

Exemplar 2: Individual Case Study  
Case Study: Running with Rufus  
CSP 662: Counseling Interventions with Children and Adolescents, Spring 2013  
Standards Addressed: 18, 21, 23, 25, 27

**Introduction:**

As a school counselor working in the field, I realized that the system in place to ensure our students receive appropriate support and services can become the roadblock that hinders students' progress. For example, inaccurate test results may place a student on an inappropriate learning track. As part of this project, I had the pleasure to work with Rufus – an energetic, happy, 5 years-old kindergartner, who is eager to learn and be part of the classroom. Unfortunately, Rufus was frequently referred to the office for disciplinary issues. Through review of his cumulative records, observations in the classroom and playground, and interviews with his teachers and parents, I gained a complete picture of his circumstances.

Equipped with this holistic view, I was able to assist the student in various ways. Through our weekly sessions, Rufus and I worked together to devise and practice strategies to help him reach the top of the classroom behavioral chart. In addition, I advocated for the California English Language Development Test (CELDT) to be administered with accommodations appropriate for the Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) diagnosis he received. Rufus's teacher and I worked together to quickly address issues that arose in the classroom.

I chose this exemplar because the variety of opportunities and activities helped me grow as a school counselor in different ways. Specifically, I learned to recognize my own limitations and how to overcome these limitations so I can best serve my students. On a personal note, I enjoyed and felt honored by the opportunity to work with Rufus, his parents, his teachers, and various school staff. I would like to dedicate this exemplar to them.

**Standard 18: Professionalism, Ethics and Mandates**

- Though I have a background in psychology, I realize that my knowledge was insufficient, specifically to the application of language proficiency assessment in a school setting. I accepted my limitations and conducted research on CELDT, IEP's, and the referral and ADHD assessment processes to get a more complete understanding of the current system in place and how I could assist Rufus.
- I sought guidance through current literature on the topic of minority students and the over-identification of students with similar demographics as English Learners (EL) and

placed in remedial courses. Though I was a trainee, I followed professional ethical codes and addressed concerns brought to my attention, rather than assume that his teacher, school counselor, school psychologist, and administrators were aware of the complete picture. For example, rather than rely on the school counselor's reassurance that Rufus is correctly classified as an EL student, I followed-up with his teachers to find out whether additional language proficiency assessments have been completed with accommodations for the ADHD diagnosis.

### **Standard 21: Personal and Social Development**

- *PS:A1.3 Learn the goal-setting process.* During our time together, Rufus and I were able to set goals for behaviors in the classroom. Rufus was able to identify behaviors he needed to display in class and strategies to help him stay on track in class in order to reach his goals. He was very cognizant of his strengths, growths, previous instances where he had been successful, and how he could replicate these behaviors.
- *PS:A1.8 Understand the need for self-control and how to practice it.* In addition to the medication used to treat ADHD, Rufus also needed to appropriately utilize self-control skills, as indicated by referral data. Fortunately, self-control skills are already taught by his teachers. We practiced specific skills, such as sitting in a "criss-cross apple sauce" position with arms and legs crossed. Both Rufus and his teachers were already familiar with these skills, which increased the likelihood of him reaching his goals.

### **Standard 23: Advocacy**

- Throughout the process of working with Rufus, I noticed a few points in which he was treated unfairly. For example, he was administered the CELDT prior to being diagnosed with ADHD and he had not been tested again since treatment for ADHD began. I advocated for the re-administration of CELDT with appropriate accommodations for Rufus in order to ensure that the assessment results were accurate. Unfortunately, CELDT is administered at this school only once per year due to funding challenges. Rufus's teacher reassured me that subsequent in-class assessments have shown that Rufus still needed additional work in English Language Art (ELA).
- I advocated for Rufus with his teachers, school counselor, and school psychologist. For example, I questioned whether CELDT is appropriate since Rufus is a kindergartner who had very little exposure to a testing environment and may not understand the gravity of any given test. Since the response I received from each person is very similar (i.e. he

needs the extra support in ELA and funding issues), I had to be cognizant of my position as a trainee and trust their professional input and experience with the school's capability and culture.

### **Standard 25: Individual Counseling**

- While working with Rufus to devise strategies to help him reach his goals, he expressed concern that he may not reach the top of the chart because he may engage in “bad” behaviors. I pointed out his successes (i.e. he is not always at the bottom of the chart) and directed his attention to strategies that he had used with success to help him stay on track.
- Another area of concern brought to my attention by Rufus' teachers and school counselor was inappropriate behavior with peers, as evidenced by referral notes. Although these incidents drastically decreased during second trimester, we discussed his feelings (i.e. feeling angry when other students do not want to play with him) and strategies to manage these feelings (i.e. take a deep breath and choose a different activity) so that he does not continue to get referrals or calls home.

### **Standard 27: Collaboration, Coordination and Team Building**

- During this process, I learned the importance of collaboration and team building. Without a good rapport with the teacher, school staff, and parents as a foundation, I would not have been able to get the buy-in and support from these stakeholders. Having built rapport with them, I felt comfortable expressing my views, while knowing that they may not necessarily agree with me. Similarly, they were comfortable expressing their opinions to me. With trust and rapport, we were able to work together and devise strategies to work together for Rufus's benefit.
- From reviewing cumulative records, to classroom and playground observations, to interviews and ultimately coming to the conclusion of attempting systemic changes, I worked with various stakeholders who have different observations and different opinions on how best to proceed. I was able to manage these varying points of view and served as an objective liaison. Rufus's parents had previously agreed to meet with the teacher once per month to discuss Rufus's progress. His parents were unable to do so and the teacher did not follow-up with the parents. I approached the parents from the perspective of working for Rufus's benefit. As a result, his parents felt comfortable informing me that

they had not followed-through with the agreement and will make efforts to do so in the future.

**Conclusion:**

Prior to working with Rufus, being an advocate and system change agent appeared to be something grandiose and out of my reach as a school counseling trainee. When I noticed inequities towards Rufus, I had to speak up. Though I had advocated in other instances, I was in the position as the person with experience who had earned the right to attempt systemic changes. As a trainee, I was very aware of my limitations and had to be conscientious of how my behavior reflects upon my supervisor and her position within the school. Though little change occurred as a result of my advocacy, I was able to open the communication with various stakeholders and receive answers to questions I had. I am now better able to see how a school counselor can be an advocate and have the capacity to effect system change. For example, if I was a full-time school counselor who had worked at the site and established rapport with district administrators, I would feel more comfortable advocating for funding for additional opportunities to administer CELDT, specifically because the school district has such a high EL population.

If I had the opportunity to redo this process, I definitely would meet with Rufus's parents sooner. Had I met with them earlier, they may have been able to begin the process of meeting with Rufus's teacher once each month. This additional meeting time would have been a great opportunity for the teacher and parents to build rapport and formulate additional strategies and plans to support Rufus. Working with Rufus's parents sooner would also give us more time to formulate, implement, and evaluate our interventions. As it was, we did not have sufficient time to implement interventions and to gather data to evaluate our progress. Though early results show promise, a follow-up would have been necessary.