The Perceptions of Nova Scotia School Psychologists regarding their Roles

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Abstract

For a number of years, it has been proposed that the scope of school psychological services be expanded beyond assessment to include other activities such as consultation, prevention, and research. Despite school psychologists' reported desires to expand their roles, change in this direction has been slow (Braden et al., 2001; Fagan, 2002). Many practitioners have found their roles restricted to that of "testers" and reported discrepancies between their actual and desired practice (Curtis et al., 2002; Desimone, 1999; Hanson, 2004; Jones-Wilson, 1994; Levinson, 1990; Reschly & Wilson, 1995).

This study was conducted to examine the perceptions of psychologists practicing in Nova Scotia schools regarding their actual and desired role functioning, the establishment of their activities, the challenges to achieving their desired practice, and the influence they feel they have over the activities in which they engage. The intent of this research was to provide insight into the current practices and perceptions of school psychologists in the province.

Thirty-four psychologists responded to this study, a 63% response rate, resulting in 32 usable surveys. Findings suggest that many factors influence how school psychologists enact their roles, such as the needs of different schools, school teams, school administrators, the prioritization of psychoeducational assessment, and individual school culture. Respondents spent the most time engaged in psychoeducational assessment, followed by report writing, behaviour assessment, and consultation. Significant differences were found between actual and desired role functioning, with psychologists wanting more time for counselling, inservicing, and

prevention oriented activities and less time conducting psychoeducational assessments, writing reports, and travelling. Respondents identified a number of barriers/ challenges to their desired functioning, including heavy caseloads, others' lack of awareness of psychologists' expertise, the focus on psychoeducational assessment, and issues associated with working in a non-psychology environment. They also described strategies that enable them to gain some control over their activity allocation, such as open communication/ negotiation, educating others, and participating on school teams. Respondents reported having a wide range of influence over their activity allocation, from very low to very high.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

The role of the school psychologist has evolved since the field first emerged in the latter part of the nineteenth century. At first, school psychologists focused solely on standardized testing (Braden, DiMarino-Linnen, & Good, 2001). By the end of the twentieth century, school psychologists reported engaging in other activities as well, such as consultation, counselling, research, crisis intervention, program evaluation, inservicing, and training and supervision (Curtis, Grier, Abshier, Sutton, & Hunley, 2002; Jones-Wilson, 1994; Levinson, 1990; Watkins, Manus, Hunton-Shoup, & Tipton, 1991). The field of school psychology is, however, still trying to reduce the emphasis on testing. In most instances, school psychologists' job responsibilities are heavily oriented towards psychoeducational assessment, despite the reported desire of many practitioners to diversify their roles (Curtis, Hunley, & Grier, 2002; Desimone, 1999; Hanson, 2004; Jones-Wilson, 1994; Levinson, 1990; Reschly & Wilson, 1995). A particular focus over the past two decades is how the role of the school psychologist can be reconceptualized to encompass a more prevention and consultation-oriented model of practice. This call for school psychology reform has permeated much of the literature in the field.

Jones-Wilson (1994) indicated that school psychologists have long been concerned about the nature and delineation of their job. Role restriction has been a source of dissatisfaction for many practitioners in the field, resulting in discrepancies between their actual and desired role functioning (Levinson, 1990). School psychologists have indicated that they want to spend less time in assessment and more time in consultation

and intervention activities (Curtis et al., 2002; Desimone, 1999; Hanson, 2004; Jones-Wilson, 1994; Levinson, 1990; Reschly & Wilson, 1995). Despite school psychologists' interest in role expansion, and organizational rhetoric calling for school psychology reform, Fagan (2002) reported that role allocations had remained much the same as they were in previous years. Research focusing on why change has been nonexistent or slow is needed. Factors such as years of experience, level of training, and student-to-school psychologist ratio have been shown to affect type of practice (Davis, McIntosh, Phelps, & Kehle, 2004). Legislation, such as policies perpetuating the "tester" role of the school psychologist, has also been identified as influencing the provision of service in schools (Cole & Siegel, 2003). School psychologists have also identified attempts to restrict their job responsibilities within the school system as a factor that impedes change. Davis et al (2004) indicated that the current state of school psychology in US schools forces psychologists into a testing-oriented role and suggested that school psychologists may be too busy to provide the range of preventative services that have been shown to be effective in improving children's outcomes.

While much has been written about US school psychology, research examining the role of the school psychologist in Canada is lacking. Without this type of research, it is difficult to comment on the status of school psychology in this country. The current study was conducted to gather the perceptions of school psychologists practicing in Nova Scotia schools regarding the allocation of their activities, their preferred activities, and the challenges they face. This investigation was undertaken in order to inform those in the field about current practices and reveal the degree of commonality and variability that exists in the practice of school psychology in the province.

One objective of this research was to identify what participating school psychologists are actually doing in their practice and what they would like to do. Research in the United States has found that large discrepancies exist between school psychologists' actual and desired role functioning (Curtis et al., 2002; Desimone, 1999; Hanson, 2004; Jones-Wilson, 1994; Levinson, 1990; Reschly & Wilson, 1995). It was decided that it would be valuable to determine whether this is the case for Nova Scotia school psychologists in order to understand the types of services they would like to provide and the model of practice they desire.

Another intent of this study was to examine the level of input that Nova Scotia school psychologists have into their role allocation. Learning how responsibilities are established and how psychologists feel they contribute to this process is essential in order to understand how the practitioners can influence their role functioning. A final goal of this study was to identify the barriers that Nova Scotia school psychologists perceive as standing in the way of their desired practice. An awareness of these barriers is an important step towards addressing them and effecting change.

The following research questions were addressed: (1) How are the activities of Nova Scotia school psychologists established? (2)What are the current activities of school psychologists practicing in Nova Scotia? (3) Is there a discrepancy between Nova Scotia school psychologists' actual and desired role functioning? (4) Is there a relationship between what Nova Scotia school psychologists feel they are capable of doing and what they actually do? (5) What are the factors that Nova Scotia school psychologists perceive as barriers or challenges to their desired practice? (6) How much input do Nova Scotia school psychologists feel they have into their role allocation?

Literature Review

A paradigm shift in the provision of school psychological services has been proposed for over two decades (Braden et al., 2001). This involves expanding the job focus of school psychologists beyond assessment to include other responsibilities such as consultation, prevention, and research. In spite of these calls for role expansion, researchers have found that there has been little change in the actual practice of psychology in the schools (Braden et al., 2001; Fagan, 2002). Pleas for school psychologists to expand their services flood the literature (Fagan, 2002), as does discussion about the disparity that exists between their current and potential role. As Braden et al. (2001) point out, the field of school psychology is still searching for an answer to the question posed by Letia Hollingsworth in 1933: "What will be the development of psychological service to our schools?"

Since the field was first established, school psychologists have focused primarily on providing services to individual children (an idiographic orientation) as opposed to focusing on the general problems of schooling and the influence of context (nomothetic orientation) (Braden et al., 2001; Power, 2000). The emphasis on testing and the central role psychologists played in the placement of children in special education programs has influenced the practice of psychology in schools. The first school psychologists were seen primarily as "testers" and as Siegel and Cole (2003) point out, "…the titles of "Binet-testers" and "examiners" reflected their narrowly defined roles" (p.4).

Today, some argue that school psychology is still searching to establish its identity (Braden et al., 2001; Christenson, 2000; Fagan, 2002; Siegel & Cole, 2003). As Cole and Siegel (2003) identify, nearly every school board employs psychologists, yet

there is little consensus regarding their role. The authors describe how some view school psychologists as technicians whose purpose is to provide testing services, while others view them as consultants who are able to draw on a wide body of knowledge to support the school community. The two opposing views involve very different expectations and responsibilities.

The following paper provides a review of some aspects of the role of the school psychologist in Canada and the United States: the actual role functioning of school psychologists, the discrepancy between actual and desired role functioning among school psychologists, the factors influencing engagement in various practices, and the call for school psychology reform. Along with reviewing research on school psychologists' actual and desired role functioning, factors that affect school psychologists' ability to engage in certain activities are identified. Literature regarding the call for school psychology reform is also reviewed. This area of literature focuses on the changes that must occur at an individual level (ie. role responsibilities) and system level if school psychologists hope to reconceptualize their roles. Past research has found that school psychologists' desired role functioning is in line with system reform themes (Reschly & Wilson, 1995).

Much of the research in these areas is from the US and was conducted in the 1990s. As such, many of the findings must be interpreted with caution, particularly with respect to how they represent Canada and Nova Scotia school psychologists in 2006.

Actual Role Functioning

A number of US studies have assessed the types of services school psychologists provide, along with the portion of time they devote to each service (Curtis, Grier,

Abshier, Sutton, & Hunley, 2002; Fagan & Wise, 1994; Levinson, 1990; Watkins, Manus, Hunton-Shoup, & Tipton, 1991). Most of these studies found that the role of the school psychologist was heavily oriented towards assessment. The remainder of their work time was spent in intervention, consultation, and to a lesser degree, research activities. As previously mentioned, it is important to note that the literature reviewed in this section spans a twelve-year period and dates back to 1990.

A study conducted by Watkins et al in 1991 examined the activities in which 258 school psychologists engaged. Activities listed by the surveyed psychologists included counselling, assessment, interventions, program development, continuing education, and training and supervision. This sample was comprised of school psychologists whose primary job affiliations were elementary-high school settings, university academic, private practice, hospital, community mental health, or other. Although the largest proportion of respondents (38.7%) practiced in a school setting, there were a variety of work settings, so the reported activities may not necessarily reflect the actual role functioning of the psychologists who practice solely in schools.

Other studies that have focused on US psychologists who work exclusively in school settings have generated more detailed information. Fagan and Wise (1994) found that school psychologists spent 54% of their time in assessment activities, 24% in interventions, 20% in consultation and in-service training, and 2% in research/program evaluation. A comparable study conducted by Curtis et al. in 2002 found that school psychologists spent 41% of their time in assessment, 26% in report writing, 25% in meetings, and 8% in other activities. School psychologists surveyed in the more recent study reported spending 13% less of their time in assessment activities than those

surveyed in the earlier study; however, both studies found that the practitioners spent the bulk of their time focused on the needs of individual students, primarily in assessment activities. Comparisons of these studies, which were conducted eight years apart, must be made with caution as they involved different samples and likely used different criteria to categorize activities.

While much has been written about US school psychology, it is more difficult to find similar information about the Canadian scene. A chapter written by Saklofske and Janzen in 1993 for Professional Psychology in Canada provides a rare look at Canadian school psychology (Saklofske & Janzen, 1993). The researchers stated that no general statement can articulate the roles and functions of Canadian school psychologists because each province, or even individual school boards, may have their own job descriptions.

