

Teacher's Perceptions of the Roles and Functions of School Psychologists:  
Implications for Practice

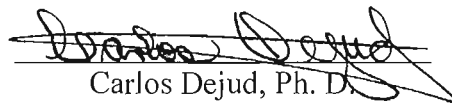
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**Abstract**

With recent federal education mandates and socioeconomic trends emphasizing full inclusion of students with special needs in the regular classroom, added pressure has been placed upon educators to provide curriculums that suit the specific academic strengths and weaknesses for each student. Examining the roles and functions of school psychologists, as well as how teacher's perceive the services they provide, is essential for providing a clear connection between the two professions and how they can collaborate to provide the best outcomes for students.

While results vary among districts, it was found that teachers understand and seek out services more often if the school psychologist is in close proximity to teachers throughout the academic year. In addition, teachers perceive the services school psychologists provide as more effective if the practitioner is believed to be knowledgeable and empathetic to the needs of teachers while keeping an heir of kindness and warmth. Further implications for practice will be explored.

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## Chapter I: Introduction

At the dawn of the new millennium the field of education stands at a critical period. Federal mandates through the American Disabilities Act (ADA), the No Child Left Behind act (NCLB), and the more recent revisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEIA) delineates the roles of teachers as well as pupil service providers, which have changed tremendously (Tiegerman-Farber & Radziewicz, 1998). Through NCLB teachers must transition from teaching lessons of their own design to teaching curriculum that ensures their students pass standardized exams administered by state and federal education agencies. In addition, due to mandates imposed by IDEIA and NCLB, school psychologists not only fill the traditional role administering cognitive assessments for special education eligibility, but also collaborate with teachers in order to develop, and implement, evidence-based interventions to the students they serve (D'Amato, Sheridan, Phelps, & Lopez, 2004). With the added pressure imposed on teachers, along with the evolving roles and functions of the contemporary school psychologist, it is important to examine how the relationship between the two professions, affect collaborative efforts to create the most positive outcomes for regular and special education students.

The roles and functions of school psychologists have evolved significantly since the profession's inception. Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, research and experimentation by psychologists began focusing on the cognitive processes involved in reading ability and comprehension (Berninger, 2006). As a result, tests of perceptual-motor-speed were used along with measures of cognitive ability in efforts to identify students in need of academic assistance. Simultaneously, educators, policy makers, and society as a whole began to examine other issues present in the field of education that the school psychologists could address.

During the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century teachers were reportedly often dissatisfied with the role of the school psychologist due to the field's emphasis on diagnosis over intervention (Gilmore & Chandy, 1973). School psychologists were also perceived as possessing more skills for therapeutic and mental health services and as such there was a push for practitioners to follow a more consultation-based model (Waters, 1973). In addition, it was believed that school psychologists could use a consultation process in order to further collaborate with teachers and gain rapport among teaching staff. As a result, during, and after the 1960's, philosophical positions were formulated describing the roles of the school psychologist as emphasizing "data-oriented" problem solving, the psychology of schooling, and educational programming (Fagan, 2002).

The role of consultation as a function of school psychology professionals initially started when a push for mainstreaming students with special needs within the regular classroom occurred in the 1970's (Tiegerman-Farber et al., 1998). As a result of this societal shift, the school psychologist service delivery model changed from a medical to a school-consultation model. This model required school psychologists and teachers to rely on their interactional abilities in order to communicate, share, and adjust the educational environment to address individual and systemic issues within the school.

Today, while the specific role of a school psychologist may vary from school district to school district, is constantly evolving over time, the overall profession of school psychology is more clearly defined and implemented within the educational environment. With the implementation of special education law for educational handicapping conditions (P.L. 94-142, 1975; later renamed Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, IDEA) clear federal guidelines were enacted regarding the eligibility criteria for individuals with disabilities pertaining to

enrollment in special education programs (Berninger, 2006). In addition, this law spells out specific educational rights of students with disabilities. These federal guidelines gave the field of school psychology a conceptual and legal framework in which to refine their abilities and define their roles of service providers in successfully implementing these federal mandates within the school setting. However, this law has been revised multiple times since its initial inception in 1975 to the most recent version, Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004).

As these federal mandates and guidelines have evolved with each revision, the general role of the school psychologist redefined (Berninger, 2006). In many school districts the role of the school psychologist has expanded to include duties, which are not directly related to the implementation of IDEIA. They might include: counseling students, crisis intervention, the facilitation of student support groups, program planning, monitoring the implementation of academic and behavioral interventions, and other education related services.

