

Peer Mentoring: Assessment Labs for Clinical Skills

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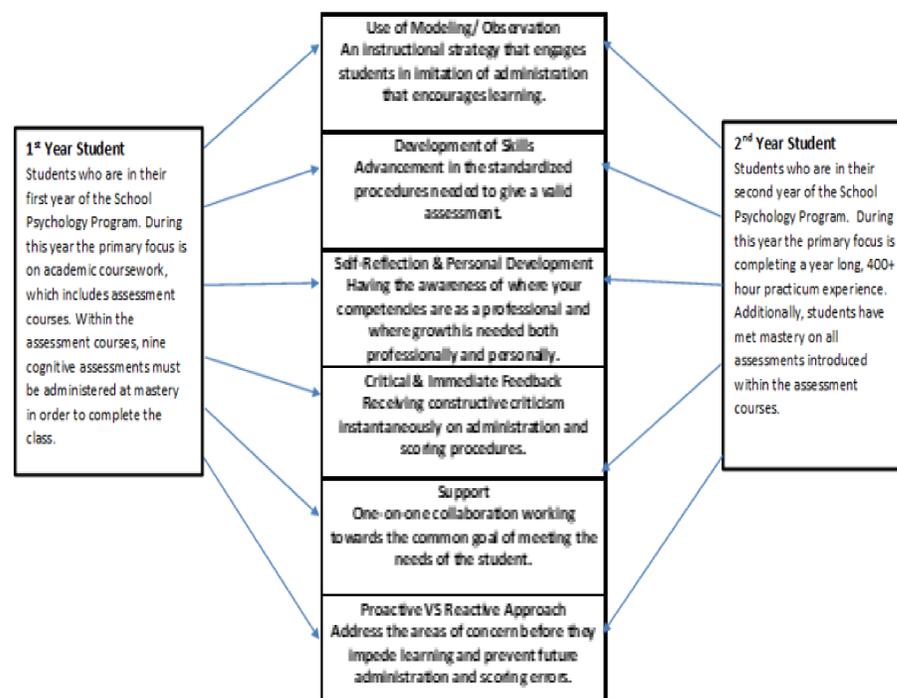
Abstract

The Peer Mentoring Assessment Lab has been in place for approximately six years. The assessment lab is staffed by the second-year practicum students within the program on a bi-weekly basis. The assessment lab is offered to first-year students as a way to enhance their standardized administration, scoring and interpretation skills for the multiple tests they learn within the respective classes. Students may attend the assessment lab to view demonstrations and/or receive corrective feedback on administration, scoring procedures and interpretation for specific testing instruments. The practicum students are able to refine their assessment skills while also gaining experience with consultation through the assistance and feedback they provide to the first-year students. Quantitative and anecdotal data collected from students and faculty involved in the assessment lab indicated enhanced clinical skills of both first-, and second-year students within the school psychology program.

Introduction

Trainers of school psychologists continuously seek to improve their training programs to reflect the National Association of School Psychologist (NASP) Standards for Graduate Preparation of School Psychologists. The NASP standards require that programs ensure candidates demonstrate application of knowledge and professional skills (NASP, 2010). Demonstration of such skills can be taught and enhanced through experiential training. The use of clinics or laboratories has a long history and tradition in preparing psychologists (Myers & Smith, 1994). Many clinical programs offer supplemental laboratory classes that allow more advanced students to teach new students. Within this model students are paired with an advanced student in a collaborative-learning environment, which allows for all participants to assume responsibility of their own learning gains (Newcomb & Bagwell, 1997). The concept is derived from the Latin phrase, "teach to learn" this idea has lasting benefits on those students who teach and the students that participate to learn (Newcomb & Bagwell, 1997). There are many benefits for those students who receive the training in these simulated settings. First, students taught by peers, are motivated to spend more time studying as the simulated situation requires students to bring in questions and homework (Cate & Durning, 2007). The advanced students also benefit by having to organize knowledge differently to explain concepts to peers, therefore enhancing recall and recognition of the subject matter (Cates & Durning, 2007). This symbiotic relationship that exists in this teaching relationship in a clinical or laboratory setting creates reflective practitioners. The University of Nebraska at Kearney utilizes an assessment lab as a part of the training program for both first- and second-year students.

Assessment Lab Benefits



Personal Quotes from Students

"I found that the assessment labs were very beneficial. The assessment labs helped answer the number of questions I had before giving the assessments and helped me feel more confident. When we had the labs after our assessments and peer critiques, I found it very beneficial to go over my mistakes and have the second years visually represent the correct way to present the assessment. That way I was able to learn from my mistakes and was less likely to make it again." -L.Y. First Year

"Assessment lab really helped me the first year to feel confident in myself and my administrations. Especially when we were learning to hand score assessments, it was helpful to be able to talk through what I was doing and have someone explain to me what I was doing wrong if I was confused. As a mentor, it is beneficial for me to check in with first years to just see how they are doing. Other than labs, I don't get to see some of them very often, and I like to hear how they're doing and help in any way I can." - M.J. Second Year

"Assessment labs have provided me with an opportunity to dig further into the assessments. It also allowed me to ask questions that I may have not gotten the chance to ask otherwise." - S.W. First Year

Conclusion

The assessment lab that has been implemented within the school psychology training program at the University of Nebraska at Kearney has provided benefits to both first-year and second-year students within the program. Quantitative and qualitative data collected support the benefits of the assessment lab and the plan to continue the assessment lab model in future years. The administration and scoring of assessments is often a primary role of a school psychologist and this model enhances the students' ability to master such skills within their training program. Consultation and providing feedback are other important skills that a school psychologist must perform, students are given the opportunity to practice and refine these skills by providing such services to first-year students who attend the lab. The lab provides a place for students to learn and demonstrate their evolving professional skills.

References

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Quantitative Data Collected

