Consultation Practices of Nova Scotia School Psychologists

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Abstract

School psychologists engage in consultation practices to better serve the psychological and educational needs of their students (Siegel & Cole, 2003). School consultation has been described as a collaborative and interdependent problem-solving process between consultants and consultees for the purpose of exchanging information. Consultants provide specialized knowledge to others while consultees seek information or assistance from others (Zins & Erchul, 2002). This model of consultation is appropriate for the school setting because consultants and consultees form a partnership and share responsibility for student outcomes (Erchul & Myers, 1996; Henning-Stout & Bonner, 1996). Consultation may be particularly important for school psychologists who work in rural communities as research has suggested that rural school psychologists encounter challenges that are unique to working in more isolated areas such as professional isolation, lack of available or accessible resources, and having to assume the role of a generalist.

This study was conducted to identify and compare rural and urban Nova Scotia school psychologists' consultation practices in their roles as consultants and consultees. It also explored what they perceived as some of the barriers and facilitators to effective consultation practices, and examined whether these differed for psychologists in urban as compared to rural settings.

Surveys were sent to 66 school psychologists believed to be practicing in Nova Scotia. Thirty-eight, or 58%, were included in the data analysis. Most respondents had limited experience in the field. Fifty percent of participants had been practicing for five years or less and 92% had been practicing for 15 years or less. Findings indicated that

many school psychologists who were practicing in Nova Scotia engaged in consultation practices, as consultants and consultees, on a regular basis. Significant positive correlations were found between how often school psychologists acted as consultants and consultees with various others suggesting an interdependent and reciprocal relationship between school psychologists and other professionals and non-professionals. Participants viewed working collaboratively with others to solve problems and gathering and receiving knowledge and support as important to them in their practice. Most consultation appeared to be occurring at the school-level with participants reporting that they consulted most often with school personnel and parents. School psychologists reported consulting most often for academic and behavioral issues and most reported being confident or very confident in their ability to act as a consultant for these issues.

Although most participants indicated they were somewhat satisfied or satisfied with their current level of consultation, almost three quarters of all respondents reported they would like to spend more time on consultation. Respondents indicated the most significant barriers to effective consultation were heavy caseloads, doing too many psycho-educational assessments, and servicing too many schools. Facilitators to effective consultation were administrative support, time allocated for consultation, common planning time with staff, flexibility in scheduling, promoting the role of the school psychologist, effective communication, parental involvement and participation in site-based and program planning teams, being a regular presence in schools, and shifting from a psycho-educational assessment focus to a comprehensive service delivery model.

Few significant differences in consultation practices were identified among rural, urban, and combined rural and urban school psychologists. Urban participants were more

likely than rural and combined participants to act as a consultant for family doctors. Urban and combined participants were more likely to provide information to social workers. Rural participants reported being sought out more often than urban and combined participants for assistance with social-emotional issues and rated gathering information for social-emotional issues as more important. No significant differences were identified with respect to barriers or facilitators to effective consultation. The lack of significant differences may have been a result of the small number of participants in the urban and combined rural and urban groups.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

The aim of this study was to identify and compare rural and urban school psychologists' consultation practices in their roles as consultants and consultees. It also explored what school psychologists perceived as some of the barriers and facilitators to effective consultation practices, and examined whether these differed for psychologists in urban as compared to rural settings.

Consultation has been promoted as an effective means for school psychologists to provide more effective service delivery (Siegel & Cole, 2003; Zins & Erchul, 2002). Consultation involves an interaction between consultants and consultees, for the purpose of exchanging knowledge. It is a problem-solving process that is carried out in an attempt to remediate a work-related issue (Zins & Erchul, 2002). As consultees, school psychologists interact with a variety of professionals and non-professionals when they are faced with a problem for which they require assistance. As consultants, they act as a resource for others (Caplan & Caplan, 1993; Henning-Stout & Bonner, 1996).

There are a variety of frameworks for understanding approaches to consultation, such as mental health consultation, environmental consultation, behavioral consultation (Sladeczek, Kratchowill, Steinbach, Kumke, & Hagermoser, 2003), and ecobehavioral consultation (Zins & Erchul, 2002). The model of consultation that guided this project was Zins and Erchul's (2002) ecobehavioral model. They define school consultation as, "a method of providing preventatively oriented psychological and educational services in which consultants and consultees form cooperative partnerships and engage in a reciprocal, systematic problem-solving process guided by ecobehavioral principles"

(p. 626). This model was chosen because a focus on collaborative partnerships may be more effective in schools where consultants and consultees work together and share responsibility for student outcomes (Erchul & Myers, 1996; Henning-Stout & Bonner, 1996).

Power (2003) suggests that consultation is especially important in rural areas where resources are limited. School psychologists who work in rural communities often face challenges that are unique to working in isolated areas. Although there is diversity among rural areas (Helge, 1985; Sutton, 2002), a review of the literature suggests that some of the common challenges that many rural school psychologists experience are extensive travel (Helge, 1985; Hughes, 1986; McLeskey et al., 1988; Barbopoulos & Clark, 2003), a lack of available or accessible resources (Cummings et al., 1985; McLeskey et al., 1986; Sutton, 2002), having to assume the role of a generalist (Cummings et al., 1985; Huebner, McLeskey, & Cummings, 1984; Kramer & Peters, 1985), and professional isolation (Helge, 1985; Hughes & Clark, 1981; McLeskey et al., 1988).

This research project addressed some of the gaps in the existing literature on the consultation practices of rural and urban school psychologists. It contributed empirical information based on a Canadian, and more specifically, a Nova Scotia, sample of school psychologists. Exploring school psychologists' consultation practices, and identifying what they perceived as some of the barriers and facilitators to effective consultation, helps identify the current practices for mental health school-based service delivery in urban and rural communities.

Literature Review

School psychologists engage in consultation practices as consultants and consultees. The goal of this problem-solving process is to provide the best possible educational and psychological services to students. Consultation practices of school psychologists have been the focus of empirically-based literature within the past twenty years (Bramlett, Murphy, Johnson, Wallingsford, & Hall, 2002; Costenbader & Swartz, 1992; Curtis, Hunley, Walker, & Baker, 1999; Curtis, Hunley, & Grier, 2002; D'Amour, Ferrada-Videla, Rodriguez, & Beaulieu, 2005; Gonzalez, Nelson, Gutkin, & Shwery, 2004; Henning-Stout & Bonner, 1996; Knoff & McKenna, 1991; Wilczynski, Mandal, & Fusilier, 2000). The existing research does not, however, include the perspective of school psychologists who work in Canadian, or Nova Scotia, urban and rural communities.

In general, there is very little research available on rural school psychology (Brassard & Grossjohann-Barnes, 1987; Huebner et al., 1984; Hughes, 1986; Hughes & Clark, 1981; Jerrell, 1984; Kee, Johnson, & Hunt, 2002; McLeskey et al., 1986; McLeskey et al., 1988; Schank & Skovholt, 1997; Sutton, 2002). Much of the existing literature provides an overview of issues pertaining to rural school psychology but does not add new empirically-based information (Barbopoulos & Clark, 2003; Campbell, Gordon, & Chandler, 2002; Campbell & Gordon, 2003; Cummings et al., 1985; Ehrhardt-Padgett, Hatzichristou, Kitson, & Meyers, 2004; Fagan & Hughes, 1985; Helge, 1985; Kramer & Peters, 1985; McLeskey, Huebner, & Cummings, 1984; Merrell, Pratt, Forbush, Jentzsch, Nelson, Odell, & Smith, 1994; Power, 2003). In addition, the majority examines school psychology in the context of rural United States in the 1980's. Twenty

of the twenty-one articles on rural school psychology cited above were published in the United States, twelve of which were published between 1980 and 1990.

No research to date has investigated, or compared, the consultation practices of school psychologists who work in Canadian, or Nova Scotia, rural and urban communities. This project addressed some of the gaps in the existing research on school psychology by examining the consultation practices of rural and urban school psychologists who work in Nova Scotia.

Goals of Consultation and Collaboration

Consultation in schools is part of a comprehensive service delivery system whose ultimate goal is to provide the best possible services to students in an efficient and effective manner (Sladeczek et al., 2003). It is an indirect service that can create an impact at the individual (child or adult), classroom, and/or systems level (Greenough, Schwean, & Saklofske, 1993). The purpose of this problem-solving process is to exchange psychological and educational information to produce changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes, and/or behaviors at the various levels. It has been suggested that these changes will help consultees become more autonomous so that they can better address the needs of their students in the future (Greenough et al., 1993). Greater autonomy of schools can result in fewer direct service referrals to the school psychologist, such as for psycho-educational assessments. Less time spent on psycho-educational assessments allows the school psychologist to offer more services to a greater number of students.

Consultation that is collaborative in nature encourages a variety of people to be included in the problem-solving and decision-making processes and also be responsible for the outcomes (Greenough et al., 1993). It is suggested that recommendations are more

likely to be implemented if they are agreed upon by all of the stakeholders (Siegel & Cole, 2003; Walther-Thomas, Korinek, & McLaughlin, 1999).

The purpose of school-based collaboration is to provide support to individual teachers and enhance student learning (Walther-Thomas et al., 1999). According to the Nova Scotia Department of Education (2002), school-based program planning teams are collaborative opportunities for parents, administrators, teachers, and special services personnel to discuss a student's program and make adjustments to best suit his or her educational, behavioral, and/or mental health needs. The school psychologist is often a member of his or her schools' program planning teams. This collaborative approach allows for a number of people who are involved with the child to be part of the decision making process (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2002).

Models of Consultation

Over the past 40 years, several frameworks for consultation in schools have been developed, including mental health consultation (Caplan & Caplan, 1993), developmental consultation, behavioral consultation (Sladeczek et al., 2003), and ecobehavioral (Zins & Erchul, 2002). Although each consultation method is unique, they share some common elements. Each approach uses a problem-solving process to attempt to deal with a work-related problem, and participation in the consultation process is seen as voluntary (Zins & Erchul, 2002).

According to Caplan & Caplan (1993), mental health consultation refers to, "…a process of interaction between two professionals – the consultant, who is the specialist, and the consultee, who invokes the consultant's help in a current work problem that he

believes is within the consultant's area of specialized competence" (p. 11). In Caplan and Caplan's (1993) model, the goal of consultation is for the consultant to provide information to, or share knowledge with, the consultee so that the latter can better serve his or her client, and so that the consultee will be able to independently handle a similar situation in the future (Caplan & Caplan, 1993). Although the consultant is offering his or her expertise to help the consultee with a client, the consultant is not directly responsible for the client's well-being. There is no power hierarchy and the consultee has the option of accepting or rejecting the consultant's advice (Caplan & Caplan, 1993). Consultation can include professionals from a variety of disciplines such as psychiatrists, psychologists, doctors, nurses, teachers, school administrators, social workers, occupational therapists, speech-language pathologists, clergy, lawyers, and criminal justice workers (Caplan & Caplan, 1993).

Developmental consultation differs from other consultation models as it focuses on the entire system, or environment in which the child operates (Sladeczek et al., 2003). It acknowledges that the key players in a child's life, such as his or her family and teachers, greatly impact his or her development and it is essential that they are included in the consultative process (Sladeczek et al., 2003).

According to Sladeczek et al. (2003), behavioral consultation is one of the most widely recognized consultation models in the United States and Canada. It is defined as "…collaboration between a consultant and at least one consultee (usually the parent and/or teacher) that together work towards bringing about behavioral change with a client (usually a child)" (Sladeczek et al., 2003, p. 46). Most noteworthy about this approach is

that the consultative relationship is collaborative in nature, rather than directive, and the identification and treatment of the problem is based on concrete methodological, systematic, observations (Sladeczek et al., 2003).

Zins and Erchul (2002) have suggested that school consultation is best understood from an ecobehavioral perspective. They conceptualize school consultation as a cooperative relationship between consultants and consultees whose mutual goal is to provide the best possible educational and psychological services to students. This approach focuses on preventative problem solving and combines aspects of behavioral and ecological or developmental consultation. Ecobehavioral consultation employs behavioral methodology to examine not only the individual child, but also the many external factors that may be influencing him or her. A variety of possible contributing factors, or system variables such as parents, siblings, peers, teachers, schools, and communities, are examined before treatment is developed (Zins & Erchul, 2002).

Shift from Consultation to Collaboration

Erchul and Myers (1996) suggest that consultation that is more collaborative in nature may be more beneficial in schools because the mental health consultation model (Caplan & Caplan, 1993) does not always fit within the school system. Consultation often occurs in small problem-solving groups rather than in one-on-one meetings, and the school psychologist is expected to take a more facilitative rather than directive approach when acting as a consultant (Erchul & Myers, 1996). According to the Caplan and Caplan (1993) definition, the consultant is an external professional who is not liable for the outcome of the client. By contrast, the school psychologist's role within schools is

typically one of an internal consultant who shares the responsibility for the well-being of his or her students with other school personnel (Erchul and Myers, 1996).