Furthermore, school psychologists are no longer considered a one-person disciplinary team, but rather individual members of multidisciplinary teams. These teams consult and collaborate with each other to decide the best course of action(s) in order to foster the best possible outcomes for the students they serve (Tilly, 2008). These groups are typically called Individualized Education Plan (IEP) teams, and consist of parents, teachers, and other relevant pupil service providers that come together in order to decide what additional support services will work best to address a student's deficits (Arivett, Rust, Brissie, & Dansby, 2007).

Due to the lack of a clear understanding of the evolving roles and functions of the contemporary school psychologist, it is imperative for researchers to examine how their duties relate to teachers in order to foster collaborative efforts (e.g. CBM, functional-based assessment

and interventions) and provide the best possible outcomes for pupils in the education system. In particular, it is important to analyze how teachers' perceive the roles and functions of the school psychologist and how often teachers seek the services available through school psychology professionals.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The role of the school psychologists within the educational setting has evolved significantly since the creation of the profession. As the role of the school psychologist continues to change, there may be a dissonance between teachers' perceptions of the role of the school psychologist and how psychological services can be utilized in an attempt to provide the least restrictive environment (LRE) for each student. With the ever expanding and changing role of the school psychologist, it would be beneficial to further examine the contemporary role school psychology plays in the educational environment and how that role affects the relationship between pupil service providers and educators in the field, especially general, and special education, classroom teachers.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this literature review is to examine the overall role of the contemporary school psychologist and how that role relates to the classroom teacher. Research in this literature review will explore the teacher's perception of the roles and functions school psychologist and how their professional relationship affects the delivery of services to students within the educational environment. Furthermore, this literature review will examine the function of behavioral and academic consultation as well as its effect on assisting teachers in their role of educating regular and special education students.



## Research Questions

This literature review will address the following questions:

1. What is the role of the school psychologist within the educational environment?
2. How often do teachers typically utilize the services available to them through the school psychologist?
3. What are the perceptions that teachers typically have regarding the role of the school psychologist?

## Definition of Terms

The following terms are typically used when discussing the field of school psychology and the educational environment and thus, will be used throughout this literature review.

*Child Advocacy* – Child advocacy represents a search for devices, targets, methods, rationales, and sanctions to make program and services more responsive and available to children (McMahon & Pruett, 1998).

*Discrepancy Model* – A practical model used in schools to identify student eligibility for enrollment in special education programs under the label of learning disability (LD). This model examines whether or not there is a statistically significant discrepancy between a child's performance on tests of cognitive ability and academic achievement (Meyer, 2000).

*Emotional and Behavioral Disturbed (EBD)* – A category of special education services provided to individuals with severe emotional/behavioral issues that chronically adversely affects one's academic achievement and social functioning in multiple settings (Wisconsin DPI, 2009).

*Evidence-based* – A standard for behavioral and academic interventions that school psychologists use to ensure the validity and effectiveness of interventions before they are implemented within the educational environment (Kratochwill & Stoiber, 2002).

*English Language Learner (ELL)* – English Language Learners (ELLs) are students whose first language is not English and who are in the process of learning English (La Celle-Peterson & Rivera, 1994).

*Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* – The federal law which defined eligibility criterion for special education as well as defined the educational rights for students with physical, emotional, cognitive, communicative, and learning disabilities. This law has been revised multiple times from its original version, which was implemented in 1975, to the latest version, IDEA 2004 (Berninger, 2006).

*Response to Intervention (RTI)* – A service delivery model that has gained popularity since the latest revision of IDEA law, which is IDEIA 2004. This service delivery model is considered to be a three tiered process designed to increase early intervention in an effort to decrease academic failure (Mahdavi & Beebe-Frankenberger, 2009).

*Systems Change* – An alteration to a present system of education and/or service delivery made in efforts to help it conform to the implications of current research findings (Curtis & Stollar, 2002).

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

This review will cite major published literature available regarding the role of the school psychologist, and teacher perceptions of that role. Literature regarding the utilization of school psychological services by classroom teachers will also be reviewed. The information provided in this literature review will be considered up to date.

1. Due to the fact that this is a literature review, the research findings provided do not contribute new knowledge to the field. In order to contribute new knowledge to the field of

school psychology, studies must be conducted utilizing raw data to enhance, or examine, the findings of previous research.

2. This literature review only involves the relationship between two pupil service professions, classroom teachers and school psychologists, respectively. Therefore, this literature review is not a comprehensive study of the role of the school psychologist as it pertains to all school personnel in the educational environment.

3. The role of the school psychologist varies between, and within, districts, states, and regions. While the information provided in this literature review should be considered generalizable, specific differences regarding the teacher's perspective of the role of the school psychologists in different environments is not examined in detail.