Although there has been minimal research on school psychologists in Canada, Saklofske and Janzen (1993) described one study conducted by Neudorf in 1990 that examined the activities performed by 37 psychologists practicing in Saskatchewan schools. Neudorf found that the most frequently performed tasks involved administering individual tests to identify learning disabilities, reporting the findings of individual assessments to parents, planning individual programs with teachers for children with learning disabilities, and conducting individual assessments to determine learning styles. Such findings are comparable to the results for US studies.

Commenting on the role of the school psychologist in the early 1990s, Saklofske and Janzen (1993) referred to the "chameleon-like" image of professionals who were expected to work as psychologists, specialist teachers, programmers, evaluators, counsellors, administrators, etc. They argued that the identity of the specialty of school

psychology had become much clearer in the United States than in Canada. While acknowledging that Canadian school psychology was a relatively young specialty, the researchers stated that the field lacked "a clear, unified conceptualization of practice" (p.340). Whether there have been changes since that time is unknown.

The Discrepancy between Actual and Desired Role Functioning

A number of studies have documented the desire of school psychologists to diversify their role and adopt a model of practice that allows for less assessment and more consultation and intervention activities (Curtis, Hunley, & Grier, 2002; Desimone, 1999; Hanson, 2004; Jones-Wilson, 1994; Levinson, 1990; Reschly & Wilson, 1995). Reschly and Wilson (1995) discussed how such preferences are consistent with system reform themes involving more emphasis on direct intervention and problem solving-oriented consultation and less emphasis on psychoeducational assessment. It is necessary to keep in mind that the literature reviewed in this section spans a fourteen-year period and was, for the most part, conducted in the 1990s.

Levinson (1990) documented the actual and desired role functioning of 362 Pennsylvania school psychologists. The purpose of the study was to investigate the relationship between role function variables and job satisfaction. Results indicated that surveyed psychologists spent more time in assessment and less time in consultation, counselling, and research than they desired. Both perceived control over role functioning and role function discrepancy were related to job satisfaction: those who felt they had less control over their role were less satisfied with their jobs, while those who reported greater discrepancies between actual and desired time spent in certain activities were also less satisfied with their employment situation.

Jones-Wilson (1994) surveyed 300 Virginia school psychologists who reported wanting to spend more time in individual counselling, group counselling, family counselling, consultation, program evaluation, inservice, and research. In contrast, the respondents desired less time in assessment activities, administrative tasks, multidisciplinary meetings, and travel.

Reschly and Wilson (1995) also found that school psychologists wanted to reduce the time spent in psychoeducational assessment activities. The researchers surveyed a random sample of 1, 089 US school psychologists who reported wanting to reduce the time devoted to psychoeducational assessment from over one-half to one-third or less of their role. Results of a study conducted by Desimone (1999) echoed the results of the Levinson study (1990). The 1999 study involved 211 Florida school psychologists who reported spending more time in assessment activities and less time in counselling, consultation, and research than desired. There is, therefore, evidence to suggest that many school psychologists were not enjoying a match between their actual and desired professional practice in the 1990s. More recently, Hanson (2004) conducted a study involving 114 Indiana school psychologists and found that they also reported a discrepancy between their actual and desired role functioning: they wanted less time with students referred for testing and more time with other groups in the student population.

The desire to move toward a more diversified role is a reoccurring theme in the literature and appears to reflect the view of many school psychologists. It is, however, important to note that there are school psychologists who prefer a restricted role focused on individual referrals and assessment activities (Braden et al., 2001; Levinson, 1990). It is not clear what percentage of psychologists fit in this category.

Factors Influencing the Practice of School Psychology

The field of school psychology continues to be shaped by the evolution of testing (Braden et al., 2001). Schools are required to provide assessment services to children and school psychologists are the professionals who deliver this service (Fagan, 2002). Cole and Siegel (2003) report that both educators and psychologists view legislated requirements as the main factor influencing the provision of service in schools. They state that because assessment is a requirement for placement decisions in many jurisdictions, educators see it as the most needed psychological service. Assessments are often needed to obtain services and funding for students. Guidelines regarding the responsibilities of school psychologists also have the potential to influence practice. Policies that narrowly define the role of the school psychologist create different expectations than policies that deem a diverse range of activities to be relevant to the position.

The lack of support for general mental health and preventative services in schools has also been identified as a factor affecting practice (Braden et al, 2001). Cole and Siegel (2003) discuss how educators often recognize that psychologists possess a wide range of knowledge and skills, but rarely accept such modes of service as appropriate alternatives to assessment. Narrow perceptions of school psychologists' responsibilities have been identified as challenges by practitioners in the field. In a study conducted by Jones-Wilson (1994) school psychologists reported that the efforts of school administrators to restrict their role was the greatest hindrance in the profession. Some have argued that this maintains a traditional model of practice and prevents the many competencies of school psychologists from being recognized (Braden et al, 2001; Jones-Wilson, 1994).

The needs of a particular school or community can also dictate the type of service a school psychologist provides. Cole and Siegel (2003) state that certain communities may require an emphasis on specific services. They also describe how a certain program or project (ie. early intervention program, health promotion project, etc.) may be a part of a school's culture and provide an avenue for services to be made available to the general school population or community. The culture within each school can have a great impact upon how psychologists enact their roles. Culture can be explained as the "…unwritten rules and traditions, norms, and expectations that seem to permeate everything: the way people act, how they dress, what they talk about, whether they seek out colleagues for help or not…" (Ledoux, 2005). The culture within one school may foster a collaborative environment, while another school's culture may be rooted in individualism, leaving little room for collaboration. A school psychologist may have a diverse role in one school and a unidimensional role in another.

Student-to-school psychologist ratio has been shown to significantly impact the type and amount of activities performed. Curtis et al (2002) found that school psychologists responsible for a greater number of students spent more time doing special education evaluations and re-evaluations, whereas those serving fewer students engaged in more intervention and prevention activities.

It has also been suggested that the working conditions experienced by many school psychologists lends to a model of practice that involves responding reactively versus proactively. Braden et al (2001) argue that this is the case for psychologists who work at multiple schools and are itinerant staff who don't have a designated workspace.

Experience and training have also been shown to influence practice. Curtis et al (2002) found that school psychologists who were more experienced and/or had higher levels of training engaged in more intervention and prevention-oriented activities. They speculated that years of experience and higher levels of training enable psychologists to more efficiently complete less preferred activities, leaving time to engage in chosen activities, diversifying their role if so desired.

Perceived level of competency has also been related to engagement. Despite school psychologists' reported desire for expanded roles, Jones-Wilson (1994) found that the majority of practitioners spent most of their time in an activity where they felt most competent (ie. assessment). She speculated that changes in practice may occur if school psychologists felt more competent in alternative activities (ie. consultation, counselling).

Research up until this point has identified some of the factors that are associated with engagement in various professional practices. Which factors are relevant to each psychologist depends upon his/her circumstance. One area that is not clear is how (if) each school psychologist can influence his/her role functioning. With the exception of findings that have associated higher levels of training and years of experience with increased engagement in preferred activities (Curtis et al, 2002), there is minimal research investigating the ways in which individual school psychologists influence their practice. Benson and Hughes (1985) suggested that school psychologists may underestimate their own influence on job functioning. Levinson (1990) addressed this issue by recommending that school psychologists maintain some degree of flexibility and control over their role, but did not elaborate on how to do this. Davis et al (2004) discussed the importance of school psychologists' promoting awareness about their

competencies within their schools. While acknowledging that systemic constraints (ie. legislative requirements, high student-to-school psychologist ratios) leave little time for activities such as consultation, prevention, and policy development, the researchers argued that school psychologists need to find a way to incorporate some aspects of these activities into their practice. They suggested that attrition becomes a problem when school psychologists are not able to do this and end up engaging in repetitive tasks. Cole and Siegel (2003) also argue that it is in the best interest of school psychologists to work towards an expanded role. They advocate that the practitioners can do much to implement change and provide a thorough discussion on the skills needed to foster a consultative approach. There is discussion taking place on how psychologists can shape their role within the school system, but there is also a need for research examining the level of influence school psychologists feel they have over their activity allocation and the ways in which they are currently negotiating their roles.

The Call for School Psychology Reform

Much of the school psychology literature is about role expansion and the call for reform (Fagan, 2002). Proponents of this reform argue that school psychologists need to reconceptualize their role and redefine how others view their position (Braden et al, 2001). When elaborating on what this change would entail, Braden et al (2001) describe a model of practice that involves, "...decreasing the emphasis on assessment and increasing emphasis on advocacy, preventative measures, and the mental health needs of all students" (p.216). There are several reasons for this proposed change. Not only has role expansion been shown to be of interest to school psychologists, it appears as though it is in their best interest as well. Job satisfaction has been related to an expanded role

(Levinson, 1990, Amedore & Knoff, 1993) and job-related stresses have been shown to be reduced when one engages in innovative services (Cole & Siegel, 2003). It can be argued that satisfied school psychologists will be more effective in their jobs and will be more likely to remain in the profession.

Role expansion also has the potential to enhance the quality and quantity of services offered to schools and children. The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) states that, "students, families, schools, and society at large benefit when schools meet the needs of the whole child by fostering social-emotional skills and identifying and preventing mental health problems early." The organization argues that prevention programs that reach all students and early identification and intervention with at-risk students will improve student and school outcomes. Cole and Siegel (2003) support this argument by proposing a model of practice for school psychologists that focuses on prevention and consultation. The model is built on the assumptions that services should be available to all students and that multiple approaches to service delivery are desirable. They argue that direct service to individual students is only one mode of service delivery and is not always the most desirable option. They discuss how a service may be most effectively provided by someone else (ie. teacher), through collaborative consultation with a school psychologist.

There is, therefore, a compelling argument for school psychologists to reconceptualize their roles. As Braden et al (2001) suggest, school psychologists who function in a broader role, opposed to those who spend the majority of their time doing psychoeducational assessments and writing reports for a minority of students, are better

able to address students' learning and mental health needs in a comprehensive, coordinated, and consistent manner.