Caplan and Caplan (1993) characterize consultation as egalitarian and voluntary within schools; however, in schools the consultee does not necessarily have the choice of accepting or rejecting the consultant's advice. Erchul and Myers (1996) suggest that a teacher who is acting as a consultee may be expected to seek advice from the school psychologist and follow his or her recommendations. The school psychologist may be viewed as the resident expert who has specialized knowledge in the areas of learning, behavioral, and mental health problems, and the teacher may not be seen as equal as a consultee (Erchul & Myers, 1996).

Given the discrepancies between Caplan and Caplan's (1993) definition of consultation and school-based consultation practices, Erchul and Myers (1996) recommend that a collaborative consultation model may be more appropriate for the school system. In a collaborative relationship, those involved are interdependent, share responsibility, and are equally accountable for decisions that will affect the client (Henning-Stout & Bonner, 1996). Erchul and Myers (1996) suggest that it is more beneficial for school psychologists to engage in collaborative decision-making than to act as an expert who dispenses advice and offers solutions. When solutions are generated by both the consultant and the consultee, treatment integrity should improve because the problem-solving plan will be more likely to be manageable in the school setting.

Zins and Erchul's (2002) ecobehavioral approach is consistent with the descriptions of school psychology consultation outlined by Erchul and Myers (1996): it

conceptualizes consultation as a collaborative problem-solving process whereby the consultant and consultees form partnerships to best serve the needs of students. The consultant does not necessarily take on the role of the expert; rather both the consultant and consultees share responsibility for the outcome (Zins & Erchul, 2002).

Elements of Effective Collaboration

D'Amour et al. (2005) conducted a literature review to identify concepts related to interprofessional collaboration in health care. The concepts that were referred to most frequently within the collaboration literature were partnership, power, interdependency, sharing, and process. Collaboration is a partnership between two or more people who are working toward a common goal, and is characterized by open and honest communication, trust, and respect for one another as professionals. Effective collaboration requires the empowerment of each member while maintaining interdependency, or mutual dependence, on one another. Within a collaborative group, there is shared responsibility for decision-making, planning, and intervention strategies. Collaboration is a process that continues to evolve and change (D'Amour et al., 2005).

To improve the delivery of mental health services it is recommended that collaborative partnerships be interdisciplinary and inter-agency (Campbell et al., 2002; Siegel & Cole, 2003; Ehrhardt-Padgett et al., 2004; Helge, 1985; Jerrell, 1984; Power, 2003). School psychologists can form partnerships with natural helpers in the community such as caregivers, volunteers, and teenage helpers. These nontraditional helpers could be additional resources in rural areas where services tend to be limited (Hughes & Clark, 1981; Power, 2003). Working with members of the community in a collaborative manner

could help to empower them to create and maintain their own local resources (Power, 2003).

Power (2003) suggested that involving others within the school, at home, and in the community can help create a shared sense of responsibility for the mental health and educational needs of children. Service or treatment plans are more likely to be adhered to in the school and at home when a plan is developed and agreed upon by all of the stakeholders (Siegel & Cole, 2003; Walther-Thomas et al., 1999). It has been recommended that a school psychologist can best effect change by collaborating with decision makers, such as educators, parents, and students (Siegel & Cole, 2003; Walther-Thomas et al., 1999).

Consultation and Collaboration Practices of School Psychologists

In order to identify demographic information and professional practices of school psychologists, Curtis et al. (1999) distributed a survey to 20% of all members of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP). The majority of survey respondents worked in an urban or suburban setting with only 25.9 % of respondents reporting that they worked in a primarily rural setting. Participants, 1922 school psychologists, reported spending the majority of their time engaged in special education evaluation activities. Although assessment activities were the most common professional practice, 97.4% reported that they had engaged in consultation activities within the past year. In this study, consultative practices were defined as providing alternative services to children that did not result in an assessment for special education eligibility. Twenty-five percent reported that they had provided service through consultation to at least 50

students within the past year, and 45.9% reported that they had provided services through consultation to between 1 and 25 students within the past year (Curtis et al., 1999).

Curtis et al. (2002) used the data collected by Curtis et al. (1999) to further evaluate the relationships among professional practices and demographic characteristics of school psychologists. They found that the frequency of consultation services varied by school location. School psychologists who worked in urban and suburban settings reported providing significantly more consultation services that than those who worked in rural settings. In addition, rural school psychologists were more likely to report having fewer years of work experience than their urban and suburban counterparts (Curtis et al., 2002).

Bramlett et al. (2002) conducted a survey with 370 United States school psychologists, 27% of whom worked in rural areas, in order to assess their professional roles and consultation practices. Similar to the findings of Curtis et al. (1999), respondents reported that the majority of their time, 49%, was spent in assessment activities. Sixteen percent of their time was spent in consultation activities. Participants were asked to rate their level of confidence in their ability to act as a consultant for academic and behavioral concerns. For academic problems, 68% reported feeling very confident, 30% reported feeling somewhat confident, and 2% reported feeling not at all confident. For behavioral problems, 76% reported feeling very confident, 22% reported feeling somewhat confident, and 2% reported feeling not at all confident (Bramlett et al., 2002).

Costenbader and Swartz (1992) also surveyed school psychologists to examine their consultation practices in schools. Participants included 333 United States school psychologists, 30% of whom worked in rural settings. Overall, respondents reported that they consulted most frequently with teachers (42% of their time) to discuss students with handicapping conditions. Eighteen percent of their consultation time was spent with administrators, and 20% was spent with families. On average, participants reported feeling a moderate ability to perform as a consultant; however, they were less satisfied with their ability to carry out follow-up evaluation activities with those with whom they had consulted. A significant discrepancy was found between the school psychologists' actual and preferred amount of time spent engaging in consultation activities (Costenbader & Swartz, 1992). Respondents indicated that typically only 11-20% of their time was spent in consultation, but they would prefer to allocate 31-41% of their time for consultation.

In an ethnographic study carried out by Henning-Stout and Bonner (1996), eight school psychologists were asked to keep a detailed journal of their work experiences. It was not indicated whether the participants in this study worked in rural or urban areas. Consultation was defined as, "…any interaction with another professional or parent that involved problem-solving or action planning relative to a client (student) or program-related concern" (p. 51). Analysis of the school psychologists' journals indicated that they spent 25% of their time in consultation practices. The school psychologists interacted with a wide variety of people from diverse disciplines. Only 2.9% of the school

psychologists' time was spent consulting with other school psychologists or supervisors (Henning-Stout & Bonner, 1996).

Within this study, consultation practices were defined as working collaboratively with others or acting as an expert (Henning-Stout & Bonner, 1996). It was found that, of the consultative interactions, 70.73% of the events were collaborative in nature and 28.72% involved the school psychologist in an expert role. During collaborative interactions, the participants reported that they most frequently gave and received support. In the expert role, they spent most of their time providing information to others, but spent little time receiving information, giving or receiving support. Some of the participants indicated they felt pressured to fulfill the expert role and were not necessarily comfortable with that process. School psychologists indicated that a more collaborative approach, rather than simply providing information as an expert, is a more effective method of problem-solving (Henning-Stout & Bonner, 1996).

The Conference on the Future of School Psychology (Cummings, Harrison, Dawson, Short, Gorin, & Palomares, 2004) which included 740 onsite and offsite participants, such as rural and urban school psychologists, university faculty, graduate students, and professionals from related disciplines, identified five critical issues in school psychology. Two of these are directly relevant to collaborative practice. Conference participants agreed that home-school collaboration should be improved. Better partnerships should be formed between families and schools with regard to the educational and psychological needs of children. In addition, participants indicated the need for more accessible health and mental health services for children and their families

in schools. It was suggested that these school-based services be integrated with community-based services (Cummings et al., 2004).

Characteristics of Effective Consultants

Knoff and McKenna (1991) surveyed 307 school psychologists and 177 consultation experts regarding what they considered were the characteristics and skills of an effective consultant. University faculty and student supervisors, as well as school psychology practitioners reported that the most important skills and characteristics of an effective consultant were: "practices in an ethical manner, maintains confidentiality, skillful, shows respect for the consultee, knowledgeable, and approachable" (p. 4). The skills and characteristics of a consultant that they perceived as the least important, or not consistent with effective consultation, were: "authoritarian, aggressive, colorful, funny, deferent, and self-disclosing" (p. 4).

Facilitators and Barriers to Effective Consultation and Collaboration in Schools

In a review of the literature, Safran (1991) identified communication as the key component for effective collaboration within schools. The key components of effective school-based communication are knowledge, skill, performance, and commitment. Group members should have a sound understanding, not only of what is being collaborated about, but also knowledge about how to collaborate properly. Participants should be able to skillfully alternate between giving and receiving information so there is shared responsibility between group members. Safran (1991) suggested that commitment to collaboration, by school administration and other personnel, is essential for groups to perform to the best of their abilities.

Walther et al. (1999) suggested that administrative support, professional development, and common planning time are essential for effective collaboration within schools. A supportive and committed principal can facilitate the collaborative process in schools. It is recommended that administrators encourage staff to take part in training, or professional development, to help prepare them for collaborating with other professionals and parents. In addition, administrators can make collaboration a priority by coordinating schedules and establishing a set meeting time so that each member of the team is able to attend (Walther et al., 1999).

To identify some of the bridges and barriers to effective consultation, Wilczynski et al. (2000) conducted a survey with 350 United States school psychologists. Respondents indicated that the most important facilitator is support from school personnel. Seventy-three percent reported that administrators were generally supportive of consultation practices while 68.8% of respondents reported that teachers were supportive. Inclusion in teacher assistance teams and having time specifically allocated for consultation were also noted as significant bridges to consultation in schools (Wilczynski et al., 2000). The barriers to consultation most frequently indicated were a lack of time and being required to complete too many assessments (Wilczynski et al., 2000). Costenbader and Swartz (1992) also found that a lack of time was the greatest barrier to school consultation.

To investigate teacher resistance to consultation services provided by a school psychologist, Gonzalez et al. (2004) distributed a survey to 403 elementary teachers, the majority of whom worked in rural schools (60%). The only factor that significantly

affected the number of teacher consultations with the school psychologist was the school psychologist's availability. Teachers reported that the amount of time the school psychologist spends in the school impacted how frequently they consult with him or her, and they were more likely to consult with a school psychologist who spent more hours in the school. Gonzalez et al. (2004) suggested that this lack of availability may be a barrier to consultation activities within schools.

Rural Communities and Mental Health

A national census, conducted by Statistics Canada (2001), found that approximately 20% of Canadians and 44% of Nova Scotia residents live in rural areas. In an overview of Canadian rural mental health, Mcllwraith and Dyck (2002) found that mental health resources are less available to Canadians who live in rural areas compared to those who live in urban areas: the ratio of psychologists to citizens in urban areas is 1 to 2195, whereas the ratio in rural areas is 1 to 9619. According to the National Association of School Psychology's Standards for the Provision of School Psychological Services (Curtis et al., 1999), the recommended ratio of school psychologists to students is 1:1000.

The Canadian Community Health Survey, conducted by Statistics Canada (2001), found that 8.2 % of Canadians had consulted with a mental health professional, including psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, nurses, counselors, and family doctors or general practitioners, within the span of a year. People who lived in regions of rural Atlantic Canada had a rate of consultation with mental health professionals that was

significantly below the national average. This may be because of a lack of available services.

Rural School Psychologists

School psychologists who work in rural communities supply essential mental health services to children and adolescents by identifying and treating children's and adolescents' psychological and educational problems (Cummings et al., 1985; Sutton, 2002) as well as by fostering their cognitive, academic, and emotional development (Hann, 2001). The role of the rural school psychologist also includes referring clients to additional resources (Brassard & Grossjohann-Barnes, 1987; Jerrell, 1984; Kramer & Peters, 1985; Sinclair & Pettifor, 2001), consulting with other professionals on ethical, educational, and psychological issues (Campbell & Gordon, 2003; Sinclair & Pettifor, 2001), and collaborating with professionals as part of integrative teams (Siegel & Cole, 2003; Power, 2003; Ehrhardt-Padgett et al., 2004).

Challenges for Rural School Psychologists

Research has suggested that rural school psychologists face challenges that are unique to working in isolated areas, such as extensive travel (Helge, 1985; Hughes, 1986; McLeskey et al., 1988; Barbopoulos & Clark, 2003), a lack of available or accessible resources (Cummings et al., 1985; McLeskey et al., 1986; Sutton, 2002), having to assume the role of a generalist (Cummings et al., 1985; Huebner et al., 1984; Kramer & Peters, 1985), and professional isolation (Helge, 1985; Hughes & Clark, 1981; McLeskey et al., 1988).