## **Chapter II: Literature Review**

This literature review will explore the contemporary role of the school psychologist, as well as how classroom teachers perceive that role. In addition, insight will be gained regarding the extent to which classroom teachers typically utilize educational support services available to them through the school psychologist.

### **Contemporary Role of the School Psychologist**

Upon the inception of the field, a school psychologist typically held a master's degree along with practicum experience and little, or no, internship experience (Fagan, 2008). Initially the role of the school psychologist varied. Some school psychologists were generally viewed as psychometrists who solely interpreted the statistical outcomes of tests and scales used in the school environment in order to assess student's cognitive abilities and emotional well being (Davis, McIntosh, Kehle, & Phelps, 2004). Furthermore, school psychologists often supposedly used "unreliable and invalid projective assessments of personality, psychopathology, and perceptual motor measures" (Fagan & Wise, 2000) in order to examine potential ability in the educational environment (Cummings, Harrison, Dawson, Short, Gorin, & Palomares, 2004).

Later, school psychologists were typically charged with the primary role of determining special education eligibility through the examination of the results of standardized test of cognitive ability and academic achievement (Fagan et al., 2000). The tests typically administered by school psychologists included, but were not limited to, the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC), Stanford-Binet (1960 edition), Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities (ITPA), Frostig Developmental Test of Visual Perception, and the Bender Visual-Motor Gestalt Test (Fagan, 2002).

Today, while the specific role of a school psychologist may vary from school district to school district (and is constantly evolving over time), the overall profession of school psychology is more clearly defined and implemented within the educational environment. With the implementation of federal special education law for educational handicapping conditions clear guidelines were enacted regarding the eligibility criteria for individuals with disabilities pertaining to enrollment in special education programs as well as spelling out specific educational rights of students of disabilities (Berninger, 2006). These federal guidelines gave the field of school psychology a conceptual and legal framework in which to refine their abilities and define their roles in successfully implementing these federal mandates within the school setting. However, this law has been revised multiple times since its initial inception in 1975 to the most recent version, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA 2004). As these federal mandates and guidelines have evolved with each revision, so has the general role of the school psychologist.

In many school districts the role of the school psychologist has expanded to include duties, which are not directly related to the implementation of IDEIA. Such duties might include, but are not limited to, teacher consultation, counseling students, crisis intervention, the facilitation of student support groups, program planning, monitoring the implementation of academic and behavioral interventions, and other education support services. Furthermore, school psychologists are no longer considered a one-person disciplinary team, but rather individual members of multidisciplinary teams, which consult and collaborate with each other to decide the best possible outcomes for the students they serve (Tilly, 2008). These teams are typically called Individualized Education Plan (IEP) teams, and consist of parents, teachers, and

other relevant key stake holders that come together in order to address what educational support services will work best for a student's academic success (Arivett et al., 2004).

As mentioned previously, the traditional role of school psychologists used to be primarily that of a psychometrist and statistician. Today school psychologists fill multiple roles and typically work with teachers, educational support personnel and district administrators to identify the emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and academic needs of the students they serve (Gilman & Gabriel, 2004). Furthermore, school psychologists collaborate with educators, parents of students, and other helping professionals in order to promote healthy, safe, supportive schools, that provide the least restrictive environment (LRE) for all students (NASP, 2009). School psychologists also work to bridge the gap between the school and community settings in order to help promote mental health and academic achievement among students in the educational environment.

The academic standards for school psychologist training programs have significantly increased their standards as many state school psychology boards require 2 years of supervised experience, a pre-doctoral internship, and 60-70 semester hours of didactic, in order to attain an education specialist (ED.S.) degree (Fagan, 2008). With such rigid and rigorous academic standards, contemporary school psychologists also fill a more proactive leadership role characterized by systems change, collaboration, and intervention implementation (Davis, McIntosh, Kehle, & Phelps, 2004). In addition school psychologists serve as child/student advocates who utilize preventative techniques regarding potential emotional, behavioral, and educational problems among students (Davis, 2004).

School psychologists are typically seen as evaluators within the school environment. They have traditionally evaluated students in order to determine whether or not special education

eligibility criteria could be met. When a learning disability was suspected, verification was performed by administering cognitive and achievement assessments, which are much more valid and generalizable today prior to the standardization of assessment batteries. After both cognitive and achievement assessments were administered, school psychologists analyzed the performance of the student, identified possible strengths and weaknesses, and determined if there was a significant discrepancy between a student's cognitive and achievement scores. This model has traditionally been called the "discrepancy-analysis" model for special education eligibility (Dykeman, 2006). In addition, school psychologists were often assigned the task of analyzing a student's educational environment (e.g. a classroom) to decide how best to utilize the environment's resources in order to maximize the student's optimal learning opportunities (Reschly, 2008).