While investigating the views of school psychology practitioners and faculty on the issue of systemic change, Reschly and Wilson (1995) found that both groups had positive attitudes toward system reform, but that the attitudes of the faculty were significantly more positive. The researchers speculated that school psychologists would become increasingly positive toward role reconceptualization as more graduates who had been educated by current faculty entered the field. More recently, Cole and Siegel (2003) discussed the attitudes of those in the school psychology arena regarding role expansion. In accordance with Reschly and Wilson (1995), the researchers described how "forward-thinking educators" are questioning traditional practices of school psychology and practitioners are considering the benefits of expanded services. In spite of the noted potential, they caution that, "…the fundamental pace of change has been and will likely continue to be slow" (p.6). They credit legislative requirements (ie. assessment-for-placement) and the focus on assessment skills as the core competencies in school psychologists' training as helping to perpetuate the diagnostically-oriented model. Braden el al (2001) also cited the training of school psychologists as problematic and suggested that there is a discontinuity between university coursework and internship experiences. They argued that non-traditional roles and functions are beginning to be addressed in university settings, but that internship experiences continue to be based on traditional practice.

This proposed expansion of services would involve more than just altering how school psychologists enact their roles; it would require system-level change in the ways

in which psychologists are utilized in schools (Braden et al, 2001). As previously mentioned, both educators and psychologists view legislative requirements as the main factor influencing the provision of service in schools. In a position paper written for the Canadian Psychological Association, French and Mureika (2002) proposed a plan to implement change at the system-level. They discussed how access to psychological services in Canadian schools is problematic and referred to large student-to-school psychologist ratios that cause long waiting periods for services and result in the narrowing of potential roles and services. They recommended that each province/territory establish a comprehensive human resource plan to provide psychological services in all schools. They outline a plan that includes reasonable work loads, ratios, and geographical distributions that enable effective service, and consideration for the unique strengths and needs of communities being served. They contend that the plan must address the full range of psychological programs and services aimed at proactive prevention, intervention, and crisis management. Involving school psychologists in the drafting of plans of this sort is one avenue that may lead to policy change. It is important that the professional organizations associated with school psychology have input into legislation so that regulations will be structured to best meet the needs of children (Cole & Siegel, 2003). Davis et al (2004) stressed the importance of school psychologists' involvement at the system-level. They argued that playing an active role in public policy and engaging into the political arena could affect how the practitioners perform their jobs.

New Brunswick is a province that seems to be quite progressive in its policies regarding school psychology. In 2001 the New Brunswick Department of Education released a document titled "Guidelines for Professional Practice for School

Psychologists." There is a strong focus on consultation and prevention and a range of services are included in the job description of the school psychologist including consultation, prevention, in-servicing, and the development and evaluation of new programs. Consultation can be offered at an individual/family/student/teacher level, whole school level, and district/system level. It is also noted that consultation can involve collaboration with community stake-holders (ie. medical practitioners, government and service agencies, etc.). Prevention can involve planning, implementing, and evaluating prevention programs. It is noted that school psychologists can deliver meaningful programs to the student body through collaborative consultation with teachers and other mental health professionals. Inservice responsibilities include providing inservices for districts, teachers, and parents on a variety of school-related issues. Other more traditional services are also included in the job description such as assessment and counselling. All of the services falling under the role of the school psychologist are categorized into five levels of intervention: student-focused indirect intervention; student-focused direct intervention; school-wide intervention; district/system-wide intervention; and research. The document is based on the notion that school psychologists bring a diversity of training and skills to the education system. The responsibilities that are outlined for school psychologists indicate that there is support at the system-level for role expansion. To date there is no research on the actual role functioning of New Brunswick school psychologists to determine if the Department of Education's progressive policies are reflected in their practice.

There is no document currently available that outlines the guidelines of professional practice for school psychologists in Nova Scotia. There is one in draft form,

but it is not yet available. It is expected to be ready sometime in the Summer/Fall of 2006.

Fagan (2002) seems accurate in his suggestion that school psychologists have yet to truly establish their identity. Researchers argue that role reconceptualization is in the best interest of children, schools, and psychologists themselves. There is a need for research examining the types of policy changes that are occurring and how (if) school psychologists in the field are reconceptualizing and expanding their roles.

Although calls for school psychology reform are wide-spread, Fagan (2002) points to many unanswered questions. For example, what would school psychology as a field look like if psychologists spent two-thirds of their time in a consultative or research-oriented role? Who would meet assessment needs if role expansion into the arena of regular education takes place? What about school psychologists who do not want to diversify their practice?

Conclusion

The school psychology research that has been conducted over the past two decades suggests that the role of the school psychologist has been heavily oriented towards assessment, despite the documented desire of practitioners to diversify their activities and adopt a model of practice that allows for less assessment and more consultation and intervention. Such a model of practice is consistent with calls for school psychology reform that permeate the literature. Proponents of this reform argue that the role of the school psychologist should be reconceptualized in a manner that places less emphasis on assessment and increased emphasis on prevention, advocacy, and the mental

health needs of all students. According to the literature in this area, change in this direction has been slow.

Although there appears to be a growing awareness regarding the benefits of role expansion, there is little information about the types of changes that are occurring at present. There is a need to investigate the level of influence school psychologists feel they have into their role allocation. It is often assumed that the practitioners can implement change and it would be useful to determine if they believe that to be true. There is also a need to examine how school psychologists are currently enacting their roles. Research supports the notion that they are most effective in supporting students when they are functioning in a broader role. If this is not happening, it would be important to examine why.

As previously mentioned, research on school psychologists in Canada is scarce. Because of this, we know very little about the role of school psychologists in the country, and we know even less about their role in Nova Scotia. It was decided to undertake a study that would gather the perceptions of Nova Scotia school psychologists regarding issues relevant to their role and function. This intent of this research was to contribute to research in this field, provide an avenue for school psychologists' voices to be heard, and generate information that will be helpful in considering the need for, and the possibility of, change.

CHAPTER II

Method

The current research was conducted to examine the perceptions of school psychologists practicing in Nova Scotia schools regarding their actual and desired role functioning, the establishment of their role allocation, the influence they feel they have over the activities in which they engage, and the challenges to achieving their desired practice. The methodology for this study is discussed below. The characteristics of the participants are addressed, along with a detailed description of the survey instrument. The procedures of data distribution and collection are specified, as is the data analysis.

Participants

Participation was sought from 54 school psychologists who were practicing in Nova Scotia schools. The names and addresses of the school psychologists who were contacted were identified from the Directory of Psychologists published by the Nova Scotia Board of Examiners in Psychology.

Instrumentation

A survey was utilized for this study. A survey format was chosen for the following reasons. One, little information is available on the role of the school psychologist in Nova Scotia and surveys allow a great deal of information to be collected fairly efficiently from a group of people. Two, surveys allow individuals to participate in a study while remaining anonymous. It was speculated that participants would feel more comfortable freely expressing their thoughts and experiences if they were guaranteed anonymity. Three, previously conducted studies on the role of the school psychologist have used surveys. Utilizing a survey similar to some of those allowed for comparison

between past studies and the findings from the current study. Four, surveys are an efficient means to reach individuals who live in different geographical areas.

Portions of the survey were based on an instrument used in a doctoral thesis conducted by Jones-Wilson (1994) which investigated the responsibilities of Virginia school psychologists. The 1994 survey addressed school psychologists' actual and desired role functioning, perceptions of their skills and competencies, and level of job satisfaction. Also addressed were aspects of the job that school psychologists enjoyed the most and the least, as well as factors that were perceived as barriers to their more effective functioning. Demographic information was also collected. This survey was chosen as a model because it addressed some of the issues that were of interest in this study, the most notable being the actual and desired role functioning of school psychologists and the factors that practitioners perceive as barriers in their practice.

In order to address the research questions of this study, modifications were made to the Jones-Wilson survey. Questions regarding actual and desired activities, level of competency, perceived barriers, and demographic information were presented in the same format as the Jones-Wilson survey, although they were tailored to ensure their relevance to the practice of Nova Scotia school psychologists in 2006. This was done by consulting with a practicing school psychologist and a cohort of five school psychology graduate students who were completing internships in different areas of Nova Scotia. The students were asked to identify their activities and their supervisor's activities. Based on their suggestions, modifications were made. Questions regarding the establishment of role allocations and the input psychologists feel they have into that process were added. To ensure that all survey questions were relevant and comprehensible, a practicing school

psychologist was asked to review the survey. Based on her feedback, changes were made. A copy of the survey is included as Appendix A.

The survey is divided into four sections. Section One identifies the actual and desired role allocation of the respondents and how that allocation is established. Participants were asked to estimate the percentage of time they spent, and would like to spend, in 14 activities. They assigned a percentage to each activity based upon their actual practice and their desired practice. Participants were also asked to describe how their role allocation was established.

The activities listed in this section represent the potential functions of school psychologists. Many of the activities listed in the Jones-Wilson survey were deemed appropriate for this study, although some modifications were made. The Jones-Wilson survey did not include behaviour assessment, training and supervision, or travel as potential activities. Most of the individuals consulted identified these activities as significant functions of a school psychologists' job so they were added to the list.

Other modifications involved the categorization of activities. In the Jones-Wilson survey, consultation, parent meetings, and teacher conferences were presented separately; however, all of the individuals consulted for this study included parent and teacher conferences as forms of consultation. Therefore, what was divided into three separate activities for the Jones-Wilson survey will be represented by one term (consultation) in this study. Cognitive assessment and personality assessment were terms used in the Jones-Wilson survey that are not commonly used by Nova Scotia school psychologists. As such, these terms were not deemed appropriate for this study; psychoeducational assessment was added to the list because it is the term that is commonly used among

practitioners. The term prevention-oriented work was substituted for program evaluation. This change was made because some of the individuals consulted suggested that prevention can encompass program development, implementation, and evaluation. Observation is another activity that was included in the Jones-Wilson survey, but not in the survey for this study. Individuals consulted felt that, depending on the circumstance, observation is part of a psychoeducational assessment, a behaviour assessment, or consultation. Finally, report writing was added to the list for this study because individuals consulted felt that this was a significant part of their work. Participants were also asked to add any other activities that were not included in the list.

The Jones-Wilson survey divided potential activities into two separate lists, representing direct and indirect services. The researcher found that most school psychologists do not conceptualize their role into direct and indirect services and recommended deemphasizing this distinction in future studies so that this division was eliminated in this study.

Section Two identifies the participant's perception of his/her skills and competencies as a school psychologist. The list of activities that was utilized in Section One was also used for this question. Each participant was asked to rate his/her level of skill relative to each domain on a scale that ranged from expert to having no knowledge. He/she was also asked to indicate his/her desire for training in each area. As in Section One, a space was provided to add activities to the list. This section was included because of the finding in the Jones-Wilson study that although Virginia school psychologists' said that they desired to spend more time in certain role activities (consultation, counselling),

they spent the majority of their time in activities where they felt most competent (assessment).