Travel Time

School psychologists who work in rural areas often have to travel extensive distances over, at times, adverse terrain to service their schools (Barbopoulos & Clark, 2003; Helge, 1985; McLeskey et al., 1988). In a study by McLeskey et al. (1988), interviews were conducted with 50 rural school psychologists. Travel time and distance were often reported as problematic. An excessive amount of travel affects how much time psychologists can spend at rural schools with their clients. In some instances, school psychologists are expected to travel on their own time, before and after school hours. This may cause their workday to be extended well beyond that of their urban and suburban counterparts (McLeskey et al., 1988). A survey of 13 rural school psychologists who left the profession indicated that dissatisfaction with the job, specifically with travel time, was one of the primary reasons for discontinuing their practice as a school psychologist (Hughes, 1986). It has been suggested that travel time is not always viewed as a negative aspect of working in rural areas (McLeskey et al., 1984; McLeskey et al., 1988). Some psychologists are not opposed to travel, as they see this as time to unwind after a meeting or collect their thoughts before an upcoming meeting (McLeskey et al., 1988).

Scarcity of Local Mental Health Services

School psychologists who work in rural schools often have clients referred to them who cannot be adequately treated within the school environment. These psychologists are ethically responsible for helping their clients access the services they require (Brassard & Grossjohann-Barnes, 1987; Jerrell, 1984; Kramer & Peters, 1985;

Sinclair & Pettifor, 2001). The necessary mental health services are not always available in rural communities, however, and people may be required to travel to urban centers (Sutton, 2002). Families often cannot, or will not, travel the distances required to receive the help they need (Sutton, 2002). This may be because they lack the transportation to travel or do not have the financial means to seek transportation.

In rural communities where mental health resources are scarce, the school psychologist may be the only local and accessible mental health professional (Cummings et al., 1985; McLeskey et al., 1986; Sutton, 2002). When students do not receive necessary treatment elsewhere, the school is often forced to take on the responsibility for their well-being. Rural school psychologists are expected to expand their role to offer more extensive services (McLeskey et al., 1986). School-based mental health service providers may be expected to fill gaps that exist in the local mental health services (Sutton, 2002).

Assuming the Role of a Generalist

Rural school psychologists who lack referral resources are more likely to assume the role of generalists (Cummings et al., 1985; Huebner et al., 1984; Kraemer & Peters, 1985). According to Cummings et al. (1985), a generalist can be defined as someone who "can provide a wide array of services and functions" (p. 430). Unfortunately, rural school psychologists may not have been properly trained to treat the range of problems that they are expected to handle (Cummings et al., 1985). School psychologists are then faced with the ethical dilemma of providing services outside their areas of professional competency (Brassard & Grossjohann-Barnes, 1987; Sinclair & Pettifor, 2001).

Professional Isolation

Professional isolation is one of the most problematic aspects of rural practice. Rural school psychologists are not always able to access other mental health professionals for consultation purposes (Helge, 1985; Hughes & Clark, 1981; McLeskey et al., 1988). At the same time, they have a professional responsibility to seek support from other professionals for guidance and suggestions on difficult cases (Brassard & Grossjohann-Barnes, 1987), and to discuss ethical dilemmas (Campbell & Gordon, 2003; Sinclair & Pettifor, 2001). School psychologists may have the opportunity to consult with administrators on educational issues; however, many administrators do not have the psychological expertise that is necessary to assist with problems that are psychological in nature (Cummings et al., 1985).

Kee et al. (2002) conducted a study to examine the role of professional and social support in predicting burnout for rural mental health professionals. Participants included 513 master's level professional counselors and psychologists who worked in rural areas in a Midwestern state. They found that rural counselors and psychologists who did not have the opportunity to share concerns and interests with colleagues were at a greater risk of becoming emotionally exhausted and developing feelings of depersonalization.

Rural School Psychologists and Consultation

Consultation may be particularly important for school psychologists who work in rural communities. School psychologists who work in rural areas tend to be younger and less experienced (Helge, 1985; Curtis et al., 2002). Consultation with other professionals is especially important for school psychologists who do not have extensive experience to draw from (Helge, 1985; Hughes & Clark, 1981). Rural school psychologists are often

expected to offer more extensive services and may benefit from the opportunity to consult. At the same time, rural professionals can be at a greater risk of becoming isolated (Helge, 1985; Hughes & Clark, 1981; McLeskey et al., 1988).

Given that there is no existing literature regarding the consultation practices of school psychologists who work in rural and urban areas in Nova Scotia, the goal of this study was to identify and compare the consultation practices of rural and urban Nova Scotia school psychologists and investigate what they perceived as some of the barriers and facilitators to effective consultation.

CHAPTER II

Method

This study identified and compared the consultation practices of Nova Scotia school psychologists who worked in rural and urban settings. More specifically, it examined their experiences as both consultants and consultees and identified what they perceived as some of the barriers and facilitators to effective consultation.

The following section describes participant characteristics, the instrumentation, the procedure for the survey distribution and collection, as well as how the data were analyzed.

Participants

Participants were school psychologists who worked in schools in rural and urban areas throughout Nova Scotia. The names and addresses of potential participants were identified through the Directory of Psychologists published by the Nova Scotia Board of Examiners in Psychology.

Instrumentation

Data was collected for the proposed study by distributing a short survey. A survey was chosen as the best method to collect data for this study because, one, it was an efficient way to gather information from a relatively large number of participants, two, participants could remain anonymous, and, three, previous studies have used similar methods, which allowed for comparisons.

The survey was adapted from a survey by Craig and Church (2005) that examined the consultation patterns and professional supports of school psychologists who worked in rural and urban communities throughout Canada. The survey for the current study was

modified from its original version to reflect the aim of the current study: to identify and compare the consultation practices of school psychologists in who work in rural and urban settings in Nova Scotia. The current study distinguished between psychologists' experiences as consultants and consultees and identified some of the barriers and facilitators to consultation. In addition, some of the questions in the survey were generated based on existing literature and previous studies (Barbopoulos & Clark, 2003; Bramlett et al., 2002; Costenbader & Swartz, 1992; Cummings et al., 1985; Curtis et al., 2002; Helge, 1985; Huebner et al., 1984; Hughes & Clark, 1981; Hughes, 1986; Gonzalez et al., 2004; Kramer & Peters, 1985; McLeskey et al., 1986; McLeskey et al., 1988; Safran, 1991; Sutton, 2002; Whalther et al., 1999; Wilczynski et al., 2000), as well as from the researcher's professional experiences.

Part one of the survey collected participants' demographic information. Participating school psychologists were asked whether they were employed full- or part-time, how long they had been practicing as school psychologists, their credentials, gender and age, the number of schools they serviced, and whether they serviced schools in rural or urban areas. This information helped define the sample of participants. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they worked in rural or urban areas so they could be categorized into one of two groups, those who worked in primarily rural areas and those who worked in primarily urban areas. Responses of rural and urban school psychologists were compared. Rural was defined according to Du Plessis, Beshiri, Bollman, and Clemenson's (2001) definition, that is, rural areas and small towns with fewer than 10,000 residents that were not within commuting distance of a major urban center.

Part two of the survey examined the consultation practices of school psychologists in their roles as consultants and consultees. First, school psychologists' experiences in their role as consultants were explored. They were asked how frequently others sought them out for information or specialized knowledge about work related issues, by whom they were sought, and for what reasons. In addition, respondents were asked to rate how confident they were in acting as a consultant for a variety of topics such as academic, behavioral, family problems, social-emotional, and ethical issues. They were asked to indicate how important a number of things were to their practice as consultants: providing knowledge and resources for psychological issues, knowledge and resources for educational issues, providing advice about specific cases, providing information about specific cases, providing direction and support around ethical and professional issues to other psychologists, and providing direction and support around ethical and professional issues to other professionals.

School psychologists were also asked to report on their experiences as consultees. Similar to the questions about their role as consultants, participants were asked how often they sought assistance or information from others about work related issues in their role as consultees. They were asked with whom they consulted and for what reasons. Respondents were asked to rate how important each of the following was to their practice as consultees: gathering knowledge and resources for psychological issues, gathering knowledge and resources for educational issues, gathering information about specific cases, receiving advice about specific cases, receiving direction and support around ethical and professional issues from other psychologists, and receiving direction and support around ethical and professional issues from other professionals.

Next, participants were asked to rate the extent to which the following were barriers to effective consultation practices: heavy caseload, servicing too many schools, focus on psycho-educational assessments, travel time, professional isolation, others' lack of awareness of psychological expertise, lack of interest on the part of professionals, lack of interest on the part of parents, and them not viewing consultation as an effective use of their time. Many of these factors have been identified in the literature as challenges for school psychologists who work in rural areas.

Participating school psychologists were then asked to rate how satisfied they were with the amount of time they had for consultation purposes and to indicate whether they would have preferred to spend less time, the same amount of time, or more time consulting with others. They were also asked to elaborate on what they perceived as some of the factors that facilitated effective consultation and collaboration in schools.

Procedure

Upon approval from Mount Saint Vincent University Research Ethics Board, data were collected for this study by distributing a short survey to psychologists who worked in rural and urban communities. Potential participants were mailed a package including:

1. Two copies of an Informed Consent Form (Appendix A). This form outlined the purpose of the study, participation instructions, ethical considerations, and contact information. Participants were instructed to keep one copy of the consent form and to sign the other and seal it in an accompanying envelope;
2. a Request for Research Results Form (Appendix B). If they wished to receive a summary of the research results, participants could fill out and return this form;
3. the survey (Appendix C);

4. an envelope marked consent form; and
5. a stamped envelope that had been addressed to the researcher.

Participants were instructed to sign the consent form and seal it in the enclosed envelope marked consent form. Then they were asked to fill out the survey and return it, along with the consent form, in the addressed and stamped envelope. If they wanted to receive a summary of the research results, they were asked to fill out the Request for Research Results Form and return that as well. When the surveys and sealed consent forms were received, they were separated immediately.

Upon completion of the study, participants who returned the research results form were mailed a final report containing a summary of the findings. In order to ensure participant's privacy and confidentiality, only the primary researcher, Kelly Murray, and the primary supervisor, Dr. Elizabeth Church, had access to data containing personal information. Any material containing identifying information was stored in a locked filing cabinet and shredded after seven years. Anonymity of participants was maintained by omitting all names, addresses or identifying information in the written component of the study.

Data Analysis

Data that were collected from the surveys were analyzed using descriptive statistics in the Statistical Package for Social Sciences. Participant demographic information was analyzed through the use of descriptive statistics, such as frequency counts. Responses to questions in a Likert scale format were examined by calculating the percentages of respondents who endorsed each statement. Statistical analyses to compare

the responses of rural and urban participants were conducted by analysis of variance (ANOVAs), Chi-square analyses, and correlational analyses. Correlational analyses were conducted to examine the relationship between participants' experiences as consultants and consultees. Post-hoc statistical analyses to compare the responses of participants based on years of experience were conducted by analysis of variance (ANOVAs), Chi-square analyses, and correlational analyses. The brief open-ended qualitative responses were transcribed, analyzed, and grouped in order to identify themes and patterns of responding.

CHAPTER III

Results

This chapter presents an overview of the survey results. Survey response rate will be reported followed by participants' demographic information, professional credentials, and employment characteristics. Next, participants' responses to questions based on their experiences as consultants and consultees, their level of consultation satisfaction, and what they perceived as some of the barriers and facilitators to effective consultation will be outlined. Urban and rural participants' responses will be compared. Participants' responses will also be compared based on their years of experience. Finally, the relationship between participants' experiences as consultants and consultees will be described.

Survey Response

A total of sixty-six surveys were mailed to Candidate Register and Registered Psychologists believed to be currently practicing in Nova Scotia schools. The names and addresses of participants were identified through the online Directory of Psychologists published by the Nova Scotia Board of Examiners in Psychology at www.nsbep.org. Forty-one surveys were returned, a 62% response rate. Three of the returned surveys were deemed unusable as two respondents indicated that they were not practicing as school psychologists in Nova Scotia, and one respondent returned the survey past the date of analyses. Thirty-eight, or 58%, of the surveys were included in the data analyses.

Demographic Information

Personal Characteristics

The majority of respondents were female (81.6%) and 18.4% were male. Half of the respondents were 30 years old or younger (50%), 31.6% were between 31 and 40 years old, and 18.4% were over 41 years old.