With the onset of recent federal mandates, along the growing popularity of the response to intervention (RTI) model have become increasingly utilized to address academic/behavioral problems as well as determining eligibility for special education services. Today, instead of solely utilizing a model of, "refer-test-place," contemporary school psychologists employ a problem-solving model, which focuses on (1) identifying problems, (2) functions of a problem is occurring, (3) what can be done about a given problem, (4) and was the intervention/solution employed effective (Tilly, 2008).

With the implementation of IDEIA 2004, RTI is gaining prominence in many school districts throughout the country. According to Mahdavi and Beebe-Frankenberger (2009) the RTI service delivery model is designed to increase academic success through the use of early interventions implemented through a three tiered process. More specifically, the RTI model is a three-tiered intervention approach that utilizes evidence-based interventions to address primary

prevention among all students, secondary interventions regarding students who are considered at-risk, and tertiary prevention for students with intensive needs (Merrell, Erwin, & Gimpel, 2005).

With the current popularity surrounding RTI and its emphasis on intervention rather than assessment scores, a school psychologist's role in a district implementing RTI will differ significantly from a psychologist employed in a district solely utilizing the discrepancy model. The RTI model also alters the role of the educator in the classroom environment as well as the professional relationship between classroom teachers and school psychologists (Powers & Busse Hagans, 2008).

Through the RTI service delivery model, school psychologists are often charged with the task of implementing and evaluating the effectiveness of academic and behavioral interventions among students experiencing difficulties in these areas. Thus, school psychologists work collaboratively with teachers, parents, and other service providers in order to determine which, among the plethora of evidence-based interventions available (Reschly, 2008), will be the most effective for each student's specific situation. This knowledge and implementation of interventions have become increasingly important as RTI is being implemented, since this model places a great emphasis on the success of interventions prior to consideration of special education. If a student's educational needs can be adequately met within the regular education setting, special education services may not be necessary or appropriate.

Another issue regarding the implementation of the RTI model and the overall role of the contemporary school psychologist is the ever-increasing influx of English language learning (ELL) students in the classrooms. Through the Educate America initiative passed by Congress in 1994, the federal government challenged educators to instruct a diverse population of students in the regular classroom (Wilczenski, Bontrager, Ventrone, & Correia, 2001). According to Xu



and Drame (2007), the number of students whose first language is not English will continue to increase at a rapid pace every year. These authors report that over 2 million ELL students in the pre-kindergarten through grade 3 were enrolled in public school in the year 2004. In addition ELLs represent over 400 different primary languages along with 75 percent of ELLs primarily speaking Spanish. The increasing number of ELLs enrolled in the educational environment presents an additional variable regarding the relationship between the school psychologist and the educator in providing the least restrictive learning environment for all students regardless of language and culture. However, the consultative and collaborative roles can be effective in assisting education staff if school psychologists are culturally competent.

Another one of the many challenges that the field of education faces is the implementation of the No Child Left Behind act (NCLB, 2002). A bi-partisan act passed through congress in 2002, NCLB touts the lofty goal of having all students proficient in the basic academic skills of reading and math by the academic year of 2013-2014 (Tilly, 2008). NCLB seeks to accomplish this by having the education system held accountable for the academic success of students through incentives in the form of monetary rewards if academic goals are met, along with sanctions if they are not (Lemann, 2008). With the increased pressure placed on teaching staff to increase their classes' academic achievement, school psychologists have been increasingly supportive. Through collaboration and consultation, school psychologists have become more effective in providing the best possible outcome for students (Ransford, Greenberg, Domitrovich, Small, & Jacobson, 2009). In addition, the challenge of working with emotionally behaviorally disturbed (EBD) students also presents a unique challenge for teachers. Not only are EBD students a challenge to work with at times, the frustration, isolation, and perceived lack of understanding often leads to short tenure regarding teachers who work in

classrooms with EBD students (Niesyn, 2009). School psychologists are a vital tool for these teachers as they can collaborate and consult with teachers who work with EBD students to provide evidence-based interventions and solutions for the specific challenges each EBD student presents (DuPaul, Stoner, & O'Reilly, 2002).

Many of the current challenges faced by today's teachers can be stemmed from the social push for full inclusion of students with physical, emotional, and psychoeducational disabilities in the general classroom, which gained momentum in the 1980's (Robbins-Etlen, 2009). Along with the emphasis of full inclusion, special instruction and services without labels, a preference for outcome-based education, and the phasing out of pullout special education programs are becoming commonplace in many school districts. Essentially, full inclusion requires regular education teachers to, not only plan effective curriculums for regular education students, but must adapt their lessons and teaching style to fit the academic, physical, and emotional strengths and weakness of the possible myriad of disabilities that may be present in a given classroom (Robbins-Etlen, 2009).

