Educational Psychology Forum 2020

Striving for Maximum Impact with Least Intrusive Methods

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Background

- Growing evidence around children's development being significantly impacted by Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE), with direct negative relationship between number of ACES experienced and measures of school readiness (Walsh et al., 2019)

- Code of ethics: 4.1.2 states psychologists should be "sensitive to the needs, current issues and problems of society and take account of these needs in their work" (p.18)

- Code of ethics: 2.4.5 states that psychologists should "identify… less intrusive alternatives" (p. 25)

- Three examples showing educational psychologists, working for the Ministry of Education, striving to achieve 'maximum impact with least intrusive methods.'

  Daniela – supporting an individual student

  Ellie – supporting a school wide intervention

  Claire – supporting a group of early childhood centres

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Supporting an individual student in a Modern Learning Environment

Striving for maximum impact with least intrusive methods

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Case example

- Boy – 7 years old

- Multiple ACEs experienced before 4 years of age.

- Significant behavioural challenges at school → Referral to Behaviour Service at Learning Support at the end of Year 1.

- At this point, Ed Psych had been involved for 12 months.

- Some progress in behaviour but increasing social and academic gap.

- Had moved into a modern learning environment for Year 3 → Escalation in behaviour.

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Role of the Educational Psychologist

1. Relationship building with the new team around the student.

2. Ecological assessment (compare with previous year).

3. Professional development for the school team.

4. Supporting the team to formulate, implement, evaluate, and modify a plan based on a shared understanding of the behaviour.

NOT: to work individually with the student.

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Professional development

- **Key focus areas:**

  1. Impact of trauma/absence of attachment on brain development.

  2. Impact of these changes in brain functioning on behaviour in the school setting.

  3. What works to help these children:
     a) Developing strong relationships with adults.
     b) Providing a safe and predictable environment.
     c) Supporting them with learning and behaviour (e.g. explicit teaching of emotional-regulation strategies and appropriate behaviours).

  4. Suggestions for further reading.

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Planning and Implementation

- Ongoing team discussions facilitated by the Educational Psychologist. Topics for discussion included:

    1. How can we meet this student's need for strong on-going relationships with key adults within our MLE setting?

    2. What meaning do we make of challenging behaviours that occur despite our best efforts?

    3. How can we manage incidents of challenging behaviour in a way that helps the student feel safe and supported?

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Planning and Implementation (cont'd)

4. How can we teach this student to self-regulate and get along with his peers?

5. How do we balance the teaching of social/emotional skills and academic skills?

6. How do we develop strong home-school communication?

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Outcomes

For the school team:

1. Increased understanding of the impact of adverse childhood experiences on the developing brain, and the ways that this impacts on behaviour at school.
2. Identified learnings for multiple students.
3. Over time, and with support, the homeroom teacher developed a strong relationship with the student.
4. Teacher came to see teaching this child as a positive challenge.

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Outcomes (cont'd)

For the student:

1. Overall improved behaviour at school.

2. Behavioural incidents were understood and managed with the team's knowledge of the student and best practice.

3. Improved academic outcomes.

4. Improved self-esteem.

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Implications for research

- Providing support for school-based teams around individual students is common practice for Educational Psychologists working at the Ministry of Education.

- It would be helpful to know more about:
    - What New Zealand schools are doing to support the needs of children who have experienced adverse childhood experiences.
    - The short- and long-term outcomes for students who receive this type of school-based, collaborative, least intrusive practice.

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