Professional Credentials and Employment Characteristics

Sixteen respondents (42.1%) indicated they were Registered Psychologists and 22 respondents (57.9%) classified themselves as Candidate Register Psychologists. Almost all of the respondents reported being employed on a full-time basis (94.7 %) with 5.3% working on a part-time basis. In terms of years of experience, nineteen respondents (50%) had been practicing as school psychologists for 5 years or less, 16 respondents (42.1%) had been practicing for between 6 and 15 years, and 3 respondents (7.9%) had been practicing for 16 years or more.

With regard to the number of schools they serviced, most respondents reported working in five or fewer schools (44.7%), or between 6 and 10 schools (44.7%). Three respondents indicated serving between 11 and 15 schools (8.0%), and one respondent reported servicing 26 schools or more (2.6%). About two thirds (63.2%) indicated that they serviced schools located in rural areas or small towns with populations of fewer than 10,000. Approximately twenty-one percent (21.1%) serviced schools in urban areas, 13.2% worked in both rural and urban areas, and 2.6% or one respondent did not indicate the types of communities she serviced.

School Consultation

Respondents answered questions based on their consultation experiences as school psychologists. In the survey, school consultation was defined as, "A method of providing psychological and educational services in which consultants and consultees form cooperative partnerships for the purpose of exchanging knowledge. It is a reciprocal, systematic, and collaborative problem solving process." A consultant was defined as, "a person who has specialized knowledge in a particular area and provides information to the consultee." A consultee was defined as, "a person who seeks assistance or information from a consultant."

School Psychologists' Experiences as Consultants

Providing Specialized Knowledge to Others

Participants indicated how frequently others sought information or specialized knowledge from them about work related issues. About two thirds of respondents (65.8%) indicated that, on average, they acted as a consultant at least once per day. Fewer reported acting as a consultant two to three times per week (28.9%), and two respondents said they consulted two to three times per month (5.3 %).

When asked how frequently they acted as a consultant for a variety of others, respondents reported that they were sought out for information or specialized knowledge most often by teachers, school administrators, and parents. There was considerable variability in how often they acted as a consultant for students. They acted as consultants the least frequently for occupational therapists, criminal justice professionals, psychiatrists, nurses, social workers, and family doctors (See Table 1).

Table 1

How Often School Psychologists Provide Specialized Knowledge to Others

	Almost Everyday	2 – 3 Times a Week	Between Once per Month & Once per Week	Less than Once Per Month
Others	Percentage			
Teachers[a]	52.6	34.2	13.2	0
School Administrators[a]	31.6	44.7	21.1	2.6
Parents[a]	8.0	60.5	28.9	2.6
Students[a]	15.8	31.6	31.6	21.0
Guidance Counselors[a]	2.6	21.1	60.5	15.8
Educational Assistants[a]	5.3	18.4	44.7	31.6
School Psychologists[b]	2.6	15.8	65.8	15.8
Supervisors[b]	2.8	16.7	36.1	44.4
Speech Language Pathologists[a]	0	10.5	42.1	47.4
Other Psychologists[a]	0	0	44.7	55.3
Family Doctors[a]	0	0	28.9	71.1
Social Workers[a]	0	2.6	18.4	78.9
Nurses[a]	0	0	5.3	94.7
Psychiatrists[a]	0	0	2.6	97.4
Criminal Justice Professionals[c]	0	0	2.7	97.3
Occupational Therapists[a]	0	0	0	100.0

[a]n = 38
[b]n = 36
[c]n = 37

How Often School Psychologists are Asked to Provide Information or Knowledge regarding Different Issues

Participants were asked how frequently they are asked for assistance for academic, behavioral, family, social-emotional, and ethical issues. Most often they acted as a consultant for academic and behavioral issues, with over 90% reporting that they provided knowledge for academic and behavioral issues at least two to three times a week. They acted as a consultant less frequently for social-emotional and family problems and the least often for ethical issues (See Table 2).

Table 2

How Often School Psychologists are Asked to Provide Information or Knowledge regarding Different Issues

	Almost Everyday	2 – 3 Times a Week	Between Once per Month & Once per Week	Less than Once Per Month
Issues[a]	Percentage			
Academic	50.0	42.1	7.9	0
Behavioral	42.1	47.4	7.9	2.6
Social – Emotional	13.2	39.5	44.7	2.6
Family Problems	5.3	18.4	55.3	21.0
Ethical	0	2.6	31.6	65.8

[a]n = 38 for each response category

Confidence in Providing Knowledge

Participants rated their level of confidence in providing or sharing knowledge on academic, behavioral, family, social-emotional, and ethical issues. Almost all (94.7%) rated themselves as either very confident or confident in their ability to provide information for academic issues, 84.2% rated themselves as confident or very confident for behavioral issues, and 79% rated themselves as confident or very confident for social-emotional issues. Their confidence in handling ethical issues varied across the sample, with responses ranging from very confident to somewhat confident. They indicated feeling the least confident when dealing with issues related to family problems, with approximately half of all respondents saying they were somewhat confident (See Table 3).

Table 3

School Psychologists' Level of Confidence in Providing Information or Sharing Knowledge regarding Different Issues

	Very Confident	Confident	Somewhat Confident	Not at all Confident
Issues[a]	Percentage			
Academic	63.2	31.5	5.3	0
Behavioral	50.0	34.2	15.8	0
Social – Emotional	15.8	63.2	18.4	2.6
Ethical	31.6	39.5	28.9	0
Family Problems	13.2	26.3	52.6	7.9

[a]n = 38 for each response category

Importance of Consultation Practices as a Consultant

Participants rated how important certain aspects of acting as a consultant were to them in their practice as school psychologists. As displayed in Table 4, all participants rated each of the six listed aspects of acting as a consultant as either somewhat important, important, or very important. None was viewed as not at all important. They ranked highest working collaboratively with others to solve problems, as well as providing knowledge and resources regarding academic, behavioral, and social emotional issues. Providing direction and support around ethical and professional issues to other professionals was also viewed as very important or important. Providing direction and support around ethical and professional issues to other psychologists was seen as relatively less important, with responses ranging from somewhat important to very important (See Table 4).

Table 4

Importance of Consultation Practices in their Role as a Consultant

	Very Important	Important	Somewhat Important	Not at all Important
Consultant Practices	Percentage			
Working collaboratively with others to solve problems[a]	89.2	10.8	0	0
Providing knowledge and resources regarding academic issues[a]	81.1	16.2	2.7	0
Providing knowledge and resources regarding behavioral issues[a]	70.3	27.0	2.7	0
Providing knowledge and resources regarding social – emotional issues[a]	67.6	32.4	0	0
Providing direction and support around ethical and professional issues to other professionals[b]	51.7	38.0	10.3	0
Providing direction and support around ethical and professional issues to other psychologists[a]	29.7	48.7	21.6	0

[a]n = 37
[b]n = 29

School Psychologists' Experiences as Consultees

Seeking Assistance or Information from Others

Participants were asked how frequently they acted as a consultee, or sought assistance or information from others about work related issues. Most often (44.7%) respondents indicated that, on average, they sought assistance or information from others two to three times per week. About fifteen percent (15.8%) reported doing so everyday,

18.4% at least once per month, 15.8% two to three times per month, and two respondents (5.3%) less than once per month.

Respondents reported seeking assistance or information most frequently from teachers, followed by school administrators, other school psychologists, and parents. There was considerable variability in how often they acted as a consultee with students. Most participants indicated that they sought assistance from supervisors, guidance counselors, speech language pathologists, educational assistants, and other psychologists once per week or less and from family doctors, social workers, psychiatrists, nurses, criminal justice professionals, and occupational therapists less than once per month.

Table 5

How Often School Psychologists Seek Information or Assistance from Others

	Almost Everyday	2 – 3 Times a Week	Between Once per Month & Once per Week	Less than Once Per Month
Others[a]	Percentage			
Teachers	28.9	39.5	26.3	5.3
School Administrators	15.8	31.6	39.5	13.1
School Psychologists	5.3	36.8	47.4	10.5
Parents	7.9	36.9	28.9	26.3
Students	26.3	15.9	28.9	28.9
Supervisors	2.6	18.4	57.9	21.1
Guidance Counselors	2.6	18.4	42.1	36.9
Speech Language Pathologists	0	10.5	57.9	31.6
Educational Assistants	0	10.5	47.4	42.1
Other Psychologists	0	2.6	47.4	50.0
Family Doctors	0	0	28.9	71.1
Social Workers	0	2.6	21.1	76.3
Psychiatrists	0	0	15.8	84.2
Nurses	0	0	2.6	97.4
Criminal Justice Professionals	0	0	2.6	97.4
Occupational Therapists	0	0	0	100.0

[a]n = 38 for each response category

How Often School Psychologists Seek Information or Assistance regarding Different Issues

Participants were asked how frequently they sought out information or assistance for family problems as well as academic, behavioral, social-emotional and ethical issues. Most often they sought information regarding academic and behavioral issues; however the response distribution was spread out across response options. Approximately half of all respondents indicated that they sought information from others for social-emotional issues and family problems between once per month and once per week. They sought assistance for ethical issues the least often, with approximately 50% of participants doing so between once per month and once per week and 40% doing so less than once per month (See Table 6).

Table 6

How Often School Psychologists Seek Information or Assistance regarding Different Issues

	Almost Everyday	2 – 3 Times a Week	Between Once per Month & Once per Week	Less than Once Per Month
Issues[a]	Percentage			
Academic	23.7	39.5	26.3	10.5
Behavioral	13.2	36.8	39.5	10.5
Social – Emotional	7.9	21.0	63.2	7.9
Family Problems	7.9	10.5	50.0	31.6
Ethical	0	5.3	52.6	42.1

[a]n = 38 for each response category

Importance of Consultation Practices as a Consultee

Participants were asked to rate how important different aspects of consultation were to them as a consultee. As displayed in Table 7, almost all participants (92.1%)

ranked working collaboratively with others to solve problems as very important. Over half of all respondents noted the following as very important or important in their practice as school psychologists: receiving direction and support around ethical and professional issues, and gathering knowledge and resources regarding behavioral, academic, and social-emotional issues. One aspect that was seen as relatively less important, although still deemed important or very important by about half (52.2%) of respondents, was receiving direction and support around ethical and professional issues from other professionals (See Table 7).

Table 7

Importance of Consultation Practices in their Role as a Consultee

	Very Important	Important	Somewhat Important	Not at all Important
Consultant Practices[a]		Percentage		
Working collaboratively with others to solve problems[a]	92.1	7.9	0	0
Gathering knowledge and resources regarding behavioral issues[a]	68.4	29.0	2.6	0
Gathering knowledge and resources regarding academic issues[a]	60.5	39.5	0	0
Gathering knowledge and resources regarding social – emotional issues[a]	60.5	39.5	0	0
Receiving direction and support around ethical and professional issues from other psychologists[a]	55.3	31.6	10.5	2.6
Receiving direction and support around ethical and professional issues from other professionals[b]	26.1	26.1	43.5	4.3

[a]n = 38
[b]n = 23

Satisfaction with Consultation

Participants were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with their current consultation practices. Most respondents indicated that they were somewhat satisfied (52.6%) or satisfied with the amount of time they had for consultation (31.6%), while 10.5 % reported being not at all satisfied and 5.3% reported very satisfied. The majority of participants (71.1%) would like to have spent more time on consultation, while others felt they spent the right amount of time on consultation (28.9%). Noone indicated that he or she would prefer to spend less time on consultation.

Barriers to Effective Consultation Practices

Participants were asked to rate the extent to which different aspects of their job were barriers to effective consultation practices. Heavy caseloads, servicing too many schools, and focus on psycho-educational assessments were most often seen as barriers to effective consultation practices while travel time, others' lack of awareness of the psychologist's expertise, a lack of interest on the part of other professionals, a lack of interest on the part of parents, and professional isolation were rated by most participants as sometimes being a barrier to effective consultation practices. One of the barriers was 'I do not see consultation as an effective use of my time'. One participant saw this as always a barrier to effective consultation, one participant reported it was sometimes a barrier, while the majority (94.7%) did not see this as a barrier to effective consultation (See Table 8).