School psychologists can be instrumental in assisting teachers with the added pressure of NCLB, along with the other various challenges present in the educational environment through functioning as a behavioral, and academic, consultant (D'Amato et al., 2004). According to the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), most school psychologists serve as consultants with teachers and other school staff (Burns et al., 2006). Consultation is considered an indirect service through which a consultee (i.e., a teacher) attempts to support a client(s) (e.g. a student or parent) through the use of problem solving (Knotek, 2005).

Consultation in the school environment typically attempts to resolve issues surrounding students' academic performance within the educational environment, as well as addressing

maladaptive behavioral issues (Freer & Watson, 1999). Throughout the consultation process, school psychologists attempt to strengthen the relationships between teachers, parents, and service providers within the community. Regarding the implementation of the Response to Intervention (RTI) service model, consultation between school psychologists and teaching staff is vital, in order to ensure overall general knowledge of the methods, principles, motivations, and goals involved in the process (Knotek, 2005). The indirect nature of consultation makes this service more feasible in the school environment given that the need for mental health services are greater than the availability of services (Auster, Feeny-Kettler, & Kratochwill, 2006). Additionally, consultation utilizes the expertise of all those involved in the process including teacher, support staff, and parents. Finally, this mode of service delivery places responsibility to the consultees, which allows more students to be served at a given time than the amount of individuals the consultant could serve alone.

Many models of consultation have been developed that encourage the use of instructional and behavioral consultation services to teachers while utilizing the problem-solving approach. One such model available to school psychologists is Conjoint Behavioral Consultation (CBC) (Reinke, Lewis-Palmer, & Merrell, 2008). CBC is unique in the sense that involves both teachers and parents in the same consultation relationship and come together to problem-solve a presenting issue. In the words of Kratochwill and Sheridan, CBC is

“...a systematic, indirect form of service-delivery, in which parents and teachers are joined to work together to address the academic, social, or behavioral needs of an individual for whom both parties bear some responsibility” (1992, p. 122).

Another consultation method available to school psychology professionals is Heartland problem-solving approach. The Heartland problem-solving approach utilizes the problem-

solving model in conjunction with consultation Heartland problem-solving approach that utilizes four levels to consultation (Tilly, 2008). The four levels in the Heartland problem solving approach to consultation include: Level I- which involves consultation between parents and teachers, Level II- which involves consultation with other resources, Level III- which extends consultation to multiple individuals in a problem-solving team, and finally Level IV which involves the IEP consideration. Each level successively requires more resources to address increasingly intense problems as each step is implemented.

Other consultation models that have been used traditionally include teacher-based consultation and parent-based consultation (Reinke et al., 2008). In teacher-based consultation, a teacher often serves as the mediator for the treatment of a client. This consultation model is the most widely used and researched consultation approach because it makes serving a teacher, both feasible, and appropriate due to teacher availability during a given school day. Another model of consultation services is parent-based consultation in which the parent serves in the role as a mediator and is trained in the agreed upon intervention or service (Kratochwill & Pittman, 2002). Peer-mediated consultation is another form of school consultation and this involves a student playing the role as a mediator in order to address behavioral and/or academic issues among his/her peers. Other types of consultation include technology training/consultation, parent training, and organizational/system-level consultation.

An additional role of the contemporary school psychologist includes the prevention of problems within the school setting rather than working to alleviate them after psychological problems have become manifest (Sandoval, 2002). School psychologists evaluate the mental well being of students through interview techniques, along with the administration of emotional/behavioral scales. In addition, school psychologists often assume responsibility for

the development of proactive programs that are designed to prevent at-risk children from failing and dropping out of school. Furthermore, school psychologists attempt to prevent violence and ignorance by promoting overall understanding and acceptance of increasingly diverse school and community environments. Finally, by evaluating the mental health of students and collaborating with school personnel and parents, school psychologists attempt to prevent crises, such as school shootings and suicides (Larson, 2008; Sandoval, 2002).

In summary, school psychologists typically assist, and work cooperatively with other professionals within the educational setting in order to provide the learning environment most conducive to each student's academic, behavioral, and emotional needs. It is, however, important to note that the specific role of a psychologist in the schools will be greatly influenced by the grade levels of the students with whom he/she works. For example, a school psychologist in an elementary school may conduct more psychological assessments than a colleague in a secondary educational environment, where more counseling and crisis prevention work may be required (Sandoval, 2002).

