intrapersonal strength, school functioning, affective strength, and career and vocational strengths (Epstein, Mooney, Ryser, & Pierce, 2004). Reid et al. (2000) found that the Behavior and Emotional Rating Scale could discriminate between typical students and those with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD), with typical students scoring significantly higher in all domains. In addition to the BERS-2, which solely assesses a student's strengths, the BASC-2 has Adaptive Scales, which measure strengths in addition to the Clinical Scales that measure problem behaviors (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004).

CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

Emotions, and thus behaviors and social interactions, vary across cultures, and as such, emotional responses should be evaluated based on the student's cultural norms (Mesquita and Walker, 2003). School psychologists must balance understanding cultural norms with understanding the degree of influence these norms might have on an individual student. When conducting culturally competent assessment for ED, it is important to consider assessment data with awareness of the societal and historical forces that continue to affect minority students (Skiba et al., 2002). Additionally, because measuring emotions is rather subjective, their assessment is more influenced by cultural differences (Spielberger, 2006).

Given the growing diversity of the United States (as of the year 2000, about one third of the population was of non-European background; Chen, Downing and Peckham-Hardin, 2002), school psychologists must understand the complexities of conducting culturally competent assessment of ED, especially since there are a disproportionate number of minority students diagnosed as such (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Engaging in culturally competent assessment does not mean that culture should account for everything, nor should the school psychologist discount its impact altogether (Cartledge, Kea and Simmons-Reed, 2002); rather, culturally competent assessment involves an overall commitment to data collection procedures that do not contribute to the over-identification of minority students for special education (Skiba et al., 2002). Culturally competent assessment is much broader than simply examining test bias (Harry & Klingner, 2006; Skiba et al., 2002; Skiba et al., 2006), and at the core of the issue is ensuring that cultural factors and/or lack of educational opportunity are not contributing significantly to the student's school difficulties. Because overrepresentation is a multi-faceted issue, which includes considering physical facilities, curriculum, expectations, and motivation, to name a few (Skiba et al., 2002), school psychologists need to be well-informed about national and local initiatives to examine overrepresentation. While an in-depth analysis of this topic is beyond the scope of this article, readers are referred to the following sources: "Cultural and Linguistic Competency and Disproportionate Representation" (Osher et al., 2004) and *Why are so Many Minority Students in Special Education?: Understanding Race & Disability in Schools* (Harry & Klingner, 2006).

CONCLUSION

While ED assessments are complex, and the methods used to gather data have significant limitations, school psychologists can gain confidence in the conclusions they draw if they do not over-rely on any one assessment approach and consistently cross-validate their findings using the RIOT model. In addition to collecting data through the assessment methods described in this article, it is critical that the school psychologist have an appreciation of the student's strengths and an awareness of the complexity of culturally competent assessment to reduce overrepresentation of minority students classified as ED. By approaching the data collection from an ecological perspective, the school psychologist can present a more complete picture of the student within the school environment and make appropriate recommendations for interventions that focus on the environmental contributions to and functions of the student's behavioral and emotional responses.

The school psychologist should use data gathered from the assessment to make recommendations for interventions and supports to help the student be more successful in school regardless of whether the student qualifies for special education services as ED. Recommendations should go far beyond simply suggesting an appropriate placement. From conducting observations, the school psychologist should be able to make recommendations about environmental and instructional strategies to help the student

experience greater success, as well as suggest ways to support the student's behavior. From interviews and strength-based approaches, the school psychologist is in a position to recommend strategies to capitalize on things the student enjoys and build on the student's strengths. The school psychologist should also recommend ways to help remediate areas of weakness and to build greater academic and social competence.

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