Section Three gathers the perceptions of school psychologists about a variety of issues. Several open-ended questions were included in this section. These allowed participants to elaborate on issues pertinent to the role of the school psychologist. Participants were also asked to rate the level of influence they feel they have over how they spend their time on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from very low to very high. Much of the discussion on role expansion is based on the notion that individual school psychologists can shape their role within schools. It was anticipated that responses to this question would reveal the level of influence participants feel they have. Participants were also asked to identify the aspects of their job that they most enjoy, as well as the strategies they use to engage in desired activities. These questions allowed participants to express what they like about their job and describe how they shape their role to incorporate their most valued activities. Finally, participants were asked to identify the barriers that they feel get in the way of their desired functioning as a school psychologist. This question was included to shed light on the challenges that the practitioners face.

Section Four gathers information regarding various demographic variables: employment status, years of experience as a school psychologist, number and approximate population of schools served, location of practice, student-to-school psychologist ratio, degree and professional credentials, gender, and age. Such information was sought in order to describe the sample of participants and because it would allow for the impact of certain variables to be considered. Some of the variables, such as years of experience, professional credentials, and student-to-school psychologist ratio, have been

found to affect practice. Information relevant to those variables allowed for investigation into whether such factors influence Nova Scotia school psychologists.

Procedure

A package of materials was mailed to 54 psychologists practicing in Nova Scotia schools. Each package included:

1. Two copies of the consent form (Appendix B) outlining the purpose of the research, ethical considerations, contact information, and directions for participants. Psychologists were asked to sign the forms indicating that they are willing to participate in the study, and they were instructed to keep one copy for themselves and return the other with the survey;

2. a form (Appendix C) that participants could fill out if they wished to receive the results of the study in the mail;

3. the survey;

4. an envelope, marked "Survey", in which they should place the completed survey;

5. an envelope, marked "Consent Form & Request for Research Results Form" for the signed consent form and Request for Research Results form, if applicable; and

6. a stamped, addressed envelope for return of all documents.

Follow-up postcards (Appendix D) were sent if no response was received after 14 days of the initial mailing.

Data Collection

Once returned, envelopes containing surveys and consent forms were immediately separated. No identifying material was on the survey. Only this researcher and the thesis supervisor (Dr. Elizabeth Church) had access to the data, which is being stored

in a locked cabinet. Data will be kept for 5-7 years and will be shredded at the end of that period.

Data Analysis

The results of the questionnaire were analyzed primarily through the use of descriptive statistics. Frequency counts were generated for demographic information in order to describe the sample. Frequency counts were also tabulated for each activity based upon the actual and desired percentage of time reported by respondents. A paired samples t-test was used to determine the significance of discrepancy between actual and desired role functioning. Cohen's *d* was used to calculate effect sizes. Participants' perceived level of skill was also compared to their actual role functioning. Responses to the likert-type item measuring perceived level of influence over activities were calculated by examining the percentage of respondents who endorsed certain statements. In addition, responses to open-ended questions were examined and themes identified.

CHAPTER III

Results

Survey Response

A total of 54 surveys were mailed to psychologists who were believed to be practicing in Nova Scotia schools. 34 surveys were returned, a 63% response rate. Thirty-two of the returned surveys were usable. One of the two unusable surveys was returned by an individual who had not practiced in a Nova Scotia school anytime in the past two years and the other was returned by a school psychologist who did not wish to participate in the study. Two of the usable surveys were not included in the analysis of actual and desired role functioning because the first question on each was incomplete.

Demographic Information of the Respondents

Personal Characteristics

The majority of respondents (68.8%) were 35 years of age or younger. Only a small portion (12.4%) was over 45 years of age. Most (90.6%) were female. Table 1 displays complete information reported by respondents relative to age and gender.

Professional Credentials

In regard to education, all but one respondent (96.9%) reported their highest academic degree at the Master's level. About half of the respondents (53.1%) were Registered Psychologists, while the remainder (46.9%) fell in the "Candidate Register" category. Table 2 shows information reported by respondents relative to those variables.

Table 1

Personal Characteristics

	n	%
Gender		
Male	3	9.4
Female	29	90.6
Age		
21-25	1	3.1
26-30	14	43.8
31-35	7	21.9
36-40	4	12.5
41-45	2	6.3
46-50	1	3.1
51-55	1	3.1
56-60	1	3.1
+60	1	3.1

Table 2

Professional Credentials

	n	%
Highest Academic Degree		
Masters level	31	96.9
Doctorate level	1	3.1
Credentials		
Candidate Register	15	46.9
Registered Psychologist	17	53.1

Employment Characteristics

Almost all of the respondents (96.9%) reported that they were employed on a full-time basis. Half of the respondents (50%) had five or less years experience practicing psychology in schools. None had more than 15 years experience.

Respondents reported that the number of schools served in their most recent positions ranged from three to 42. Two respondents reported being responsible for considerably more schools than the others. One reported serving 20 schools and the other 42 schools. Those respondents were not typical school psychologists in the sense that they allocated their time based on referrals and do not have set schedules or regular circuits. Half (50%) of respondents reported working in six or fewer schools. Student-to-school psychologist ratios ranged from 800:1 to 5000:1. The mode was 2500:1.

In regard to the types of schools serviced, the majority of respondents (81.3%) reported working in all three types of schools (elementary, junior high, and high school). Three respondents reported working in alternative schools.

As for the types of communities in which respondents practiced, almost half (40.6%) reported working exclusively in rural areas. Smaller groups of respondents reported working solely in suburban or city areas, while others reported working in two or three different types of communities. Three respondents filled in the "other" category with "small town."

Table 3 displays complete information reported by respondents relevant to employment characteristics.

Table 3

Employment Characteristics

	n	%
Employment		
Full-time	31	96.9
Part-time	1	3.1
Year of Experience		
5 or less	16	50
6-10	10	31.3
11-15	6	18.8
Number of Schools Served		
3-4	6	20
5-6	9	30
8-9	9	30
10-11	4	13.3
20	1	3.3
42	1	3.3
School Psychologist: Student Ratio		
1: 800	1	4
1:1250-1350	2	8
1: 2000-2500	13	52
1: 2700-3200	8	32
1: 5000	1	4
Types of Schools Serviced		
Elementary, Junior High, and High School	26	81.3
Elementary and Junior High	5	15.6
Junior High and High School	1	3.1
Types of Communities Serviced		
Rural (exclusively)	13	40.6
Suburban (exclusively)	3	9.4
Urban (exclusively)	2	6.3
Rural and Suburban	6	18.8
Rural and Urban	3	9.4
Suburban and Urban	3	9.4
Rural, Suburban, and Urban	2	6.3

Scheduling

In response to the question (Ib) that asked school psychologists to describe how their activities were established, some respondents addressed how they divide their time among assigned schools. Some reported that they are responsible for creating their own schedules, while for others schedules are negotiated in consultation with supervisors. Some allocate their time based on school population, others factors in the needs of their schools, and others distribute their time equally because they consider all of their schools "needy," albeit in different ways. Three psychologists stated that they are currently re-evaluating the ways in which they allocate their time in order to better address the needs in their schools. One described this process, "Initially we decided how much time each school would get based on their population. I did this because others did, but we are now leaning towards using 'need' as a factor and possibly a triage system." Another described her plans:

> My current school schedule sees each school getting equal time simply because many of the schools lack adequate resources for caseload planning and have historically seen my role as assessment-based. I have planned to spend 1-2 years clarifying my role, changing attitudes toward my role, and educating…It is my hope that I will be able to focus on my truly needy schools after this time frame and my schedule will change to reflect that.

Allocation of Activities

In response to the same question (Ib) about how activities were established, respondents cited a number of factors that influence their allocation of activities,

including the needs of different schools, school teams, administrators, a central referral system, an emphasis on psychoeducational assessment, and individual school culture.

Needs of Different Schools

Most commonly (50%) respondents reported that the needs of the schools they service determine the allocation of their activities. The term "needs" was used to represent the most salient issues that should be addressed at a school. These vary depending on the school and community. Respondents identified several circumstances where unique needs influence their activities.

High needs schools. Some respondents noted that they conduct more psychoeducational and behaviour assessments at certain schools and therefore, have no time to provide much needed counselling. One psychologist discussed her experience: "Different schools require more time, often because of high needs (sometimes due to socioeconomic issues but certainly not always)…Sometimes the most affluent schools are the most demanding because of parental influence."

Level of school. Elementary schools were described as requiring more time and a wider variety of services than junior high and high schools.

Size of school. Respondents noted that their activities are sometimes restricted to assessment in bigger schools that have guidance counsellors who provide counselling, and that they have more latitude in smaller schools that rely entirely on the psychologist for services.

Urban and rural communities. Several respondents made a distinction between their role in urban and rural schools. They described how professionals in related disciplines (e.g. social workers, behaviour specialists, etc.) are more accessible in city

schools and this can result in a restricted role for psychologists. Other professionals can counsel students or engage in necessary interventions, but only psychologists can conduct assessments. In contrast, roles in rural schools were reported to be more expanded due to minimal availability of other professionals:

> …rural schools do not have access to services involving private psychologists, social workers, or community-based intervention programs (e.g. LINKS, SPELLREAD) to the same extent that city/suburban schools do. Therefore, rural administrators are often seeking a more multifaceted service model from their school psychologist.

School Teams

Almost half the respondents (47%) reported that school program planning teams establish the allocation of their activities. Typically, school teams determine the priorities for the types of service to be delivered. Some of the psychologists participate in this process, while others do not.

School Administrators

Almost half of the respondents (41%) stated that school administrators play a central role in the allocation of their activities. Principals set priorities for their schools and request specific services (e.g. prioritize an assessment, observe a child, etc.). Some noted that principals most often request psychoeducational assessments and suggested that this emphasis on testing was driven by their lack of knowledge regarding other available services and lengthy wait lists.

Central Referral System

A small number of respondents (6%) reported that requests for their services were funnelled through a central referral system, where a representative from each school

would submit referrals to a student services consultant who would then direct it to the appropriate service provider. One psychologist described a similar system for psychoeducational assessments only, whereby assessment requests are submitted monthly to the board office, reviewed at a meeting of student services, and are prioritized based on need. Because service is based solely on need, psychologists working in this system do not have a set schedule; some schools refer many students, while others refer few. They receive referrals for other services (e.g. behaviour assessments, inservicing, counselling, etc.) directly from assigned schools via telephone.