Thus, it is apparent that the role of the school psychologist today is much more comprehensive and complex than in previous years. This contemporary role involves the provision of support and assistance to students, parents and other school personnel, using a wide variety of "best practice" methods and techniques. More specifically, the roles of the school psychologist can be described as a problem solver for special education, repairer through individual and group interventions, consultant among teaching professionals, and as an engineer where practitioners work with overall service delivery methods (Fagan, 2006).

### **Teachers' Utilization of the Services Provided by the School Psychologist**

School psychologists provide a natural link between regular education teachers and special education teachers in order to provide services that meet the needs of their schools (Rosenfield, 2008). In addition, while assessment has historically been a primary role of the school psychologist, it has been shown that teachers generally wanted school psychologist to expand their role (Watkins, Crosby, & Pearson, 2001). Findings of surveys given to teachers suggest that consultation is perhaps the most important service that school psychologists can provide. Furthermore, in examining the role of the school psychologist as a behavioral consultant, the teacher's perception of the service provider, along with the method of service delivery significantly impacts overall effectiveness of the consulting relationship and process.

Regarding the in-school consultation process, McMahon and Pruett (1998), describes consultation as a complex process involving communication and collaboration among professionals in the school environment with the goal of enhancing the overall quality of education for students. When teachers have a student presenting a behavioral or academic issue, they should be able to directly consult with a school psychologist in order to formulate effective solutions. Theoretically, the indirect services provided by the school psychologist through a consultative model should effectively support the client, a student or parent. However, teachers may not be inclined to collaborate with other education professionals due to personal issues and/or lack of knowledge regarding the services available to them.

In a study conducted by Gonzalez, Nelson, and Gutkin (2004), nine variables were defined as affecting the efficacy of the consultation process between consultees (teachers) and the consultant (school psychologist). Variables discussed included (1) teaching efficacy, (2) the teacher's perceptions of his/her own consultation skills, (3) the teacher's overall perception of

the role of the school psychologist, (4) similarities between the two individual professionals, (5) and the problem-solving skills provided by the school psychologist. Other variables include (6) the interpersonal and relationship skills of the school psychologist, (7) administrative support of in-school consultation, (8) adequate time available for proper consultation, (9) and the opportunity for the teacher to reciprocate consultation with the school psychologist. While this study lacked empirically-based conclusions, it was found that teachers reported a positive correlation between the amount of time the school psychologist spent in the building and the efficacy of in-school consultation. Research also suggests that school psychologists who utilize a more, “soft” approach, which attempts to emphasize the feelings of the teacher as well as the use of empathy and suggestions, are more frequently sought out for their consultation services rather than psychologists who utilize a more “harsh” consultation style (Erchul, Raven, & Ray, 2001).

In addition, school psychologists who are perceived as kind and competent in their expertise and use more subtle, positive and non-coercive methods of consultation are more often perceived as helpful and nonthreatening by teachers (Erchul et al., 2001). This is in contrast to psychologists who are seen as “heavy handed” individuals who, while they may provide expert suggestions and information, utilize consultation strategies that are viewed as coercive and impersonal. In such cases, teachers may perceive such a psychologist as cold and authoritative (Erchul & Covington, 1995).

The use of consultation has increased as pre-referral intervention, prior to evaluation for special education eligibility, has recently been emphasized as best practice (Gutkin, Henning-Stout, & Piersel, 1988). In the past, school psychologists often administered psychological assessments to students to explore the possibility of special education eligibility. In addition,

when district wide pre-referral interventions are utilized, the frequency of in-school consultation increases.

Regarding current and future demographic trends, school psychologist and teachers are predicted to work with increasingly diverse populations, particularly English Language Learners (ELLs) (Merrell et al., 2005 (School Psychology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century). There is a projected growth of populations with diverse race, ethnicity, language, cultural background, and familial composition. Specifically, teachers have found assistance from school psychologists through the use of academic interventions geared specifically for ELL students.

In recent years, the field has shifted from “test and place” to the RTI model, which relies heavily on evidence and research based interventions that can take into account cultural and language barriers (Xu & Drame, 2007). Thus, the RTI model properly addresses behavioral and academic classroom issues. As a result, teachers can utilize the implementation of evidence-based interventions to break down cultural and language barriers within the classroom environment to provide the best situation for learning within a given curriculum.

In addition, Gilman and Medway (2007) examined how often regular education teachers requested the services provided by school psychologists versus the frequency of requests given by special education teachers. Findings indicate that most requested services by both groups of teachers included (1) assessment of students for learning disabilities, (2) behavioral consultation, and (3) academic consultation. However, it was found that special education teachers more often requested these three services than regular education teachers (Gilman & Medway, 2007). A possible explanation for this may be the fact that school psychologists often work directly with special education teachers in multiple settings. For example, special education teachers develop students’ individual education plans, in order to ensure that they effectively meet each student’s



individual needs. In developing these plans, the special education teachers often use the information gained through evaluations done by the school psychologist.