Table 8

Barriers to Effective Consultation

	Almost Always a Barrier	Often a Barrier	Sometimes a Barrier	Almost Never a Barrier
Barriers[a]	Percentage			
Heavy caseload	39.5	39.5	18.4	2.6
Focus on psycho-educational assessments	36.8	21.1	36.8	5.3
Servicing too many schools	31.6	28.9	36.9	2.6
Others' lack of awareness of psychological expertise	15.8	31.6	44.7	7.9
Lack of interest on the part of other professionals	2.6	28.9	47.4	21.1
Travel time	2.6	23.7	50.0	23.7
Professional isolation	7.9	18.4	52.6	21.1
Lack of interest on the part of parents	0	26.3	50.0	23.7
I do not see consultation as an effective use of my time	2.6	0	2.6	94.7

[a]n = 38

Factors that Facilitate Effective Consultation Practices

When participants were asked to rate the extent to which different factors facilitate effective consultation practices they cited support and commitment from school administration as the most important facilitator to effective consultation, with 52.7% reporting it as almost always a facilitator and 34.2% as often a facilitator. Also noted as important were time allotted in their daily schedule for consultation, being part of school site-based teams, and established meetings times. Training and professional development

in how to consult effectively was ranked the least high with approximately 45% of participants reporting it as sometimes a facilitator and 15.8% as almost never a facilitator (See Table 9).

Table 9

Facilitators to Effective Consultation

	Almost Always a Facilitator	Often a Facilitator	Sometimes a Facilitator	Almost Never a Facilitator
Facilitators[a]	Percentage			
Support and commitment from school administration[a]	52.7	34.2	10.5	2.6
Time allotted in my daily schedule for consultation[b]	44.7	34.2	15.8	5.3
Being part of school site-based teams[a]	39.5	36.8	23.7	0
Established meeting times for consultation with school staff[a]	39.5	39.5	13.1	7.9
Support from other psychologists[a]	28.9	36.8	34.2	0
Training and professional development in how to consult effectively[a]	15.8	23.7	44.7	15.8

[a]n = 38
[b]n = 37

Participants were asked to elaborate on the factors that they believed facilitate effective consultation/collaboration in schools. Twenty-nine participants did so. Seventeen provided written responses that were between half a page and a full page in length, while 12 wrote less than half a page. Their responses were analyzed by grouping together similar content and identifying the themes that occurred most frequently. Eight themes were identified: promoting the role of the school psychologist, administrative

support, shifting from a psycho-educational assessment focus to a comprehensive service delivery model, flexibility in scheduling, regular presence in schools and continuity, participation in school program planning and site-based team meetings, communication among all parties involved, and parental involvement.

Promoting the Role of the School Psychologist

Twelve respondents stated that educating others about the role of the school psychologist helps facilitate effective consultation in schools. One participant indicated that it is the responsibility of school psychologists to promote a general understanding of the scope of the services they are competent to provide. One school psychologist described her experience:

> As a school psychologist you need to be vigilant in explaining your role to others. I have found that by "selling yourself" and the skills you have really helps non-psychologists use your full range of services (e.g. assessment, consultation, behavior and counseling).

Two respondents reported that school psychologists need to work together on a regular basis to explain their role not only to school administrators and school staff, but to student services supervisors as well. One participant stated, "Most of us are governed by educators who may not be fully aware of our skills."

Administrative Support

Ten participants asserted that support from student services supervisors and/or administrators is necessary to facilitate consultation. As one participant noted, "A supervisor's willingness to allow for collaborative exchange and consultation" is a major factor that facilitates effective consultation and collaboration in schools. Several

respondents reported that administrators must support consultation, view it as a valuable service, and make it a priority in order for consultation to be effective.

Another respondent indicated the necessity for student services supervisors and principals to be in agreement about what services they would like school psychologists to provide. She described her experience, "Very often, I find my boss (student services supervisor) wants assessments and my principals want more consultation!"

One participant elaborated on what he felt facilitates consultation, the merits of consultation, and his perception of administrative involvement. He indicated that a facilitator to effective consultation is having:

> Supervisors and administrators who allow for flexibility in your schedule for consultation (e.g. not just a psycho-educational focus). Effective consultation will reduce your number of referrals and lower your caseload; however, you need support from supervisors and principals to make it a priority.

Shifting from Psycho-Educational Assessment Focus to Comprehensive Service Delivery Model

Seven respondents believed that there needs to be a shift from a primary focus on psycho-educational assessment to a more comprehensive service delivery model that includes consultation. One participant stated:

> A school's openness to a broad service delivery model helps considerably. Those who feel service time is at a premium and value assessment services tend to be rather reluctant in having specialists consult. It's not seen as a direct service, although most psychologists would likely view their ability to consult regularly as integral to their practice.

Flexibility in Scheduling

Seven respondents said that having flexibility in their daily and weekly schedules helps facilitate consultation and collaboration in schools. One school psychologist indicated that it would be ideal if time were incorporated into her schedule to meet with other psychologists and student services members. Another respondent indicated the need for "A flexible schedule where you have the freedom to set your own meeting, and not be tied to a rotary system where you have to see a school on a certain day."

Regular Presence in Schools and Continuity

Ten school psychologists reported that having a regular and consistent presence in schools promotes consultation and collaboration. Two indicated that having fewer schools on their rotation would allow them to be in schools on a regular basis while two others indicated that visibility within the school environment can be enhanced by school psychologists spending their free time with school staff in places such as the office and the staff room at lunch. One respondent stated: "Administration, staff (teachers/guidance) and parents are more inclined to seek consultation and support when they see you regularly and consider you part of the larger school team." As mentioned by two respondents, another factor that that allows the school psychologist to become a regular presence in the school environment is maintaining the same set of schools from one year to the next. One school psychologist suggested that, "The more years servicing a school leads to more familiarity, which leads to trust," while another noted, "School staff need to trust your commitment so they feel they can count on you."

Participation in School Program Planning and Site-Based Team Meetings

Participating in Program Planning and Site-Based Team meetings on a regular basis was reported by ten respondents to facilitate effective consultation. One participant asserted that school administration has to be committed to including the psychologist in school meetings for effective consultation and collaboration to take place. Being a regular presence in schools was also reported as connected to inclusion in school based team meetings. Several respondents indicated that a consistent schedule is necessary so the school can predict when the school psychologist will be present. With this type of predictability the school can plan their meeting times according to the school psychologist's schedule. Although it is ideal to be involved in school teams, school psychologists' schedules may make this challenging:

> Certainly, one's participation as a member of a Program Planning (school-based) Team facilitates consultation/ collaboration. However, doing so can be extremely challenging when school circuits are large. For instance, it is much easier to attend program planning team meetings when you visit a school weekly as opposed to bi-weekly or less frequently in some cases.

Communication Among All Parties Involved

Five respondents cited clear communication among all people involved with a specific case as a facilitator of effective consultation and collaboration. One participant explained that those who are involved must value a team approach to problem-solving and the recommendations should be derived from all parties involved. Another respondent noted that school psychologists should ensure that, when acting as

consultants, they provide useful and accurate information so that the school staff will regard consultation as useful.

One respondent indicated that for consultation to be effective school psychologists must be aware of their own limitations within their competencies and willing to seek answers from other professionals when necessary. She noted that it is important for school psychologists to take the step to consult or collaborate with external resources when they cannot provide the necessary services to students. Another participant noted, however, that accessing external mental health and social services is not always possible as these organization are not consistently accessible, or interested and willing to consult and collaborate.

Parental Involvement

Four respondents also noted the importance of parental involvement in consultation. One participant suggested that school psychologists can help to empower and support parents and guardians in the consultation and collaborative process, while another participant noted that helping the parent be comfortable and free from anxiety can aid consultation. One respondent indicated that school psychologists should:

> Have a clear understanding of teachers' and parents' opinions prior to entering consultation meetings, approach these situations in a diplomatic manner, consider all opinions, and have an awareness of possible opposing views and take the time to consider and offer ways by which these can be reconciled.

Another respondent noted the value in helping parents and schools communicate: "Many schools have indicated the value of school psychologists who seem to bring a calm, outside opinion to potentially tense meetings."

Urban versus Rural Comparisons

The communities serviced by participants were divided into three categories: exclusively rural (n = 24), exclusively urban (n = 8), and combined rural and urban (n = 5). One participant did not indicate the type of communities she services, and was excluded from comparison analyses. Analysis of variance (ANOVAs) and Chi-square analyses were conducted to compare the responses of rural, urban, and combined groups on each of the survey questions. No significant differences were found with respect to demographic information, professional credentials, or employment characteristics among the three groups.

A 3 x 4 Chi-square analysis was conducted to compare how often rural, urban, and combined school psychologists acted as consultants, or provided information or specialized knowledge to others (Question 1). No significant differences were found among the rural, urban and combined groups.

A 3 x 4 Chi-square analysis was conducted to compare how often rural, urban, and combined school psychologists provided specialized knowledge to others such as parents, students, school administrators, supervisors, teachers, educational assistants, school psychologists, speech-language pathologists, other psychologists, psychiatrists, family physicians, nurses, occupational therapists, social workers, criminal justice professionals, and guidance counselors (Question 2). Only two of the sixteen variables were found to be statistically significant. The urban group was more likely than the rural and combined groups to act as a consultant or provide specialize knowledge to family doctors ($\chi^2(2) = 8.240$, $p = 0.016$). The urban and combined groups were more likely

than the rural group to act as a consultant or provide specialize knowledge to social workers ($\chi^2(4) = 11.401$, $p = 0.022$).

A 3 x 4 Chi-square analysis was conducted to compare how frequently rural, urban, and combined school psychologists acted as consultants for academic, behavioral, social-emotional, and ethical issues as well as family problems (Question 3). The only significant difference among groups was that the rural group was more likely than the urban and combined groups to be sought out for information or assistance from others about social-emotional issues ($\chi^2(6) = 12.989$, $p = 0.043$).

One-way ANOVAs were conducted to compare rural, urban, and combined participants' level of confidence in providing information or sharing knowledge for academic, behavioral, social-emotional, and ethical issues as well as family problems (Question 4), and to compare rural, urban, and combined participants' responses when rating how important various practices were to them in their role as consultants (Question 5). No significant differences were identified. Three by four Chi-square analyses were conducted to compare how often rural, urban, and combined school psychologists sought assistance or information from others about work related issues (Question 6), how often they provided specialized knowledge to others (Question 7), and how frequently they acted as consultees for different kinds of issues (Question 8). No significant differences were identified among the rural, urban and combined groups. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare rural, urban, and combined participants' responses when rating how important various practices were to them in their role as consultees (Question 9). The only significant difference that existed among groups was that the rural group reported that it was more important to gather knowledge and resources regarding social-

emotional issues than the urban group ($p = 0.004$), and the combined group ($p = 0.008$) ($F(2, 34) = 7.227$, $p = 0.002$).

Barriers and Facilitators

A one-way ANOVA and contrasts were conducted to compare rural, urban, and combined participants' ratings of barriers and facilitators to effective consultation (Questions 10 and 13). No significant differences were found. One difference that approached significance was that the rural group was more likely than the urban group ($p = 0.028$) to view servicing too many schools as a barrier to effective consultation practices ($F(2, 34) = 4.348$, $p = 0.062$).

Level of Satisfaction

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare rural, urban, and combined participants' ratings of satisfaction with time for consultation and whether they would have preferred to spend more, less, or the same amount of time for consultation (Questions 11 and 12). No significant differences were found.

Years of Experience Comparisons

Respondents' years of experience were divided into three categories: five years or less (n = 19), between six and fifteen years (n = 16), and more than 16 years (n = 3). Analysis of variance (ANOVAs) and Chi-square analyses were conducted to compare the responses of the three groups on each survey question. No significant differences were found with respect to demographic information, professional credentials or employment characteristics among the three groups.

When a one-way ANOVA and contrasts were conducted to compare the three groups' ratings of barriers and facilitators to effective consultation, the only significant

difference that was found was that respondents with five years of experience or less indicated support from other psychologists was more often a facilitator for effective consultation than those with between six and fifteen years of experience ($p = 0.030$) and those with more than 16 years of experience ($p = 0.054$) (F (2,35) = 3.631, $p = 0.037$). Respondents with five years of experience or less were also significantly more likely to seek assistance or information from other school psychologists than those with between six and fifteen years of experience or those with 16 years of more ($\chi^2(4) = 11.029$, $p = 0.026$).

No significant differences were found when a one-way ANOVA and contrasts were conducted to compare the three groups' level of confidence in providing information or sharing knowledge for academic, behavioral, family, social-emotional, and ethical issues; however, one difference that approached significance was that respondents with more than 16 years of experience were more confident in providing information or sharing knowledge regarding family problems than those with five years of experience or less ($p = 0.052$) ($F(2, 35) = 2.921$, $p = 0.067$).

No significant differences were found when 3 x 4 Chi-square analyses were conducted to compare how often the three groups sought assistance or information from others about work related issues; however, one difference that approached significance was respondents with five years of experience or less were more likely to seek assistance or information from others regarding ethical issues than the other two groups ($\chi^2(4) = 9.155$, $p = 0.057$).

The Relationship Between School Psychologists' Experiences as Consultants and Consultees

In order to determine whether there were significant relationships between school psychologists' experiences as consultants and consultees, several bivariate correlational analyses were conducted.

