

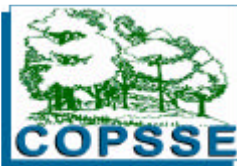
School Psychology

Prepared for the Center on Personnel Studies in Special Education

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

by
Andrea Canter
National Association of School Psychologists

June 2006
COPSSE Document No. IB-4E



Center on Personnel Studies in Special Education

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

<http://www.copsse.org>

Center on Personnel Studies in Special Education

University of Florida

Johns Hopkins University

Vanderbilt University

University of Colorado - Boulder

Instructional Research Group, Long Beach, CA

COPSSE research is focused on the preparation of special education professionals and its impact on beginning teacher quality and student outcomes. Our research is intended to inform scholars and policymakers about advantages and disadvantages of preparation alternatives and the effective use of public funds in addressing personnel shortages.

In addition to our authors and reviewers, many individuals and organizations have contributed substantially to our efforts, including Drs. Erling Boe of the University of Pennsylvania and Elaine Carlson of WESTAT. We also have benefited greatly from collaboration with the National Clearinghouse for the Professions in Special Education, the Policymakers Partnership, and their parent organizations, the Council for Exceptional Children and the National Association of State Directors of Special Education.

The Center on Personnel Studies in Special Education, H325Q000002, is a cooperative agreement between the University of Florida and the Office of Special Education Programs of the U. S. Department of Education. The contents of this document do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of Education, nor does mention of other organizations imply endorsement by them.

Recommended citation:

Canter, A. (2006). *School psychology*. (COPSSE Document Number IB-4E). Gainesville, FL: University of Florida, Center on Personnel Studies in Special Education.



U. S. Office of Special
Education Programs

Additional Copies may be obtained from:

COPSSE Project
P.O. Box 117050
University of Florida
Gainesville, FL 32611
352-392-0701
352-392-2655 (Fax)

There are no copyright restrictions on this document; however, please credit the source and support of the federal funds when copying all or part of this document.

INTRODUCTION

This paper briefly presents the history of school psychology in the context of professional roles, training, and credentialing and considers key issues facing the profession today:

- balancing professional roles as gatekeepers versus comprehensive service providers in order to integrate services that address both mental health and academic concerns effectively
- serving a diverse student population with a relatively homogeneous work force
- serving a broader segment of the school community with a current and predicted shortage of qualified personnel.

School psychology is looking to the future and seeking strategies that will allow the profession to address student needs effectively and efficiently, while ensuring the longevity of a highly qualified work force.

PERSONNEL DILEMMAS IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Early History

Early school psychologists were diagnosticians who studied the attributes of children to predict school success and determine the need for remedial or specialized instruction. Students typically referred were failing academically or exhibited severe emotional disturbance.

Evolving Roles

A medical model of diagnosis and classification was well entrenched when federal special education regulations were first adopted in the mid-1970s. Eventually every school district employed at least one school psychologist. A slow revolution in school psychology toward role expansion beyond diagnostic assessment began with two major conferences in the early 1980s (Spring Hill and Olympia) and continued with the publication of the first Blueprint for the profession. Consultation to address individual academic and behavioral difficulties, as well as group and systems intervention (e.g., at the school or district level), were promoted as ways to expand roles and to help prevent more serious student difficulties. Few school districts implemented the recommended paradigm shifts because budgets delayed broad roles for school psychologists. Ratios of students to school psychologists did steadily improve, and referral to special education increased rapidly. With better ratios, many school psychologists included consultation, counseling, staff training, and group interventions in their repertoire of professional services in addition to the traditional diagnostic role.

Slow Change

At the end of the 1980s, the first national credential for school psychologists was introduced. Affiliated with the National Association of School Psychologists [NASP], the Nationally Certified School Psychologist credential [NCSP] solidified several trends in the profession: broad recognition of the specialist level of training, uniform training standards incorporating evolving principles, and a commitment to ongoing professional development.

Paradigm Shift: New Tools, New Standards, New Dilemmas

Calls for educational accountability led to evidence-based practice and a focus on outcomes. More precise and frequent measurement of student skills and behavior enabled curriculum-based assessment, curriculum-based measurement, functional behavior assessment, and response to intervention techniques. Within collaborative team decision-making, problem-solving models of service delivery evolved, emphasizing early identification and support of at-risk students separate from any special education involvement. For school psychologists, this model has promoted broader roles in consultation and intervention design. A Blueprint II supported ecological over medical models, problem-solving strategies over refer-test-place paradigms, and curriculum-based

assessment over traditional norm-referenced approaches. The efficacy of the special education model—responsible for the rapid growth of school psychology—was questioned. New standards for training and practice included:

- data-based decision making and accountability
- interpersonal communication, collaboration, and consultation
- effective instruction and development of cognitive-academic skills
- socialization and development of life competencies
- student diversity in development and learning
- school structure, organization, and climate
- prevention, wellness promotion, and crisis intervention
- home-school-community collaboration
- research and program evaluation
- legal, ethical practice, and professional development.