### **The Teacher's Perception Regarding the Role of the School Psychologist**

A theme emerging from current and past research is the mismatch between what teacher's think about the role of the school psychologist versus the actual duties that school psychologists perform (Farrell, Jimerson, & Kalambouka, 2005). Across the board, teachers and other educational support professionals must be knowledgeable of what the role of the school psychologist is and how often their services are available. If this knowledge has not been established within a school district, educators may view those services as being provided by other service professionals (Farrell et al., 2005). In addition, if there is simply a general lack of knowledge of who the school psychologist(s) is in a district, the overall perception of the quality of services provided by the school psychologist will be altered and diminished.

Even though school psychologists have a broad role and typically provide the aforementioned services, it has been found that teachers may have varying opinions regarding the role of the school psychologist (Wilson, Erchul, & Raven, 2008). While it is true that school psychologists do not hold official authority over teachers, they are often viewed as individuals who have the ability/potential to influence teachers. In addition, teachers are faced with meeting the demands of the educational environment with increasingly scarce time and resources, e.g. from additional academic requirements from NCLB and strains from the current state of the economy (Ransford et al., 2009). When teachers implement academic interventions, school psychologists often request that they monitor the effectiveness of the subsequent interventions over time. Likewise, behavioral interventions often require teachers to monitor the frequency and intensity of a student's targeted behaviors. Teachers may also be asked to determine whether

positive behaviors replace the target behaviors over time. While many interventions are intended to be quick and easy to monitor, teachers may perceive the added tasks of supporting and monitoring the effectiveness of interventions over time as an infringement on their already extensive schedules.

Regarding the overall knowledge and efficacy of the services provided by the school psychologist, it was found by Gilman (2007) that teachers often perceived many of the roles of the school psychologist as being solely provided by the school counselor. Such services included crisis intervention; group counseling, training and professional development, and consultation, to name a few. Teachers also have perceived as school psychologists as having more clinical skills than what school psychologists typically possess (Farrell et al, 2005). Furthermore, it was noted that teachers generally know more about the role of the school counselor as opposed to that of the school psychologist. This may also be the case because regular education teachers may often have more contact with the school counselor within the schools they are employed (Gilman et al., 2007). In the United States, research suggests that teachers perceive the consultative role of the school psychologist if the school psychologist is present in their school building more than twice a week (Arivett, et al, 2005).

According to a practicing school psychologist in Minnesota “school psychologists often serve several buildings... and may have only one "office" where they typically perform most of their professional duties” (personal contact, October, 2009). As a result, the availability of school psychologists for the provision of support services is also usually limited. In addition, practitioners are often not in close proximity to the regular education teachers they serve.

Furthermore, “teachers may view school psychologists as part of the Ivory Tower” (D. Krupp, personal communication, September 2008). From personal experience, this school

psychologist disclosed that school psychologists often work alongside administrators and may have an office in close proximity to them. Due to the limited office space in many school buildings, the psychologist may not have an office in every building he/she serves. In addition, administration may request school psychologists to perform tasks that involve systems change within a school district, such as communicating policies set forth by administrators. In very few cases school psychologists may be asked to perform administrative duties when specific officials are not present.

In contrast to the Ivory Tower mentality, it is important to note that teachers typically rate school psychologists who have a doctoral degree as being more effective and having more social influence (Arvitt et al., 2007). This is important to note because administrative officials in public schools often hold doctoral degrees and a comparison could be made between administration and school psychologists. However, this connection may only be adverse if the relationship between administration and teachers is considered coercive.

### **Chapter III: Summary, Critical Analysis, and Recommendations**

As mentioned previously, the roles and functions of the school psychologist have changed dramatically since the inception of the field. While school psychologists have always had the task of assisting education professionals in providing in the least restrictive environment (LRE) for the students they serve, research has led to multiple paradigm shifts in how this task is to be performed. Within this section, a summary of the literature will be presented. In addition, a critical analysis of the literature and recommendations will be discussed for areas of future research.

#### **Summary**

School psychologists are agents of change at the cusp of current research, which is guiding education to new revolutionary methods of service delivery. Initially school psychologists were viewed as statisticians who would interpret the results of academic and achievement ability assessments for the purpose of special education eligibility. After the implementation of IDEA (1997) and its revisions, ADA (1990), NCLB (2002), and the push for full inclusion, the role of the school psychologist has greatly expanded. Currently, school psychologists are typically viewed as educational experts who work alongside teachers and other professionals in the school setting to provide the most supportive learning environment for all students. School psychologists are also prime candidates for professional consultation among education professionals along with administering psychological services and providing crisis prevention/intervention. This would suggest that today's school psychologists should have a sound knowledge of basic counseling skills and must be prepared to administer "psychological first aid" to students when necessary.