Relationship between How Often School Psychologists Act as Consultants and Consultees for Others

A bivariate correlational analysis was conducted to determine whether there was a significant relationship between how frequently participants acted as consultants and consultees with others. As displayed in Table 10, there were significant correlations except for three groups: parents, school psychologists, and psychologists.

Table 10

Relationship between How Often School Psychologists Act as Consultants and Consultees for Others

Other	*P*
Teachers	.002**
School Administrators	.003**
Parents	.868
Students	.039*
Guidance Counselors	.000**
Educational Assistants	.023*
School Psychologists	.563
Supervisors	.032*
Speech Language Pathologists	.000**
Other Psychologists	.545
Family Doctors	.026*
Social Workers	.000**
Nurses	.000**
Psychiatrists	.019*
Criminal Justice Professionals	.000**
Occupational Therapists	-

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

Relationship between how Often School Psychologists Act as Consultants and Consultees regarding Different Issues

A bivariate correlational analysis was conducted to determine whether there was a significant relationship between how frequently others sought out school psychologist's assistance for academic, behavioral, social-emotional, and ethical issues as well as family problems and how often they sought out others for the same issues. As displayed in Table 11, except for behavioral issues there was a significant correlation between how frequently school psychologists acted as consultants and consultees for academic issues, family problems, social-emotional issues, and ethical issues.

Table 11

Relationship between How Often School Psychologists Act as Consultants and Consultees regarding Different Issues

Issue	*P*
Academic	.001**
Behavioral	.278
Family Problems	.047*
Social-Emotional	.000**
Ethical	.006**

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

Relationship between Acting as a Consultant and Confidence Level

A bivariate correlational analysis was conducted to determine whether there was a relationship between how frequently respondents reported that others sought out their assistance for a variety of issues and how confident they felt in providing information or sharing knowledge on these issues. As displayed in Table 12, there was a significant correlation between their level of confidence and frequency of consultation for behavioral, family, and social-emotional issues, but not for academic or ethical issues.

Table 12

Relationship between How Often School Psychologists Act as Consultants and Their Level of Confidence

Issue	*P*
Academic	.757
Behavioral	.000**
Family Problems	.000**
Social-Emotional	.008**
Ethical	.537

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

Relationship between Level of Importance Ratings for Consultant and Consultee Practices

A bivariate correlational analysis was conducted to determine whether there was a relationship between how important different aspects of consultation were to respondents in their roles as consultants and consultees. As displayed in Table 13, except for consultation regarding ethical and professional issues with other professionals, there was a significant positive correlation between how important different aspects of consultation were to them in their roles as consultants and consultees. For both consultants and consultees, significant positive correlations were found for the following: working collaboratively with others to solve problems; consultation regarding academic, behavioral, and social emotional issues; and consultation regarding ethical and professional issues with other psychologists.

Table 13

Relationship between Importance Ratings for Consultant and Consultee Practices

Practice	*P*
Working collaboratively with other to solve problems	.000**
Providing versus gathering knowledge and resources regarding behavioral issues	.000**
Providing versus gathering knowledge and resources regarding academic issues	.033*
Providing versus gathering knowledge and resources regarding social-emotional issues	.000**
Providing versus receiving direction and support regarding ethical and professional issues to/from other psychologists	.001**
Providing versus receiving direction and support regarding ethical and professional issues to/from other professionals	.391

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

CHAPTER IV

Discussion

The aim of this study was to identify the consultation practices of Nova Scotia school psychologists, explore what they perceived as some of the barriers and facilitators to effective consultation practices in schools, and compare urban and rural participants' responses. The following section will highlight the main findings of this study and consider the results in relation to existing literature. Limitations of the study, implications for school psychologists, the profession of school psychology, and school boards, as well as suggestions for future research will be considered.

Participant Characteristics

Most of the participants were relatively new to the profession. Half were 30 years old or younger and had been practicing for five years or less and 92% of participants had 15 years of experience or less. More than half of all respondents indicated they were Candidate Registered Psychologists (57.9%), which means they were receiving monthly supervision as part of a four-year accreditation process to become a Registered Psychologist in Nova Scotia. The results of this study may be more representative of the perspective of younger psychologists who have limited experience in the field of school psychology.

In terms of geographical location, more than half of all respondents (63.2%) worked exclusively in rural areas, 21.1% worked in urban areas, 13.2% worked in both rural and urban areas, and one participant did not indicate where she worked. Approximately three times more respondents worked in rural areas as compared to urban areas, and almost five times as many participants worked in rural areas as compared to

those who worked in both rural and urban areas. The total number of Nova Scotia school psychologists who worked in urban, rural, or both rural and urban areas at the time of this study is unknown. It is suspected that the percentage of urban school psychologists who participated in this study (21.1%) is not representative of the proportion of school psychologists who practice in urban areas in Nova Scotia. Given that 66% of Nova Scotia residents live in urban areas (Statistics Canada, 2001), it is likely that there are at least as many or more school psychologists practicing in these areas as compared to rural areas.

Frequency of Consultation Practices

Most participants reported that they engaged in consultation practices as consultants and consultees on a regular basis. About 95% indicated they provided specialized knowledge to others at least two to three times a week, while 60.5% sought assistance or information at least two to three times per week. Respondents were more likely to act as consultants on a daily basis (65.8%) than as consultees (15.8%). Similar to the findings of Curtis et al. (1999), the results of this study suggest that consultation is an important part of the role of many Nova Scotia school psychologists.

Satisfaction with Consultation

About 37% of respondents indicated they were satisfied or very satisfied with the amount of time they have for consultation purposes, 52.6% reported being somewhat satisfied, and 10.5% not at all satisfied. Although the majority of participants were at least somewhat satisfied with their current level of consultation, more than 70% indicated they would like to spend more time on consultation. Costenbader and Swartz (1992) also found that school psychologists would prefer to spend more time on consultation.

Relationship between School Psychologists' Experiences as Consultants and Consultees

Except for parents, school psychologists and other psychologists, there was a significant positive correlation between how often participants acted as consultants and consultees for others. School psychologists who provided knowledge to others were more likely to seek information from the same others. Participants consulted most frequently with teachers and school administrators. This suggests that an interdependent relationship existed with many others and a reciprocal exchange of information was occurring, especially between school psychologists and teachers, and school psychologists and school administrators. These findings indicate that many Nova Scotia school psychologists not only provide knowledge and information to others, but seek assistance and information from others and engage in a collaborative problem solving process on a regular basis. These practices are consistent with Zins and Erchul's (2003) ecobehavioral approach to school consultation which describes school consultation as a cooperative partnership between consultants and consultees where recommendations are generated by multiple others who share responsibility for the well-being of the students. Zins and Erchul (2003) believe that a collaborative approach, rather than school psychologists simply providing knowledge as experts, is the most effective method of problem solving in schools.

With whom do School Psychologists Consult?

In accordance with earlier research on consultation (Henning-Stout & Bonner, 1996; Caplan & Caplan, 1993), the results of this study indicate that the school psychologists consulted with various others on a regular basis. Similar to Costenbader and Swartz's (1992) study, participants provided information most frequently to teachers,

school administrators, and parents. Respondents reported that they sought information or assistance most often from teachers, school administrators, and school psychologists. More than half of all respondents also indicated that they consulted with students, guidance counselors, educational assistants, other school psychologists, and speech language pathologists on at least a monthly basis.

School psychologists may have consulted more often with teachers, administrators, and guidance counselors because they are all members of school-based committees such as site-based and program planning teams. Site-based team meetings occur on a regular basis and are opportunities for school psychologists and school personnel to collaborate, discuss cases, prioritize needs, and problem-solve. School psychologists also participate in program planning teams which are also opportunities for administrators, parents, teachers, and special services personnel to collaborate and discuss an individual student's program needs (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2002). Participation in site-based team meetings and program planning team meetings provides school psychologists with face-to-face time with teachers, administrators, parents, and guidance counselors. This type of interaction on a regular basis could promote effective consultation and collaboration in schools. There was considerable variability in how frequently respondents consulted with students. It is unclear why these inconsistencies were found.

Participants were more likely to seek assistance from, rather than provide information to, other school psychologists on a weekly basis. About 42% of respondents indicated that they seek assistance from other school psychologists at least two to three time per week, whereas 18.4% provided knowledge or information to other school

psychologists at least two to three times per week. This may have been because the sample of participants was younger, less experienced, and many were Candidate Register Psychologists. Psychologists who are not yet registered would be expected to seek assistance from more experienced psychologists on a regular basis. Consistent with this assumption, this study found that respondents with five years of experience or less were significantly more likely than those with more than six years of experience to seek assistance or information from other school psychologists. More psychologists may have reported acting as a consultant on a weekly basis had there been more experienced respondents.

Participants reported consulting the least often with external professionals such as occupational therapists, criminal justice professionals, psychiatrists, nurses, social workers, and family doctors. Participating school psychologists may not have established links to outside professionals. Although it is suggested that collaborative partnerships be interdisciplinary and inter-agency to promote a shared sense of responsibility for the mental health and educational needs of children (Campbell et al., 2002; Siegel & Cole, 2003; Power, 2003), external professionals may not be as easily accessible as those who work in the school system. The results of this study suggest that most consultation and collaboration was occurring at the school level. Literature has indicated that school psychologists spend the majority of their time providing direct service to students in assessment activities (Curtis et al., 1999), participating in site-based and program planning team meetings (Nova Scotia Department of Education, 2002), and consulting with parents, administrators, and teachers (Costenbader & Swartz, 1992). It may be difficult for school psychologists and other school personnel to include and accommodate

outside agencies due to time and scheduling constraints. It also may have been that participants consulted least often with external professionals because of other professionals' lack of interest. About 29% of participants reported that lack of interest on the part of other professionals was often a barrier to consultation, and 47.4% perceived it as sometimes a barrier.

What is the Purpose of Consultation?

Respondents indicated they acted as a consultant, or provided knowledge and shared information most often for academic and behavioral issues. Studies have found that majority of school psychologists' time is spent on assessment activities (Bramlett et al., 2002; Curtis et al., 1999). If they are spending most of their time engaging in academic and behavioral assessment, it makes sense that they would be sought out by others to provide information most often for these issues. Participants indicated that they acted as a consultant the least frequently for ethical issues. This may have been because participants were less experienced and would have been less likely to be in a supervisory role for other psychologists.

Respondents reported they acted as a consultee, or sought information and assistance, most often for academic and behavioral issues and the least often for ethical issues and family problems. A result that approached significance was that respondents with five years of experience or less were more likely to seek information or assistance regarding ethical issues than respondents with more than six years of experience. These results are not surprising as school psychologists who are less experienced or not yet registered are expected to seek out assistance, especially for ethical issues. A significant correlation was found between how often respondents' provide information or assistance

and how often they seek information or assistance for academic, family, social-emotional, and ethical issues. Such findings suggest that the more often school psychologists provided information for these issues the more likely they were to receive information about these same issues and vice versa. This suggests that participants were not simply acting as experts, but were exchanging knowledge with others in a give-and-take fashion. This is similar to the findings that school psychologists prefer to collaborate with others rather than simply providing information as an expert (Henning-Stout & Bonner,1996).

Confidence in Providing Knowledge on Professional Issues

In the current study most participants reported that they felt confident or very confident in their ability to provide information or knowledge for academic, behavioral, and social-emotional issues. Sixty-three percent of participants in the present study reported feeling very confident acting as a consultant for academic concerns and 50% felt very confident acting as a consultant for behavioral concerns. In a previous study by Bramlett et al. (2002), 68% of school psychologists reported feeling very confident in their ability to act as a consultant for academic concerns and 76% felt very confident in their ability to act as a consultant for behavioral concerns. As compared to participants in Bramlett et al.'s (2002) investigation, participants in the current study were as confident in their ability to provide assistance for academic issues but somewhat less confident for behavioral issues.

Participants' confidence were in handling ethical issues ranged from very confident to somewhat confident. They were the least confident in their ability to deal with family problems. One finding that approached significance was that respondents with more than 16 years of experience were more confident in their ability to provide

information on family problems than those with five years of experience or less and it may be that confidence dealing with families develops with experience. It is difficult to determine the validity of this finding because only three respondents had been practicing for 16 years or longer.