Emphasis on Psychoeducational Assessment

When explaining how their activities are allocated, a quarter of respondents (25%) stated that psychoeducational assessment is prioritized over other services. They noted that school teams feel the need to focus on assessments, sometimes in an effort to reduce long wait lists or in order to access services for students (e.g. Educational Assistant support, Severe Learning Disability services). For some, their current role is to take care of wait lists and they were able to engage in other activities only if they can work around their assessment caseload. One respondent described how she felt the emphasis on assessment was starting to shift:

> …program planning teams seem to be in the routine of immediately requesting psycho-educational assessments. Previously hired psychologists only offered assessments mainly because those were the only services they were capable of offering and others fell into the routine. Until recently, since the schools are becoming aware of the numerous services available they have begun to request additional services…

A number of respondents stated that they were not required to complete a set number of assessments each year, but that there was an expectation to do as many assessments as possible: "…each psychologist feels the need to complete roughly the same number of assessments to demonstrate competence and thus the cycle continues and a high number of assessments are completed resulting in many hours of nightly report writing." Others said they were given a range for the number of assessments they were expected to complete, which puts a limit on the assessment referrals accepted each year. One psychologist discussed how referrals are managed in her board: "We have set flexible limits on the number of psycho-educational assessments allotted to each school and actively encourage schools to use our services in other ways."

Individual School Culture

The culture of individual schools also influenced the allocation of activities. Some schools view the range of potential psychological services narrowly (e.g. psychoeducational assessment), while other schools see the psychologist as an important member of their school team who provides a broad range of services. One respondent described how her level of involvement is different in every school and noted that, as a result, her efficacy varies as well. She reported that she is in a better position to ensure needs are being met in schools where her role is highly visible (e.g. on the program planning team). Others also said there were differences among their schools, including their involvement on school teams, the use of their consultative skills, and the ways in which their caseload is established.

Preferred Activities

When asked to identify activities that they most enjoy (question IIIa), respondents focused on different aspect of their jobs, including interacting with students, consultation and team collaboration, behaviour assessment and programming, and educating others.

Interacting with Students

Overwhelmingly respondents (78%) discussed direct interaction with students as an enjoyable aspect of their job. They reported that they like getting to know children, building rapport, and developing an understanding of their students' needs. One psychologist wrote about, "…getting to know them as a person rather than 'a problem'." It appeared that many value the relational aspect of their jobs.

With respect to specific activities that allow for direct interaction with students, a number of psychologists (44%) reported enjoying individual and/or group counselling. A smaller group of respondents (28%) reported liking psychoeducational assessments. One psychologist noted that she now likes the assessment process because there is a lot less pressure to do them quickly in her current board than there was in the board she worked previously. One reason respondents valued counselling and assessment was that both activities involved building relationships with students.

Consultation and Team Collaboration

Respondents (72%) also liked consultation, which they defined as working with concerned parents and assisting teachers with planning for students. Consultation as a member of a team, whether school or multidisciplinary, was also reported to be enjoyable and effective by a number of psychologists. Furthermore, consultation was identified as a way to address referral concerns without providing direct service to students.

Behaviour Assessment and Programming

Behaviour assessment is another activity that some respondents (25%) deemed enjoyable. Along with assessment, they discussed working with teachers in the classroom to help implement behaviour programs and participating in group and school-wide behaviour initiatives.

Educating/ Training Others

Several respondents mentioned that they like training others. Some (16%) discussed providing staff training through inservice presentations, while a small proportion (6.5%) discussed supervising students.

Activities that allow for Variety

One psychologist reported that a positive aspect of the job was that no two days are ever the same. Another stated that her job is most pleasurable when she is able to provide a variety of services.

<div align="center">Actual and Desired Role Functioning</div>

In response to the question (Ia) investigating actual and desired activities, respondents reported the percentage of time they spent in certain activities in their most recent position, as well as the percentage of time they would prefer to spend. Analysis of their responses is discussed below.

Actual Role Functioning

As displayed in Table 4, respondents reported spending the most time doing psychoeducational assessments (M=36.63%). Next in line were report writing (M=15.63%), behaviour assessment (M=13.74%), and consultation (M=11.54%). They reported spending the least amount of time in family counselling (M=.61%), prevention

Table 4

Percentage of Time Spent in Various Activities

Activity[a]	Min.%	Max. %	*M%*	*SD*
Psychoeducational Assessment	5	60	36.63	14.78
Behaviour Assessment	0	30	13.74	9.14
Individual Counselling	0	26.25	5.68	6.76
Group Counselling	0	10	1.18	2.16
Family Counselling	0	10	.61	1.92
Consultation	2	25	11.54	5.77
Multidisciplinary Meetings	0	20	3.5	4.29
Report Writing	2	40	15.63	8.22
Inservices (presenting)	0	10	1.82	2.25
Research	0	8	.9	1.88
Prevention	0	5	.75	1.38
Training and Supervision	0	15	2.53	3.44
Crisis Intervention	0	6.25	1.42	1.75
Travel	0	15	3.48	4

[a] n = 30 for each activity.

oriented work (M=.75%), and research (M=.9%). It is important to note that the range for time spent in some activities was large, indicating considerable variability regarding respondents' actual role functioning.

Desired Role Functioning

As shown in Table 5, respondents reported that they desire more time in psychoeducational assessment (M=21.54%) than in other activities. After psychoeducational assessment, they reported wanting to spend the most time in behaviour assessment (M=14.48%), consultation (M=12.94%), and individual counselling (M=11.71%). Respondents reported that they wanted to allocate the least amount of their time to travel (M=.68%), crisis intervention (M=1.42%), and research (M=2.42%). The range for time desired in some activities was also large, indicating considerable variability regarding respondents' desired role functioning.

Discrepancy between Actual and Desired Role Functioning

Analysis utilizing a paired samples t-test was conducted to determine whether the difference between actual and desired time in each activity was significant. Due to the number of tests being run, a more stringent significance level (p=.004) was required to report significant results (Berk & Carey, 2004). Effect size interpretation was based on Cohen's suggested criteria for small (d <0.2), medium (0.2< d <0.8), and large (d >0.8) effects (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2004).

T-test Results

Results of the t-tests (see Table 6) indicate that the difference between the actual mean percentage of time and desired mean percentage of time was significant for psychoeducational assessment, individual counselling, group counselling, family

Table 5

Time Desired for Various Activities

Activity[a]	Min.%	Max. %	M%	SD
Psychoeducational Assessment	5	35	21.54	7.23
Behaviour Assessment	0	26.25	14.48	6.92
Individual Counselling	0	40	11.71	8.51
Group Counselling	0	30	6.08	5.97
Family Counselling	0	15	2.62	3.77
Consultation	5	20	12.94	4.96
Multidisciplinary Meetings	0	11.25	4.41	3.51
Report Writing	0	25	9.09	6.26
Inservices (presenting)	0	15	3.42	3.76
Research	0	20	2.42	4.34
Prevention	0	20	5.05	5.47
Training and Supervision	0	20	3.48	3.86
Crisis Intervention	0	6.25	1.21	1.64
Travel	0	5	.68	1.33

[a] n = 30 for each activity.

Table 6

Comparison of Actual and Desired Time

Activity[a]	Actual M%	Desired M%	t	p	d
Psychoeducational Assessment	36.63	21.54	6.55	<.001*	1.37
Behaviour Assessment	13.74	14.48	-.75	.458	-.09
Individual Counselling	5.68	11.71	-4.08	<.001*	-.79
Group Counselling	1.18	6.08	-4.5	<.001*	-1.2
Family Counselling	.61	2.62	-3.95	<.001*	-.71
Consultation	11.54	12.94	-1.7	.101	-.26
Multidisciplinary Meetings	3.5	4.41	-1.47	.152	-.23
Report Writing	15.63	9.09	4.11	<.001*	.9
Inservices (presenting)	1.82	3.42	-3.23	.003*	-.53
Research	.9	2.42	-2.17	.038	-.49
Prevention	.75	5.05	-4.24	<.001*	-1.25
Training and Supervision	2.53	3.48	-1.56	.13	-.26
Crisis Intervention	1.42	1.21	.96	.344	.12
Travel	3.48	.68	4.27	<.001*	1.05

[a] n = 30 for each activity.
*p<.004

counselling, report writing, inservicing, prevention oriented work, and travel. Responses suggest that respondents would like to spend more time in counselling, inservicing, and prevention oriented activities and less time conducting psychoeducational assessments, writing reports, and travelling.

Effect Size

Cohen's *d* values (see Table 6) indicate large effect sizes for psychoeducational assessment, report writing, travel, group counselling, and prevention oriented work. This indicates that the difference between actual and desired time for these activities is not only significant, but that the distance between the two variables is great. Medium effect sizes were found for individual counselling, family counselling, and inservicing.

Perceived Level of Influence over Allocation of Activities

Respondents were asked to rate the level of influence they believe they have over how they allocate their time to various activities (question IIIb). As shown in Table 7, responses ranged from "Very Low" to "Very High." Almost half of respondents (43.8%) rated their level of influence on the high end of the scale, about one third (31.3%) believed they had little influence, and one quarter (25%) reported a moderate level of influence.

Table 7

Perceived Level of Influence over Allocation of Activities

Level of Influence	n	%
Very Low	4	12.5
Low	6	18.8
Moderate	8	25
High	10	31.3
Very High	4	12.5

The Relationship between Level of Influence and Employment Characteristics

In order to determine whether perceived level of influence was related to years of experience or number of schools served, analysis utilizing a bivariate correlation was conducted. No significant relationships were found.

Due to a number of factors, comparisons between perceived level of influence and other employment characteristics/ professional credentials were not possible. A comparison involving school psychologist-to-student ratio was not conducted because seven respondents did not provide this information. Comparisons involving employment status, highest level of degree, and types of schools served were not performed because almost all respondents reported themselves to be in the same category. Finally, the sample size was not big enough to compare perceived level of influence among psychologists who practiced in different types of communities.

<div align="center">

Perceptions of Competence

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Respondents were asked to rate their perceived level of skill in various activities (question II). As illustrated in Table 8, respondents rated themselves as most competent at psychoeducational assessment, consultation, and report writing. They reported feeling least skilled at family counselling, research, and prevention oriented work.