Projected shortages of personnel, trainers, and training programs; economic downturns; and accountability initiatives spurred calls for reform to service an increasingly diverse and at-risk student population.

Challenges to Role Change

To fulfill the agenda established at the 2002 Conference on the Future of School Psychology, school psychologists will have to move beyond the emphasis on individual diagnosis and treatment and more substantially to prevention, early intervention, instructional design, mental health services, and family support. Even with the difficulties and fear associated with role change, many trainers, practitioners, and professional leaders are optimistic that school psychology is heading in a proactive direction.

KEY DILEMMAS FACING SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY

From Gatekeeper to Comprehensive Service Provider

There is ample evidence that under more comprehensive service delivery models both students and school psychologists thrive. School psychologists must provide a broader array of services to a broader student population in order to have the necessary impact on student achievement and adjustment. These include:

- School-based mental health services. School psychologists are being encouraged to establish school-based mental health services—prevention, early intervention, and tertiary services, including crisis prevention, intervention, and postvention services.
- Improving instruction. School psychologists, who have expertise in measurement, learning, cognition, and evaluation of research findings, are in ideal positions to translate research on instruction to effective, empirically based classroom practices and implement problem-solving models.
- Positive behavior support. School psychologists are providing leadership in fostering improved academic outcomes through positive behavior support involving data-based decision making using functional behavioral assessment and ongoing monitoring of the outcomes of intervention.
- Integrating instructional and mental health supports. Mental health and academic performance are clearly intertwined, and school psychologists must be prepared to address and integrate both areas in their daily practice.

Diversity

In demographics, the profession and students served are very dissimilar (e.g., about 93% of practicing school psychologists are identified as Caucasian). Because these demographics will not

change dramatically soon, it is important that training and professional development emphasize culturally competent practices.

Personnel Shortages

Serving the student population with a dwindling work force will require a multi-faceted approach: recruiting and retaining professionals, identifying different approaches to service delivery that increase both effectiveness and efficiency, and shifting to more indirect strategies that address systemic issues.

PROFESSIONAL TRAINING OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

Accreditation and *program approval* refer to the systematic review of a university's school psychology training program relative to the criteria adopted by a professional body such as the National Association of School Psychologists [NASP], through its affiliations with the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education [NCATE] and the American Psychological Association [APA]. *Credentialing* refers to the state or national process of evaluating the training of an individual school psychologist relative to the training and practice standards of that state or national board and the granting of a certificate or license to practice.

Scope of Training

Today school psychologists need a greater array of skills than did their predecessors of the 1970s and 1980s. School psychologists for the foreseeable future must have substantial expertise in:

- understanding special education laws and regulations
- eligibility determination
- translating research to practice in the areas of instruction, particularly early literacy, reading, study skills, and meta-cognition
- positive behavior supports
- mental health (prevention and intervention)
- crisis management
- school organization
- collaborative consultation and program evaluation
- service delivery in a manner that is culturally sensitive and supportive of a vast diversity of learners and their families
- working with a wide range of disabilities.

Availability of Training and Trainers

Approximately 218 institutions of higher education offer some type of school psychology program, an estimated 294 different degree programs across the country. Estimates of school psychology graduates across all levels of training have typically ranged from 1,750 to 1,950 per year, with little change in completion rates over the past 15 years. Unfilled faculty positions have increased, and the future work force may depend more on successful recruitment of trainers than trainees.

Entry-Level Training

APA considers that doctoral-level preparation is required for independent practice as a professional psychologist, which includes school psychology. NASP maintains that the entry level for professional practice is the completion of a specialist-level graduate degree (60+ semester hours). The shift of school psychology from a master's- to specialist-level profession over the past 30 years is in part attributed to the adoption of higher standards for both credentialing and training by NASP, beginning in the 1970s. The establishment of the NCSP credential in 1989 as well as rigorous training standards are further guarantees that future school psychologists will hold at least the specialist credential or its equivalent. Respecialization—the training of individuals who

already hold degrees or credentials in closely related fields (e.g., child clinical psychology) is a possibility.

National Standards

National standards for the preparation of school psychologists have been established by NASP. All school psychology training programs are eligible for NASP approval. APA also accredits school psychology doctoral programs as an area of specialty preparation within professional psychology.

In 2004, 62% of specialist programs and 68% of doctoral programs had attained conditional or full approval through NASP. An estimated 75% of school psychology doctoral programs are accredited by the APA. More than half of the states (26) now include the NCSP as a criterion for state certification or licensure.

Training Diverse Professionals

More systematic attention to both recruitment and retention is needed if the profession is to become a better reflection of the face of the public schools today. Aside from increasing the diversity of those entering school psychology training, pre-service training and professional development opportunities give more attention to topics that will better prepare all future and current school psychologists to address the needs of diverse student populations.