A significant correlation was found between respondents' level of confidence and how often they acted as a consultant for behavioral, family, and social-emotional issues. This suggests that the more confident participants felt providing information or specialized knowledge to others about these issues, the more often they did so, and vice versa. A significant correlation was not found between respondents' level of confidence with academic or ethical issues and how often they acted as a consultant for these issues. Participants reported that they acted as a consultant most frequently for academic issues as compared to other issues. This suggests that providing information is central in the role of the school psychologist. Participants may have been expected to provide assistance and information for academic issues regardless of how confident they felt doing so. Although 71.1% of participants reported that they felt very confident or confident in their ability to provide information on ethical issues, more than half (65.8%) reported doing so between once per month and once per week. This finding may be a result of the level of experience of most participants. Most participants were Candidate Register psychologists who received regular supervision but would be less likely to provide supervision, and therefore would be called on less frequently for assistance with ethical issues.

Importance of Consultation Practices in their Role as Consultants and Consultees

Over three quarters of all respondents rated the following aspects of consultation as important or very important: working collaboratively to solve problems; providing and gathering knowledge and resources regarding behavioral, academic, and social-emotional issues; providing and receiving direction and support around ethical and professional issues to and from other psychologists; as well as providing direction and support around ethical and professional issues to other professionals. Except in the area of ethical and professional support with other professionals, there was a significant positive correlation between how important these different aspects consultation were to participants in their roles as both consultants and consultees. This suggests the more important they viewed working collaboratively with others as consultants, the more likely they were to view working collaboratively as consultees as important.

About 90% of participants reported that providing direction and support around ethical issues to other professionals was important or very important, although receiving direction and support around ethical and professional issues from other professionals was seen as relatively less important with 52.2% of respondents ranking it as important or very important. It could be suggested that participants felt it was less important to receive direction and support around ethical and professional issues from other professionals because they are governed by the Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists (Sinclair & Pettifor, 2001), and would be more likely to seek ethical and professional advice from within the discipline rather than from external professionals.

Barriers to Effective Consultation Practices

Similarly to the findings of Costenbader and Swartz (1992) and Wilczynski et al. (2000), participants reported that heavy caseloads and focusing on psycho-educational assessments were the most significant barriers to consultation in their practice as school psychologists. In addition, more than half of all respondents indicated that servicing too many schools was often or almost always a barrier to consultation. Some respondents noted that visiting their schools infrequently and not maintaining the same set of school from one year to the next has prevented them from becoming a regular presence and accessible in schools; and when they are viewed as unavailable, they are less likely to be consulted with or included in school-based team meetings. Consistent with these findings, Gonzalez et al. (2004) found that the only factor that significantly affected the number of teacher consultations with the school psychologist was the school psychologists' availability. Teachers were more likely to consult with school psychologists who spent more time in the school. More than half of all respondents in this study indicated that travel time, professional isolation, others' lack of awareness of the psychologists' expertise, lack of interest on the part of other professionals, and lack of interest on the part of parents were sometimes barriers to consultation.

Factors that Facilitate Effective Consultation Practices

Consistent with the findings of Wilczynski et al. (2000), participants reported that support and commitment from school administration was the most important facilitator to effective consultation. Approximately 87% of participants indicated that administrative support almost always or often facilitates effective consultation, and several noted that in order for consultation to be effective, administrators and student services supervisors

must view it as a valuable service and make it a priority. Most participants also ranked time allocated in their daily schedule for consultation as a facilitator to effective consultation. They stressed the importance of having student services supervisors who permit school psychologists to have flexibility in their schedules so they can allocate time for consultation. Previous consultation literature has also suggested that having time built into school psychologists' schedules is a significant bridge to consultation in schools (Walther et al., 1999; Wilczynski et al., 2000). Educating others on the role of the school psychologist was also cited as a significant facilitator to effective consultation. Participants stressed the importance of helping school administrators, non-psychologist student services supervisors, and school staff understand the scope of services school psychologists are competent to provide. Several respondents indicated there needs to be a shift from a focus on primarily psycho-educational assessments to a more comprehensive service delivery model that includes consultation.

More than three quarters of all participants reported that being part of school site-based teams and having established meeting times for consultation with school staff as almost always or often facilitators to effective consultation. These findings are consistent with previous literature that has suggested that inclusion in school-based teams and having common planning time with team members are key to effective consultation and collaboration within schools (Walther et al., 1999; Wilczynski et al., 2000). Several participants added that school psychologists must be a regular presence in schools in order to be included in school-based teams and sought out for consultation purposes by school staff, students, and parents. These assertions are supported by a study by Gonzalez

et al. (2004) which found that teachers were significantly more likely to consult with school psychologists who were visible and available in their schools on a regular basis.

Several participants indicated that clear communication among all people involved with a student is necessary for effective consultation in schools. Those who participate must value a team approach to problem-solving and decisions should be made through a collaborative effort. Previous literature has also identified communication as a key component for effective collaboration and has suggested that team members must understand what is being collaborated on and how to collaborate properly (D'Amour, 2005; Safran, 1991). Parental involvement was also indicated as a facilitator to effective consultation in schools. Participants noted that school psychologists can facilitate home and school collaboration by supporting parents and remaining calm and objective throughout the consultation process. Cummings et al. (2004) also suggested that enhanced partnerships between families and schools help facilitate collaboration.

Rural, Urban, and Combined Group Comparisons

No significant differences were found with respect to demographic information, professional credentials, or employment characteristics when rural, urban, and combined rural and urban groups were compared. Previous research and literature has suggested that rural psychologists were more likely to be younger and less experienced than their urban counterparts (Helge, 1985; Curtis et al., 2002); however, this was not supported in the current study. No differences were found among the rural, urban, and combined groups with regard to how often they engage in consultation activities as consultants or consultees. Previous research has found that frequency of consultation services provided by the school psychologist varied by school location. Curtis et al. (2002) reported that

school psychologists who worked in urban areas provided significantly more consultation services than those who worked in rural settings. This finding was not supported in the current study. Participants who worked in urban areas were significantly more likely to provide specialized knowledge to family doctors, and respondents who worked in urban as well as combined urban and rural areas were significantly more likely to provide specialized knowledge to social workers. These school psychologists may have been more likely to act as a consultant for doctors and social workers because external professionals are more easily accessible in urban settings, whereas rural school psychologists are often isolated from other professionals (Helge, 1985; Hughes & Clark, 1981; McLeskey et al., 1988).

Rural respondents were significantly more likely than urban and combined urban and rural respondents to be sought out for assistance with social-emotional issues. This may have been because rural school psychologists are one of the few professionals who can provide mental health services in smaller communities so that they may be called upon to offer more extensive services (Cummings et al., 1985; McLeskey et al., 1986; Sutton, 2002). School psychologists in urban areas may be able to refer students with social-emotional issues to school-based guidance counselors or nearby mental health agencies, whereas rural school psychologists may not have immediate access to such resources. Rural participants also reported gathering knowledge and resources regarding social-emotional issues as significantly more important than urban or combined rural and urban respondents. This makes sense as it was also found, as previously mentioned, that rural participants were significantly more likely to be sought out for assistance with social-emotional issues. Rural school psychologists were more likely to act as a

consultant for social-emotional issues and would need to seek knowledge and resources from others so they could provide the best possible services.

There were no significant differences among rural, urban, or combined rural and urban groups with respect to any of the barriers or facilitators to effective consultation practices. One difference that approached significance was that the rural group was more likely than the urban group to view servicing too many schools as a barrier to effective consultation practices. Previous literature has suggested that rural school psychologists face challenges that are unique to working in isolated areas, such as extensive travel (Helge, 1985; Hughes, 1986; McLeskey et al., 1988; Barbopoulos & Clark, 2003) and professional isolation (Helge, 1985; Hughes & Clark, 1981; McLeskey et al., 1988) but this finding was not supported in the current study. These results suggest that Nova Scotia school psychologists who work in rural, urban, and both rural and urban areas encounter similar barriers to effective consultation. Given that approximately 76% of respondents worked in at least one rural area, the barriers to effective consultation may have been more representative of those who work in rural rather than urban areas.

Limitations

Although surveys were sent to all school psychologists believed to be practicing in Nova Scotia, it may be that some potential participants were excluded because their names were not listed in the Nova Scotia Directory of Psychologists. Fifty-eight percent of the sent surveys were included in the data analysis; however, 38% of the school psychologists who were sent a survey did not return the survey. School psychologists who were interested in consultation may have been more likely to complete the survey than those who were not as interested in consultation. Most of the respondents were

relatively new to the profession and thus this study represents their perspective. The results may have differed if more school psychologists with greater than 16 years of experience had participated. Statistical comparisons based on years of experience should also be interpreted with caution due to variability in sample sizes among the three years of experience groups.

Statistical comparisons based on geographic location should also be interpreted with caution due to variability in sample sizes among the three groups. The lack of significant differences between rural, urban, and combined groups may be in part because of small urban and combined group sample sizes, and uneven sample sizes. These factors may limit whether the results can be generalized to the overall population of Nova Scotia school psychologists. The results of this study may be more representative of less experienced school psychologists who practice in rural Nova Scotia rather than those are more experienced and practice in urban or both rural and urban areas. In addition, surveys were only sent to school psychologists who were practicing in Nova Scotia and the perspective of school psychologists in other locations may differ.

The structure of the survey also had some limitations. Participants were offered four response choices when asked to rate how frequently they engaged in various consultation activities (Questions 2, 3, 7 and 8): less than once per month, between once per month and once per week, two to three times per week, or almost everyday. There is a considerable difference in frequency between once per month and once per week and analyses and comparisons would have been easier had this category been more specifically defined. Participants were asked how important it was to consult with other professionals about ethical and professional issues and with which professionals they

consulted (Questions 5 and 9). The layout of this part of the questions may have been unclear as several respondents did not complete these sections. When participants were asked how often they consulted with teachers (Questions 2 and 7), several wrote the word resource in brackets beside the word teacher. It may have been informative to distinguish between how often school psychologists consulted with resource teachers and classroom teachers.

Participants were asked to elaborate on the factors that they felt facilitated effective consultation and collaboration (Question 14). Twenty-nine school psychologists provided responses, yet the length of these responses varied and nine participants left this section blank. More information may have been generated had participants been interviewed in person. Although participants' confidentiality was guaranteed, some may have censored their responses out of concern for being identified.

Implications

Despite the limitations discussed above, these findings have implications for school psychologists, the profession of school psychology, school boards, and training programs. Some of the significant results of this study provide valuable information about the practices and perceptions of a group of Nova Scotia school psychologists.

Implications for School Psychologists

The results of this study suggest that many Nova Scotia school psychologists are consulting on a regular basis and, although most are somewhat satisfied or satisfied with their level of consultation, many would like to spend more time consulting. This study offers school psychologists information about how to promote consultation by implementing practices such as becoming a member of their schools' site-based teams,

educating others on their role and the benefits of consultation, engaging in frequent and clear communication with those who are involved with students, and supporting parents and encouraging their involvement in the consultation process. School psychologists indicated that working collaboratively with other professionals was important or very important, yet they consulted with external professionals relatively infrequently. It may be beneficial for school psychologists to make a concerted effort to engage in consultation with external professionals more regularly.

This study also suggests that many Nova Scotia school psychologists encounter similar barriers to consultation. They have little control over some of these barriers (e.g. heavy caseload, servicing too many schools, travel time). They may be able to alleviate some barriers, however, by taking an active role in educating others on the role of the school psychologist. Since many would like to shift to a more comprehensive service delivery model, they could promote the wide variety of services that they are competent to provide.

Implications for the Profession of School Psychology

The sample of participants in this study were relatively inexperienced and most indicated that they sought advice and information from other psychologists on a regular basis and perceived receiving direction and support from them as important, yet many respondents reported that professional isolation was a barrier to consultation. It may be helpful for professional organizations to offer beginning school psychologists regular opportunities to consult with other psychologists. Participants also indicated that others' lack of awareness of school psychologists' expertise and a lack of interest on the part of other professionals were barriers to consultation. Given these challenges, it may be

beneficial for professional organizations help promote the range of services that school psychologists are competent to provide and educate others on the merits and importance of consultation.

Implications for School Boards

School psychologists indicated that support and commitment from student services supervisors and school administration as the most important facilitator to effective consultation. Student services supervisors could help school psychologists educate school administrators and staff on the merits of consultation and emphasize that is as necessary as psycho-educational assessments. Student services supervisors could also support school psychologists by allocating specific time for consultation and encouraging established meeting times for school staff and other school psychologists. Nova Scotia school boards could help facilitate consultation by recognizing the value in consultation and being aware of the existing barriers and facilitators to effective consultation in schools. It may be useful for Student Services personnel to regularly monitor and attempt to improve several aspects of the job that act as barriers to consultation such as heavy caseloads, an over-focus on psycho-educational assessments, servicing too many schools, travel time, and professional isolation.