The Relationship between Perceived Competence and Actual Role Functioning

In order to determine whether there was a significant relationship between perceived level of skill and amount of time spent in each activity, a bivariate correlational analysis was conducted. As displayed in Table 9, the two variables were found to be significantly related for the following activities: family counselling, multidisciplinary meetings, inservicing, research, and crisis intervention. Such findings suggest that those

Table 8

Perceptions of Competence

Activity [a]	%				
	No Knowledge	Limited	Adequate	Competent	Expert
Psychoeducational Assessment	0	0	0	75	25
Behaviour Assessment	0	0	25	59.4	15.6
Individual Counselling	0	12.5	31.3	40.6	15.6
Group Counselling	0	15.6	50	34.4	0
Family Counselling	18.8	34.4	34.4	6.3	6.3
Consultation	0	0	0	68.8	31.3
Multidisciplinary Meetings	0	3.1	21.9	46.9	28.1
Report Writing	0	0	6.3	81.3	12.5
Inservices (presenting)	0	21.9	21.9	37.5	18.8
Research	6.3	31.3	34.4	25	3.1
Prevention work	0	34.4	37.5	25	3.1
Training and Supervision	0	21.9	31.3	40.6	6.3
Crisis Intervention	0	15.6	37.5	40.6	6.3

[a] n= 32 for each activity.

Table 9

Relationship between Perceived Level of Skill and Amount of Time Spent in Each Activity

Activity	p
Psychoeducational Assessment	.452
Behaviour Assessment	.208
Individual Counselling	.053
Group Counselling	.451
Family Counselling	.007**
Consultation	.166
Multidisciplinary Meetings	.010*
Report Writing	.903
Inservices (presenting)	.004**
Research	.036*
Prevention work	.063
Training & Supervision	.116
Crisis Intervention	.003**

*$p<.05$. **$p<.01$.

who felt more competent in these activities spent more time doing them and those who felt less competent devoted less time to them.

<div align="center">*Barriers/ Challenges*</div>

Heavy Caseloads

When asked to identify barriers or challenges that get in the way of their desired functioning (question IIId), many respondents (72%) cited time constraints and heavy caseloads. They stated that they are responsible for too many schools and therefore can spend limited time at each site. Because of this, they find it difficult to be visible in their schools, provide counselling, and follow-up on suggested interventions. Furthermore, they noted that there is little time to process information or update their knowledge base through conferences, reading, observing other psychologists, etc.

Several psychologists suggested that servicing fewer schools would allow for more proactive work and ongoing consultation regarding students. One respondent discussed her demanding caseload and the impact that lengthy waitlists have on practice, "…often referral lists are too long to focus on prevention; schools are wanting to get through lists!"

Geography. Servicing schools that are spread out across a large geographical area creates additional time constraints. In such circumstances, respondents reported visiting schools less often than needed. Much of the travelling is done on their own time.

Others' Lack of Awareness of Psychologists' Expertise

Factors associated with role restriction were also discussed. Respondents (41%) reported that others lack awareness regarding the potential scope of school psychological services. They believe that some administrators and board officials do not fully

understand the breadth of psychologists' skills and are not aware of the role that psychologists can fulfil in schools. This means that they are not effectively meeting the needs of their schools and/or are practicing more as a "tester" than a psychologist.

Focus on Psychoeducational Assessment

Some psychologists (31%) identified the focus on psychoeducational assessment and ensuing waitlists as a barrier at both the board and school level. The "perceived high need" for assessment was described to be a result of the wide-spread misconception that it is the only option for service and is a "cure-all" intervention.

Lack of Follow Through

In addition to the emphasis placed on assessment, some respondents (13%) cited lack of follow through on assessment recommendations by parents and school staff as a challenge. They speculated that this "resistance" is caused by a number of factors, including lack of understanding, limited interest, and negative school culture. Respondents also noted that many teachers lack the training, resources, and support to implement individualized programming.

Working in a Non-Psychology Environment

Supervision by non-psychologists. Being supervised and evaluated by non-psychologists who are not educated regarding good psychological practice was a problem for respondents (13%). They reported that some administrators believe that psychologists are not working if they are not with a student (e.g. reviewing a file, interpreting test results, etc.) and/or do not understand the amount of time it takes to complete a quality assessment. Some expressed frustration regarding the focus on quantity over quality (e.g. emphasis on the number of assessments completed). One psychologist discussed how

being supervised by non-psychologists is inappropriate: "Schools establish the allocation of service by their program planning teams. We may occasionally participate, but do not have final say in any case. This is often problematic as non-psychologists are managing psych-referral caseloads." Another reported that school psychologists rarely get feedback regarding their performance.

Isolation from colleagues. Respondents (9%) reported that there are very few opportunities for them to meet or consult with other psychologists. One psychologist who practiced in a rural board said: "The long distance one travels and the isolation regarding lack of contact with other psychologists is quite daunting and challenging."

Others' not understanding the ethical obligations of psychologists. Some respondents (6%) stated that ethical issues regarding confidentiality were a challenging aspect of practicing in schools. One of them reported experiencing conflict between the ethical obligations outlined in the code of ethics for psychologists and the expectations of the school board/ department of education.

Poor Resources/ Space

Also problematic for some respondents (13%) was the lack of appropriate resources and physical space within schools. They reported working with a restricted battery of tests and outdated computers that are unable to support new software. It is also sometimes difficult to secure rooms that afford quiet and confidentiality.

Assignments Based on Population

Another barrier identified by a small group of psychologists (6%) is that their assignments are determined by population, opposed to need. They believed that this is not

an effective way to construct a circuit for psychologists and suggested that the needs of schools and communities should be considered.

Administrative Demands

Psychologists (6%) also credited bureaucracy and administrative demands from the board as getting in the way of their desired functioning. Time devoted to paperwork takes away from the time they spend with students.

Lack of Vision for School Psychological Services

One respondent discussed how there is no specific job description outlining what is expected of school psychologists, while another noted that there is no clear vision for school psychological service in the province.

Strategies

When respondents were asked about strategies that enable them to fulfill their most valued activities (question IIIc), most described ways in which they advocate for the use of their skills.

Open Communication/ Negotiation

A number of psychologists (41%) discussed the importance of communication. They reported that ongoing discussion/ negotiation with program planning teams and school administration regarding how best to address school needs is helpful. Such conversations were described as a way to identify needs, manage caseloads, and reduce unnecessary assessments. Some said that this was an effective way to influence the allocation of their activities, while others reported that they attempt to negotiate their role with administrators, but expressed frustration with the process, "In some instances, psychologists may be able to negotiate their role, or aspects of the service they'll provide,

with school administrators; however, in all cases, the administrator is the superior. This is problematic as non-psychologists are supervising psychologists." Respondents also reported communicating with supervisors at the board level regarding their role and possible role changes.

Educating Others

Another strategy employed by about a third of the respondents (34%) involved educating school teams and administrators about the various services they can provide as a way to increase awareness regarding the potential scope of school psychological services. Several psychologists discussed how they "market" or "advertise" their skills. One psychologist described her approach:

I am constantly selling myself as a multi-skilled psychologist by reviewing and explaining to school teams and administrators the various facets of my role and encouraging them to use my time at their school as more than a 'tester.'

Others discussed how it is their responsibility to inform those who may not be aware about available services, "We teach our children to be advocates for themselves. We also have to advocate for ourselves and let people know how we can support them." One psychologist reported experiencing success with this strategy and described how her schools place less emphasis on assessment now that they understand the value of other approaches. In contrast, another psychologist discussed how, in spite of her efforts, her schools were still mostly interested in the number of assessments she completes. One respondent discussed how educating others is an ongoing effort and described how she demonstrates her skills and interests to school teams: "…always offering applicable

services (e.g. counselling) even if there is no time for it – this educates staff as well as prompts the planning team to reconsider how my time is spent at their school."

Participating on School Teams

Participating on school program planning teams was also seen as an effective strategy by 22%. Some reported that it gives staff a chance to get know them and better understand the type of support they can offer. They noted that teachers are more likely to approach them with questions and/or concerns when they are accessible and a relationship has been established. Other psychologists reported that being a school team member allows them to take part in discussions regarding how best to address the needs of students and educators. It provides them with an opportunity to have a say about who should be assessed and recommend services other than assessment when appropriate. Two respondents described their thoughts about participating on such teams, "I arrange, where possible, to be part of the school's program planning team on a regular basis so I can have ongoing input into the number and nature of referrals given to me." and "…the schools who receive a wider variety of services, which are happiest with my work and where I feel most productive, are schools that allow me to sit on their team." In all, active participation on program planning teams was described as an essential component to being accepted as a member of each school and as a way to ensure that psychologists have some influence into the allocation of their activities.

Being Visible and Building Rapport

Some respondents (19%) discussed how being "present" in other ways (e.g. visiting the staff room, staying around after the bell, etc.) can also cultivate positive

relationships. They described how building rapport with parents, educators, and administrators was necessary to ensure respect between all parties.

Time Management/ Setting Limits

Other strategies utilized by 22% of respondents included time management and setting limits regarding caseload. Psychologists reported carefully planning their time and establishing priorities at the beginning of each month. One respondent described how she tries to accomplish as much of her schools' priorities as possible, but designates time for her own priorities as well. Several psychologists described that learning to say "no" is necessary in order to structure time to complete a variety of activities. They suggested that setting limits is particularly important because they are working in a non-psychology environment. One respondent stated:

...we are often dealing with people who are not aware as to how things in psychology work (ex. cost of protocols, amount of time to complete a quality assessment), therefore, we can be subject to job burnout. It's very important to have realistic expectations about the job and to take steps to avoid job burnout.

A few reported that their strategy for "fitting it all in" is working overtime (e.g. lunch hours, evenings, weekends, etc.). They also discussed how they provide additional services during flex time, allotted office time, and "Consultation Week" (some psychologists operate on a schedule that is a 4:1 model: four weeks for direct service and then one week for consultation) in an effort to meet needs.

Perceived Level of Influence, Strategies, and Barriers

In order to see if there was any connection between the degree of influence respondents feel they have and the types of strategies they use and the barriers they face,

respondents' strategies and perceived barriers were examined in relation to the level of influence they believe they have over how they allocate their time. Those who reported having a high or very high level of influence tended to emphasize the importance of open communication and being visible within schools. Most of them reported negotiating their roles with administrators/ supervisors and were active members of their schools' program planning teams.

Most respondents who reported having a low to very low level of influence described limited involvement in managing their caseload. They stated that school teams decide what services are needed without consulting them and that they are not as involved as they would like to be in prioritizing referrals and determining the best use of their time. Some of them expressed frustration that non-psychologists were making such decisions for them. Another common theme among psychologists who reported lower levels of influence is that their schools prioritized assessment as the most needed service. Some of them discussed how lengthy wait lists limit their activities: "This year, we have been told to focus on assessments until the wait list is taken care of."