Training Issues for the Future

Discussions of the future of school psychology preparation must address the scope of program content and broader professional roles (particularly regarding instruction and mental health); the continuing prevalence of specialist-level training; the stability of the number of institutions and graduate programs engaged in training; the lack of diversity among individuals seeking and completing training; and the apparently insufficient number of graduates entering the work force. Given this context, the profession must focus its training efforts to do the following:

- reconceptualize the curriculum to better reflect the demands and needs of today's schools and students
- increase the number of school psychology graduate programs that meet NASP and APA requirements
- increase accessibility to valid alternative training options in several special areas of specific personnel shortages (e.g., rural areas, states with few or no traditional graduate training programs, historically black colleges and universities).
- identify successful strategies to recruit school psychologists to serve as trainers in graduate institutions
- develop alternatives to traditional faculty appointments, including adjunct arrangements
- continue to implement NASP standards that emphasize competency-based practice and development of performance-based program assessment and accountability systems
- identify successful strategies to increase the number of trainees, including part-time residency requirements, distance learning options, and respecialization programs
- develop effective recruitment strategies to increase the enrollment of students from underrepresented groups.

CERTIFICATION AND LICENSURE ISSUES

All states have established some form of certification or licensure for school psychology practice in school settings. Although most states issue a credential at one title and degree level, some states have multiple credential levels generally distinguished by graduate hours and degree (master's, specialist, doctoral). In addition to state certification and licensure, many school psychologists also hold the NCSP from NASP.

Models and Standards

NASP standards specify the following requirements: a minimum of 60 semester hours of graduate course work; demonstrated competencies in specified domains of professional practice as reflected by course work in psychology, education, and school psychology as well as associated practicum experiences; and the completion of a full academic year internship (1200 clock hours). NASP recommends that states allow use of the NCSP as one option—but not the only option—for obtaining a state school psychology credential. Even states that do not allow the NCSP as an alternative route to credentialing often have standards for state certification that are similar or identical to the NCSP requirements.

Respecialization and Credentialing

Other professionals who are interested in school-based practice but have been prepared in other areas of psychology (clinical and counseling psychologists) or mental health disciplines (mental health counselors) are a resource. Personnel shortages in schools, paired with employment changes in other settings, have created a new group of professionals interested in the opportunities and stability of school positions.

There has been consensus among trainers and leaders in school psychology that individuals considering respecialization seek guidance from school psychology training programs to ensure adequate preparation. Although APA and NASP have different approaches to respecialization, the organizations agree that respecialization should include formal preparation and supervised field experiences through APA- or NASP-approved training programs.

Future Credentialing Considerations

Critical recommendations regarding certification and licensure for the future include:

- Increase the number of states adopting national credentialing standards and accept the NCSP as a means of obtaining state school psychology certification or licensure, which will facilitate reciprocity across states.
- Increase the number and diversity of school psychologists seeking national certification, including targeting newly trained and state-credentialed professionals.
- Improve coordination of requirements for school psychology professional development and continuing education to facilitate renewal of state and national credentials for school-based practice.
- Develop and implement competency-based systems for respecialization of allied mental health professionals.
- Assure the provision of comprehensive school psychological services by the most highly qualified personnel by mandating training in Blueprint competency domains as criteria for initial credentialing, in contrast to the still-current emphasis on narrow gatekeeping skills.

SUPPLY AND DEMAND

Determining the precise number of school psychologists practicing today is difficult, but estimates range from 25,000 to 30,000. An estimated 1,750 new school psychologists enter the field each year. There is a graying effect, and the median age of school psychologists has increased significantly since the mid-1980s. Lack of minority representation among school psychologists is a concern. As bright spots, attrition does not appear to be a significant factor contributing to personnel shortages, and there has been a steady trend toward improved service ratios of school psychologists to students within a school with a national mean ratio of 1:1700 or 1:1800.

The Demand for School Psychologists

Several population trends and national initiatives could create more demand for school psychologists.

-
- changing demographics of school enrollments
 - No Child Left Behind.
 - IDEA 2004
 - Surgeon General's Report on Child Mental Health.

Personnel Shortages: Implications

Thoughtful interpretation of the most recent data supports the conclusions that there is currently a shortage of school psychologists and that a more profound shortage is likely to occur in the near future. This has important implications for the field and the quality of psychological services available in the schools.

- Loss of positions
- Loss of training opportunities
- Loss of quality comprehensive services
- Continued shortage of diverse professionals
- Credentialing alternatives.

Future Supply and Demand Considerations

As long as the balance of supply and demand is skewed in the direction of personnel shortages, the school psychology profession will face significant challenges in achieving its goals for comprehensive, culturally competent service delivery. Strategies to preserve the dwindling work force concern recruitment, retention, retraining, and a general reconceptualization of service delivery.

CONCLUSIONS

To implement an agenda for the profession that encompasses new models of comprehensive services, school psychology must ensure a sufficient and sustainable pool of diverse, trained, and credentialed practitioners.