Research indicated that in-school consultation, along with the implementation of behavioral and academic interventions in the classroom has become a significant aspect of the services provided by school psychologists throughout the nation. As pre-referral to special education, interventions are commonplace, especially with the implementation of the RTI service delivery model (Leann, 2006). In order to be effective in practice, school psychologists must be knowledgeable of available evidence-based interventions and be aware when new interventions are developed and available. In addition, teachers are more often than ever seeking in-school consultation services from the school psychologists in their districts (Auster et al., 2006). In addition, when students exhibit behaviors that are detrimental to the learning environment, school psychologists are often called to implement behavioral interventions. Furthermore, school psychologists work alongside teachers to provide academic interventions when students' specific learning deficits are not being addressed appropriately in the classroom environment. Thus school psychologists must be empathetic to teachers' needs and select interventions that are not only effective, but fit in teachers' extensive schedules as well.

Finally, the teacher's perception of the roles and functions of the contemporary school psychologist were examined. It was found that regular education teachers often perceived the services that are provided by school psychologists as typically provided by other school professionals who have more direct contact with teachers from day to day (Gilman & Medway, 2007). As a school psychologist in practice, this would imply that in order for the consultation process to be effective and efficient to teachers, school psychologists should make the effort to be present in school buildings where the teachers they serve perform their duties. It is also interesting to note that special education teachers were more likely to understand the roles and functions of the school psychologist. Therefore special education teachers more often utilized

the services provided by the school psychologist than regular education teachers. Overall, school psychology professionals should make their services known to teachers, clarify their roles and functions to the education professionals in the districts they serve, and work to establish rapport with teachers, other service providers, students, and parents.

### **Critical Analysis**

The role of the school psychologist continues to adapt to ever changing social and political climates. As stated prior, school psychologists play a much broader role since the profession's inception. The research suggested an ongoing expansion within the role of the school psychology as the more intervention driven RTI model is being implemented in increasing numbers of school districts (Fagan, 2008). Today, school psychologists often take the role of implementing interventions, recording the effectiveness of interventions over time, and reaching conclusions based on the analysis of the results. This is in contrast simply being considered the "gate keeper" of deciding which students are eligible for special education or not (Fagan & Wise, 2000).

In addition, the matter of the increasing use of interventions with ELL students was examined. In order to be the most effective at implementing academic and behavioral interventions while breaking down language barriers, it seems obvious that the school psychologists of the future will have to be more adept at communicate in multiple languages and have knowledge of the cultural norms and practices (Xu & Drame, 2008). Knowledge in cultural differences along with fluency in multiple languages will be especially useful as more and more ELL students are entering our public school districts.

An interesting aspect of the profession of school psychology was the perceived notion that many regular education teachers confuse the role of the school psychologist with that of the

school counselor and/or other pupil service providers (Gilman & Medway, 2007). While the school psychologist is typically prepared to administer psychological services, especially regarding crisis intervention/prevention, school psychologists do not typically counsel students on a regular basis.

Finally, while there are exceptions, school psychologists often have offices near administration or are even located in separate buildings all together. While the separation of the school psychologist from the typical educational environment may be conducive to the completion of extensive special education paper work and the scoring of assessments with limited interruption, the drawback appears to lay in the fact that school psychologists do not have as much professional contact with the teachers they serve (Gonzalez et al., 2004).

### **Conclusion and Recommendations for Future Research**

While this literature review examines the overall broad role of the school psychologist, as delineated by the NASP, it does not take into account the individual roles and functions of school psychologists from school district to school district. Thus, the following recommendations are offered for areas of further research regarding the teacher's perception of the roles and functions of school psychologists:

- (1) A more comprehensive and detailed examination regarding the role of the contemporary school psychologist can be obtained if research is conducted that focuses on differences within individual school districts, regional differences within each state, along with regional differences throughout the United States.
- (2) In addition it may be beneficial for research to be conducted that examines the effectiveness of the professional relationship between teachers and school psychologists

over time as the relatively new response to intervention model (RTI) becomes more prominent in implementation amongst school districts throughout the United States.

(3) The mental health and consultative role of the school psychologist should be further explored.

(4) Newer methods of consultation and mental health services delivery should be examined to further enhance the role and function of teachers and school psychologists.

As academic and behavioral consultants, school psychologists can not only prevent issues regarding behavior and academics among students from happening, the consultation process and teachers' perception can lead to more effective and efficient collaboration amongst professionals that are most congruent with students' behavioral and academic success.



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