CHAPTER IV

Discussion

The aim of the current study was to gather the perceptions of psychologists

practicing in Nova Scotia schools regarding their actual and desired role functioning, the

establishment of their activities, the influence they have over their roles, and the

challenges they face. Six research questions were proposed and are addressed below. The

characteristics of participants are described. Findings are summarized and pertinent

themes/ results discussed. Limitations and implications of the study are addressed and

recommendations for further study offered.

Characteristics of Participants

The majority of respondents were female (90.6%) and 35 years of age or younger

(68.8%). All but one of them reported their highest academic degree at the Master's level.

This is not unusual because that is the requirement to be registered as a psychologist in

the province. A large number of the respondents were relatively new to the field. Half of

them (50%) had five or fewer years experience and almost as many were still on the

register of candidates. No respondent had more than 15 years experience. This means that

the results of this study may not represent the more experienced school psychologists in

the province. It is, therefore, important to recognize that findings may have been different

had more senior members of the profession participated. Their experiences may differ

from that of their younger colleagues and they may have trained in programs where

different models of practice were taught. Almost half of respondents (40.6%) worked

exclusively in rural areas. The remaining areas of practice were quite scattered between

rural, suburban, and urban communities. Because of the small number of participants,

analysis regarding different types of communities was not possible. The bulk of respondents (81.3%) serviced elementary, junior high, and high schools. Half of them (50%) were responsible for six or fewer schools and only a small proportion (6.6%) had more than 11 schools. The mode student-to-school psychologist ratio was 2500:1.

How are the Activities of Nova Scotia School Psychologists Established?

Although many factors were reported to influence how respondents' activities were allocated, several main themes emerged. Respondents stated that the needs and culture of individual schools influence how they enact their roles. Because of this, their level of involvement and activities vary depending on the school.

School principals and teams were also central in establishing school psychologists' activities in terms of requesting certain services and determining priorities for the types of services to be delivered. Some psychologists were involved in this process, while others were not.

Psychoeducational assessment was prioritized over other services. Some psychologists seemed to be more affected by this than others. Some reported functioning mainly as 'testers' and stated that the focus of their role was to get through assessment wait lists. Others noted that the emphasis on testing was an issue, but discussed how the focus was starting to shift.

What are the Current Activities of School Psychologists Practicing in Nova Scotia?

Respondents reported that they devote the most time to psychoeducational assessment, followed by report writing, behaviour assessment, consultation, and to a lesser extent counselling. Such results are consistent with findings from earlier studies that suggest that school psychologists spend the bulk of their time focused on the needs

of individual students, primarily conducting assessments and writing reports (Fagan & Wise, 1994; Curtis et al., 2002). While there was some degree of commonality among the types of activities in which respondents' engaged, there was a great deal of variation regarding the amount of time spent in certain activities. For example, some respondents spent over 50% of their time conducting psychoeducational assessments, while others spent less than 10% of their time doing so.

Proponents of school psychology reform have argued that the focus of school psychologists should expand beyond assessment to include other activities such as consultation, prevention, and research (Braden et al., 2001; Fagan, 2002). For the most part, participants in the current study reported spending very little or no time doing research and prevention oriented work. They did, however, report spending a fair amount of time in consultation. The only activities that took up more of their time were psychoeducational assessment, report writing, and behaviour assessment.

Is there a Discrepancy between Nova Scotia School Psychologists' Actual and Desired Role Functioning?

Significant differences were found between respondents' actual and desired role functioning. Results suggest that they desired more time in counselling, inservicing, and prevention oriented work and less time conducting psychoeducational assessments, writing reports, and traveling. This is similar to the findings of a study of Virginia school psychologists conducted by Jones-Wilson in 1994. Participants of the current study and of the Jones-Wilson study desired more time in individual counselling, group counselling, family counselling, inservicing, and prevention oriented work (categorized as "program evaluation" by Jones-Wilson). Both groups also reported that they would

prefer less time in psychoeducational assessment, travel, and report writing (categorized as "administrative tasks" by Jones-Wilson). Their preferences regarding two activities differed: unlike the respondents of the current study, Virginia psychologists reported wanting more time in consultation and less time in multidisciplinary meetings.

Comparable findings also came out of a study conducted by Desimone (1999), whereby Florida school psychologists reported desiring more time in counselling and less time in assessment. Unlike Nova Scotia respondents, they reported wanting to spend more time in consultation and research.

Is there a Relationship Between what Nova Scotia School Psychologists Feel they are

Capable of Doing and what they Actually Do?

This research question was included because of the finding by Jones-Wilson (1994) that school psychologists engaged in activities where they felt most competent. It was hypothesized that school psychologists would perhaps be more likely to take on a more diverse range of activities if they felt more skilled in those areas. Perceived level of skill and amount of time spent were significantly related for the following activities: family counselling, multidisciplinary meetings, inservicing, research, and crisis intervention. This suggests that those who felt more competent in the above activities spent more time doing them and those who felt less competent devoted less time to them. One possibility to explain this finding is that those activities (perhaps with the exception of crisis intervention) are not necessarily activities that administrators/school teams request of psychologists. It is also plausible that psychologists do not consider them mandatory services. Therefore, those who are skilled and/or interested in those areas may

make an effort to engage in those activities, while those who are not will be less likely to take that initiative.

It is important to note that respondents reported spending the most time in areas where they rated themselves as most competent (psychoeducational assessment, report writing, consultation, and behaviour assessment). These results are similar to those of the Jones-Wilson (1994) study. Perceived skill level and time spent were not, however, significantly related for those activities or any of the remaining areas (individual counselling, group counselling, prevention oriented work, and training and supervision). This finding may be explained by the fact that there was substantial variation regarding time spent in those areas that cannot be accounted for by varying degrees of skill. For example, respondents who spent 20% of their time conducting psychoeducational assessments did not necessarily rate themselves as more or less skilled than those who spent 50% of their time doing so. Also worth mentioning is that school psychologists may be required to do many of the above activities, regardless of their skill level.

Responses in the current study suggest that school psychologists' time allocation is complex. Although their skill level may sometimes come into play in deciding how to allocate their time, many other previously mentioned factors influence their activities (unique needs of schools, others' perceptions of their role, etc.). When asked to explain how their activities were established none of them responded that they spend time in an activity because they have a lot of training in it, they are good at it, or it is their area of interest.

What are the Factors that Nova Scotia School Psychologists Perceive as Barriers or

Challenges to their Desired Practice?

Overwhelmingly, respondents reported that time constraints and heavy caseloads, primarily due to being responsible for too many schools, are the main barriers to their desired functioning. As a result of this, they reported difficulties providing counselling, following-up on suggested interventions, being visible, etc. Respondents believe that having fewer schools would allow them to engage in more pro-active measures (for example: ongoing consultation, prevention programs, etc.). Many of their responses lend support to the argument that school psychologists may be too busy to provide the range of preventative services that have been shown to be effective in improving children's outcomes (Davis et al, 2004). Also noteworthy is that respondents felt that they had little time to further their knowledge or update their skills.

Consistent with the responses of Virginia school psychologists (Jones-Wilson, 1994), almost half of the respondents identified others' narrow perceptions regarding the scope of school psychologists' activities as a significant barrier. They felt that their roles were restricted to that of a "tester" and stated that the lack of awareness regarding the possible activities of the school psychologist was a problem.

Working as a psychologist in a non-psychology environment was also reported to result in a number of challenges for respondents. Being supervised and evaluated by non-psychologists was the most notable. Respondents expressed frustration that non-psychologists were managing their caseloads and focusing on the number of assessments they complete rather than the quality of service provided. Isolation from their colleagues

was another issue. They reported that there are very few opportunities to consult with other psychologists.

Two respondents felt that there was a lack of vision for school psychological services in the province. They stated that there is little consensus regarding their activities and no clear direction for the field. Other identified barriers or challenges included lack of follow through on assessment recommendations, assignments based on population opposed to need, poor resources/ space within schools, and administrative demands.

How Much Input do Nova Scotia School Psychologists Feel they have into their Role Allocation?

Respondents reported varying levels of influence over how they allocate their time to various activities, ranging from "Very Low" to "Very High." Almost one third rated their level of influence on the lower end of the scale and one quarter at the moderate level. Almost half of respondents reported having a high to very high degree of influence, which is more than one might expect given the qualitative data. When asked how their activities were established, the majority of respondents referred to the needs of their schools, administrators, individual school culture, etc. Only a few suggested that they had great influence over how they enact their roles. It is possible that some respondents may have felt pressure to report higher levels of influence, because they might perceive a lower level of influence as synonymous with a lack of competency or efficacy. It is, of course, also possible that almost half of respondents do have a high degree of influence over their activities.

Respondents were also asked about strategies they use to achieve their desired functioning. Several main themes emerged. Many described that they advocate for the

use of their skills through open communication/negotiation and by educating others. Such strategy corresponds with the approach recommended by Davis et al (2004) who discussed the importance of school psychologists' promoting awareness about their competencies. Respondents also reported that participating on school teams enabled them to build rapport with staff, educate members regarding the potential scope of school psychological services, help prioritize referrals, and manage their caseload. Active participation on school teams was seen as a way to increase their visibility within schools and influence the allocation of their activities.

Setting limits and carefully managing time was also reported to be an effective strategy. Respondents described this as a way to maintain some degree of control over their practice. Learning to say "no" was essential. They also discussed the importance of identifying their schools' priorities, as well as their own, and managing time accordingly.

Strategies were examined in relation to level of influence. Most psychologists who reported having a high or very high level of influence employed a number of strategies, including negotiating their roles with administrators and participating on school teams. This suggests that some respondents have developed strategies that enable them to have more control over the allocation of their activities. Given that significant differences were found between actual and desired time for eight activities, strategies for increasing influence over activity allocation are very important.

Many of the respondents who reported having a low to very low level of influence felt that they had limited involvement in determining the best use of their time, that the emphasis on psychoeducational assessment left little time for other services, and that

non-psychologists making psychology-related decisions was a problem. Some suggested that they tried to assert more influence over their activities, but were unable to do so.

Contrary to the findings of the study conducted by Jones-Wilson (1994), perceived level of influence was not found to be significantly related to years of experience. This may be because the majority of respondents had few years of experience. Similarly, no significant relationship was found between perceived level of influence and number of schools served, even though qualitative data suggested a correlation. This may be due to the relatively small number of participants and large range reported for number of schools served.

Implications

Implications for School Psychologists

The findings of the current study have several implications for school psychologists. The first is that many of them are experiencing similar challenges in their jobs. Recognition of this may act as a catalyst for discussions to take place regarding the barriers they face and the ways in which they can effect change in those areas.

Secondly, respondents described a number of strategies that they have found helpful in achieving their desired functioning. It is possible that school psychologists may learn from the strategies that others in their field have found to be effective.

Thirdly, almost half of respondents reported having a high or very high level of influence over how they allocate their time to various activities. This suggests that some school psychologists feel they have control over how they enact their roles and may be in a position to reduce the gap between their actual and desired role functioning.

Finally, results of this study indicate that Nova Scotia school psychologists engage in a wide range of activities. The amount of time they spend in those activities also varies considerably. Some are practicing in a testing-oriented role and others are practicing in ways that involve more behaviour programming, consultation, and/or counselling.

Implications for the Profession of School Psychology

This research also has implications for the profession of school psychology. The first is that many of the respondents stated that others' lack of awareness regarding the potential scope of school psychological services was a problem. Some of the psychologists described ways in which they advocate for the use of their skills. It may be advantageous for the profession of school psychology to consider how it could support practitioners in this area. Promoting the various services school psychologists are capable of providing within the school system may be beneficial. Secondly, some respondents reported that there are very few opportunities for them to meet or consult with other psychologists. It may be useful for school psychology organizations to consider how they could help combat the isolation that some practitioners experience.

Implications for School Boards

The findings of this study also have several implications for Nova Scotia school boards. The first is that the vast majority of respondents identified their heavy caseload as a barrier to their desired functioning. They suggested that having fewer schools would allow them to increase both the quantity and quality of their service. This may be important for school psychologists' employers to be aware of. Secondly, some respondents stated that school psychology circuits were established based on population,

without consideration for the needs of schools and communities. In circumstances where this is the case, it may be beneficial for such factors to be considered. Thirdly, some respondents suggested that they have little time to update their skills or consult with other psychologists. Encouraging and facilitating professional development and consultation among school psychologists may help ensure that they have the opportunity to continuously update their knowledge.

Implications for Training Programs

This research also has implications for training programs. The first is that students training to become school psychologists may benefit from learning about the barriers that have been identified by practitioners in the field, as well as the strategies that they have found effective in dealing with those issues. Secondly, findings from this study suggest that Nova Scotia school psychologists engage in a broad range of activities. It is, therefore, important for school psychologists entering the field to be prepared for this.

Limitations

Not all psychologists practicing in Nova Scotia schools participated in this study. While the response rate was respectable (63%), over one third of the psychologists who were sent surveys did not participate. Half of those who did respond had five or fewer years experience in the field and no respondent had been working in the field for more than 15 years. In addition, some practicing school psychologists were not sent surveys because their names or addresses were not listed on the Nova Scotia Directory of Psychologists when the mailing list for the study was created. Also, no psychologists working outside of Nova Scotia were surveyed. The generalization of these results is therefore limited.

In order to learn about respondents' roles, they were asked to estimate the percentage of time they devoted to certain activities. One of the listed activities was "Training and Supervision." The information provided on the survey did not specify whether this category referred to the training and supervision of others or learning through training and supervision. Information regarding this category must therefore be interpreted with caution.

The methodology may have also been somewhat of a limitation. While many respondents' provided detailed responses to survey questions and a great deal of information was collected, it is possible that more information may have been generated if participants were interviewed and able to discuss their perceptions rather than writing them. This may have been useful in learning more about the types of schools and communities in which specific challenges were experienced and the circumstances in which certain strategies have been helpful.

Finally, it is possible that respondents may not have revealed their honest perceptions in response to all questions. Although steps were taken to ensure confidentiality, some psychologists may have felt pressure to provide certain responses.

Recommendations for Future Study

Survey Design

For question one of the survey, psychologists were asked to provide the percentage of time they spent in certain activities in their most recent position. One of the activities was "Psychoeducational Assessment." If this list were to be used in a future study, it is recommended that psychoeducational assessment be defined more precisely (ex: cumulative record review, observations, testing, etc.). Similarly, it is recommended

that the nature of "Training and Supervision" be more clearly defined and indicate whether it refers to providing training and supervision for others or being trained and supervised. Given that some respondents indicated that they would like more time to update their knowledge base and consult with other psychologists, it is also recommended that "Professional Development" be added to the list of activities.

Also, a couple of respondents noted that providing percentages of time for each activity was difficult. One psychologist suggested that ranking the activities would have been easier. Depending on the goals of future studies, asking psychologists to rank activities in order from most to least time spent may suffice. Such changes would not, however, allow for the same type of information to be collected. It is recommended that question one be worded so that respondents understand that they are being asked to estimate the time they spend in each activity.

Future Research Projects

While a great deal of information was generated in the current study, there is potential to learn more about the perceptions of Nova Scotia school psychologists. Future research could focus on gathering more in-depth perceptions of school psychologists. In particular, interviewing them about how their activities are established, the challenges they face, and the strategies they employ to achieve desired functioning, would be valuable. This may generate more detailed information regarding the specific ways in which school psychologists deal with certain barriers. Such interviews may also reveal more about how certain strategies are employed and the circumstances in which they have been effective. This information has the potential to benefit psychologists in the field and students who are preparing to enter it.

Participants of the current study identified a number of barriers/ challenges to their desired functioning. Research focused on those barriers could be useful. Asking psychologists to identify which factors are most problematic in their work may generate information that is helpful in determining where change is most needed.

It would also be valuable to undertake a study that examines the perceptions of veteran members of the profession. Given that past research suggests that years of experience and level of influence over activity allocation are positively related, research that incorporates more experienced school psychologists may shed light on why this is the case.

It is also important to note that the current study did not make a distinction between the perceptions of psychologists who were practicing in different types of communities (for example, rural communities versus urban communities). It is possible that those practicing in different areas of the province have diverse experiences. Different factors may influence their activities and strategies that are helpful in one community may not be in another. Further study examining the role of the school psychologist in distinct communities would be valuable.

Future research could also focus on gathering the perceptions of school psychologists across Canada. Such research has the potential to reveal the degree of commonality and variability that exists regarding the role of the school psychologist in different provinces. Learning about school psychological service in other areas of the country may be helpful for those in the field.

Conclusion

Similar to past research findings, gaps between respondents actual and desired role functioning were found. Despite such disparity, there is some indication that school psychology in Nova Scotia is changing although it is not clear whether changes are taking place at an individual or system-level. This study revealed considerable variability regarding the role of the school psychologist in the province and how much influence they feel they have over how they enact their roles. This suggests that some school psychologists are moving away from a traditional model of practice. Future research could reveal more about school psychology across the province and country and show if changes are taking place.

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Appendix A: Survey
The Roles of Psychologists Practicing in Nova Scotia Schools

☐ If you have not practiced as a psychologist in a Nova Scotia school at anytime in the past two years, please check the above box and return the survey unanswered.

I. a) In your most recent position, what percentage of your time would you say is spent in each of the following activities? What percentage of your time would you prefer to spend in each of the following? Please answer both questions by filling out the Actual and Desired columns.

Please make sure that each column totals 100%

	Actual %	Desired %
Psychoeducational Assessment		
Behaviour Assessment		
Individual Counselling/ Therapy		
Group Counselling/ Therapy		
Family Work/ Counselling		
Consultation (parent meetings, teacher consultation, etc.)		
Multidisciplinary Meetings		
Report Writing		
In-services (presenting)		
Research		
Prevention Oriented Work		
Training & Supervision		
Travel (between schools)		
Crisis Intervention		
Other (specify)_____		
_____	100%	100%

b) How is this allocation of activities established? (For example, are you required to complete a certain number of psychoeducational assessments? Do school administrators request specific services? Do you negotiate your role with a board administrator? How do the needs of different schools and/or communities influence this process? Do certain schools require more of your time?)

If you need extra space, please feel free to continue on the back of the page

II. Please assess your level of skill for each of the following by circling the appropriate number.
If you desire training relative to a specific area, please circle Y in the appropriate column.

1-no knowledge	2-limited	3-adequate	4-competent	5-expert

Psychoeducational Assessment	1	2	3	4	5	Y
Behaviour Assessment	1	2	3	4	5	Y
Individual Counselling/Therapy	1	2	3	4	5	Y
Group Counselling/Therapy	1	2	3	4	5	Y
Family Work/ Counselling	1	2	3	4	5	Y
Consultation	1	2	3	4	5	Y
Multidisciplinary Meetings	1	2	3	4	5	Y
Report Writing	1	2	3	4	5	Y
In-service (presenting)	1	2	3	4	5	Y
Research	1	2	3	4	5	Y
Prevention Oriented Work	1	2	3	4	5	Y
Training & Supervision	1	2	3	4	5	Y
Crisis Intervention	1	2	3	4	5	Y

Other (specify)

_____ 1 2 3 4 5 Y

_____ 1 2 3 4 5 Y

III.
a) Which activities of your job do you most enjoy?

b) Please rate the level of influence you believe you have over how you allocate your time to various activities.

Very Low   Low   Moderate   High   Very High
☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐

c) What strategies do you use to ensure that you are able to fulfill your most valued activities?

If you need extra space, please feel free to continue on the back of the page.

d) Please identify barriers/challenges that get in the way of your desired functioning as a school psychologist.

Any additional comments you would like to add.

IV. Demographic Data

a) Currently employed _____Full time _____Part time

b) Approximate student: school psychologist ratio in your most recent position
_____ : _____

c) Please check the types of schools you service
_____ Elementary School
_____ Junior High School
_____ High School
_____ Other (specify)

d) Number of schools served in your most recent position

_____

Please indicate the approximate population of each school

e) Please check the type of community/communities in which you practice
_____ Rural
_____ Suburban
_____ City
_____ Other (specify)

f) Total years of service as a school psychologist
_____ 5 or less _____ 11-15 _____ 21-25 _____ 30+
_____ 6-10 _____ 16-20 _____ 26-30

g) Highest Academic Degree
_____ M.A. / M.Ed.
_____ Ph.D., Psy.D., Ed.D.
_____ Other (specify) _____

h) Credentials
_____ Candidate Register
_____ Registered Psychologist
_____ Other (specify) _____

i) Gender
_____ Male _____ Female

j) Age
_____ 21-25 _____ 41-45 _____ 60+
_____ 26-30 _____ 46-50
_____ 31-35 _____ 51-55
_____ 36-40 _____ 56-60

THANK YOU!

Participant's signature_____ **Date**_____

Researcher's signature_____ **Date**_____

Please keep a copy for yourself and send a signed copy back to me.

Appendix C: Request for Research Results

If you would like a summary of the research results, please fill out the following:

Name:

_____

Email:

_____

Mailing Address:

_____