Implications for Training Programs

Participants perceived working collaboratively with others as either important or very important. Graduate students may benefit from being educated on the importance of consultation, how to consult effectively, and how to facilitate consultation. It may be useful for training programs to educate students on the potential barriers to consultation and provide them with coping strategies to help them overcome these barriers in their

practice. The results of this study indicated that rural school psychologists were more likely to be sought out for assistance with social-emotional issues, and gathering knowledge and resources regarding social-emotional issues was significantly more important to them than their urban counterparts. School psychology training programs could recognize the unique challenges that are specific to working in rural areas and educate future school psychologists on how to deal with these issues.

Suggestions for Future Study

There is room for further research on the consultation practices of Nova Scotia school psychologists because, although many interesting findings were generated from this study, questions about the consultation practices of Nova Scotia school psychologists remain. In the current study, only 58% of potential respondents participated, there was a relatively small percentage of urban participants, and many of the participants had limited experience practicing as school psychologists. Further research including more participants and a greater percentage of urban and experienced school psychologists could help determine whether their consultation practices are similar to the participants in the current study. In addition, replicating this study with more urban and experienced school psychologists would allow improve the validity of comparisons. Examining the consultation practices of school psychologists who work in other provinces and countries could help identify the most effective consultation practices and determine whether there is consistency among school psychologists' consultation practices in other locations.

School psychologists in the current study were asked to rate several barriers and facilitators to effective consultation and elaborate on what they believed were some of the factors that facilitate consultation in schools. Participants provided valuable insight when

asked to elaborate on what they perceived as facilitators to effective consultation; therefore, it may be informative to also ask participants to provide detailed responses about what they perceive as barriers to consultation. Exploring the barriers to consultation may help to further identify the challenges school psychologists encounter in their practice. Once these challenges are identified, strategies to overcome these barriers could be generated. A qualitative study where individual or group interviews are conducted with school psychologists may allow participants to further explain and provide more in-depth responses to questions about what they perceive as some of the barriers and facilitators to effective consultation.

In this study school psychologists were asked with whom, how often, and for what reasons they consulted, but were not asked how they consult. Future research could ask participants what they are doing to collaborate and to describe the strategies they employ. Most participants in the current study indicated that consulting with external professionals was important, yet they consulted with them considerably less frequently than school personnel and parents. Future studies could investigate why school psychologists do not consult with external professionals on a regular basis, if they would like to consult with them more often, and how better collaborative relationships could be established.

Conclusion

The school psychologists in this study valued consultation and regarded giving and receiving information as an important part of their practice. They consulted on a regular basis and had established collaborative and reciprocal partnerships with a variety of others for the purpose of exchanging information to address the psychological and educational needs of students. Consultation occurred most often within the school environment with school personnel and less frequently with external professionals. Most participating school psychologists were satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the current level of consultation, but would have preferred to spend more time consulting. Several barriers and facilitators to effective consultation were reported and aspects of their job that could be changed were identified at the system and individual levels. This study addressed some of the gaps in the existing literature on school-based consultation by exploring Canadian, and more specifically, Nova Scotia school psychologists' consultation practices. The results of this study identified some of the current practices for mental health service delivery in Nova Scotia schools and outlined several factors that may enhance collaboration in schools.

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Appendix A: Survey

Consultation Practices of Nova Scotia School Psychologists

Part I – Demographic Information

1. Currently Employed
   Part time _____
   Full Time _____

2. Credentials
   Candidate Register _____
   Registered Psychologist _____

3. How many years have you been practicing as a school psychologist?
   0-5 _____
   6-10 _____
   11-15 _____
   16-20 _____
   20+ _____

4. Gender
   Male _____
   Female _____

5. Age

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

6. How many schools do you service?
   0-5 _____
   6-10 _____
   11-15 _____
   16-20 _____
   21-25 _____
   25+ _____

7. How many of the schools that you service are located in:
   Urban areas _____
   Rural areas or small towns (i.e. populations of fewer than 10, 000)? _____

Part II - Consultation

School Consultation:

- A method of providing psychological and educational services in which consultants and consultees form cooperative partnerships for the purpose of exchanging knowledge. It is a reciprocal, systematic, and collaborative problem-solving process.

- **Consultant** – A person who has specialized knowledge in a particular area and provides information to the consultee.

- **Consultee** - A person who seeks assistance or information from a consultant.

Please answer the following questions in your role as a Consultant:

1. **On average, how often do others seek information or specialized knowledge from you about work related issues?**

   At least once per day _____
   2-3 times per week _____
   At least once per month _____
   2-3 times per month _____
   Less than once per month _____

2. **Please rate how frequently you act as a consultant or provide specialized knowledge to the following:**

	Less than once per month **1**	Between once per month & once a week **2**	2-3 times a week **3**	Almost everyday **4**
Parents	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Students	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
School Administrators	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Supervisors	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Teachers	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Educational Assistants	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
School Psychologists	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Speech-Language Pathologists	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Other Psychologists	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Psychiatrists	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Family Physicians	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**

(2. cont'd)	Less than once per month **1**	Between once per month & once a week **2**	2-3 times a week **3**	Almost everyday **4**
Nurses	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Occupational Therapists	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Social Workers	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Criminal Justice Professionals (i.e. RCMP Officers, Judges, Lawyers etc.)	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Guidance Counselors	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Other (Please specify):				
_____	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
_____	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
_____	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
_____	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
_____	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**

3. Please rate how frequently others seek out your assistance for the following issues:

	Less than once per month **1**	Between once per month & once a week **2**	2-3 times a week **3**	Almost everyday **4**
Academic	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Behavioral	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Family Problems	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Social-Emotional	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Ethical	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Other (Please specify):				
_____	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
_____	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
_____	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
_____	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
_____	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**

4. Please rate your level of confidence providing information or sharing knowledge on the following issues:

	Not at all Confident 1	Somewhat Confident 2	Confident 3	Very Confident 4
Academic	1	2	3	4
Behavioral	1	2	3	4
Family Problems	1	2	3	4
Social-Emotional	1	2	3	4
Ethical	1	2	3	4
Other (Please specify):				
_____	1	2	3	4
_____	1	2	3	4
_____	1	2	3	4

5. As a consultant, please rate how important each of the following is to you in your practice as a school psychologist.

	Not at all Important 1	Somewhat Important 2	Important 3	Very Important 4
Working collaboratively with others to solve problems	1	2	3	4
Providing knowledge and resources regarding behavioral issues	1	2	3	4
Providing knowledge and resources regarding academic issues	1	2	3	4
Providing knowledge and resources regarding social-emotional issues	1	2	3	4
Providing direction and support around ethical and professional issues to other psychologists	1	2	3	4
Providing direction and support around ethical and professional issues to other professionals. Please indicate which professionals:				
_____	1	2	3	4
_____	1	2	3	4
_____	1	2	3	4
_____	1	2	3	4
Other (Please specify):				
_____ _____	1	2	3	4
_____ _____	1	2	3	4

Please answer the following questions in your role as a Consultee:

Consultee - A person who seeks assistance or information from a consultant.

6. **How often, on average, do you seek assistance or information from others about work related issues?**

   At least once per day _____
   2-3 times per week _____
   At least once per month _____
   2-3 times per month _____
   Less than once per month _____

7. **In the role of the consultee, please rate how frequently you seek assistance or information from the following:**

	Less than once per month **1**	Between once per month & once a week **2**	2-3 times a week **3**	Almost everyday **4**
Parents	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Students	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
School Administrators	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Supervisors	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Teachers	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Educational Assistants	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
School Psychologists	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Speech-Language Pathologists	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Other Psychologists	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Psychiatrists	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Family Physicians	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**

(7. cont'd)	Less than once per month **1**	Between once per month & once a week **2**	2-3 times a week **3**	Almost everyday **4**
Nurses	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Occupational Therapists	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Social Workers	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Criminal Justice Professionals (i.e. RCMP Officers, Judges, Lawyers etc.)	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Guidance Counselors	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Other (Please specify):				
_____	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
_____	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
_____	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
_____	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
_____	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**

8. As a consultee, please rate how frequently you seek information or assistance from others about the following issues:

	Less than once per month **1**	Between once per month & once a week **2**	2-3 times a week **3**	Almost everyday **4**
Academic	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Behavioral	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Family Problems	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Social-Emotional	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Ethical	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Other (Please specify):				
_____	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
_____	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
_____	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
_____	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**

9. As a consultee, how important are the following to you in your practice as a school psychologist.

	Not at all Important **1**	Somewhat Important **2**	Important **3**	Very Important **4**
Working collaboratively with others to solve problems	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Gathering knowledge and resources regarding behavioral issues	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Gathering knowledge and resources regarding academic issues	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Gathering knowledge and resources regarding social-emotional issues	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Receiving direction and support around ethical and professional issues from other psychologists	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Receiving direction and support around ethical and professional issues from other professionals. Please indicate which professionals:				
_____	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
_____	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
_____	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
_____	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Other (Please specify):				
_____ _____	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
_____ _____	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**

10. Please rate the extent to which each of the following is a barrier to effective consultation practices:

	Almost Never a Barrier **1**	Sometimes a Barrier **2**	Often a Barrier **3**	Almost Always a Barrier 4
Heavy caseload	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Servicing too many schools	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Focus on psycho-educational assessments	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Travel time	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Others' lack of awareness of psychologist's expertise	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Lack of interest on the part of other professionals	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**

(10. cont'd)	Almost Never a Barrier **1**	Sometimes a Barrier **2**	Often a Barrier **3**	Almost Always a Barrier 4
Lack of interest on the part of parents	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
I do not see consultation as an effective use of my time	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Professional isolation	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Other (Please specify):				
_____	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
_____	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
_____	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
_____	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**

11. How satisfied are you with the amount of time you have for consultation?

Not at all Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
1	2	3	4

12. Please choose one of the following:

_____ I would prefer to spend less time on consultation

_____ I spend the right amount of time on consultation

_____ I would prefer to spend more time on consultation

13. Please rate the extent to which each of the following helps facilitate effective consultation practices:

	Almost Never a Facilitator **1**	Sometimes a Facilitator **2**	Often a Facilitator **3**	Almost Always a Facilitator 4
Support from other psychologists	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Support and commitment from school administration	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Time allotted in my daily schedule for consultation	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Being part of school site-based teams	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Established meeting times for consultation with school staff	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Training and professional development in how to consult effectively	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**

14. In your opinion, what are some of the factors that facilitate effective consultation/collaboration in schools?

Thank-you for taking the time to fill out this survey!

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

Dear _____,

My name is Kelly Murray and I am a graduate student in the Master of Arts in School Psychology Program, Faculty of Education, Mount Saint Vincent University. I would like to invite you to participate in my Masters thesis research project, *Consultation Practices of Nova Scotia School Psychologists*. This project is being supervised by Dr. Elizabeth Church. It will compare the consultation practices of Nova Scotia rural and urban school psychologists, and examine what they see as some of the facilitators and barriers to effective consultation practices.

This survey has been sent to all psychologists practicing in Nova Scotia schools. It should take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. If you are interested in participating in this study, please sign one copy of the consent form and seal it in the enclosed envelope marked "Consent Form", and keep the second copy of the consent form for your records. Next, please fill out the survey and return it to me in the addressed and stamped envelope, along with the consent form. If you would like to receive a summary of the research results, please fill out and return the Request for Research Results form. Upon completion of the study, participants who return this form will be mailed a final report containing a summary of the findings.

Should you decide to participate, a number of measures will be taken in order to ensure your confidentiality. There is no identifying information on the survey, and the Consent and the Request for Results forms will be kept separate from the completed survey. Anonymity of participants will be maintained by omitting all names, addresses or identifying information in the written component of this study. In addition, no individual respondents will be identified in future presentations or publications that may arise from this research. Only I, as the primary researcher, and my supervisor, Dr. Elizabeth Church, will have access to the surveys. All material will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and shredded after seven years, and all electronic files will be password protected.

In order to ensure that each psychologist has received a survey and also to act as a reminder, follow-up postcards will be sent to those who have not returned the survey within 14 days of mail-out.

Your participation is voluntary. You may withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.
If you have any questions about this study, please contact Kelly Murray at [redacted]; or Dr. Elizabeth Church at 902-457-6721/ elizabeth.church@msvu.ca. This research activity has met the ethical standards of the University Research Ethics Board at Mount Saint Vincent University. If you have any questions or concerns about how this study is being conducted and wish to speak with someone who is not directly involved with this study, you may contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Board (UREB) c/o MSVU Research and International Office, at 902-457-6350 or by e-mail at research@msvu.ca.

By signing this consent form, you are indicating that you fully understand the above information and agree to participate in this study.

_____ _____

Participant's Signature **Date**

_____

Participant's Phone Number

Please keep a copy of this form for your records and send one back to me in the sealed envelope marked "Consent Form"

Appendix C: Request for Research Results

If you would like a summary of the research results, please provide the following information:

Name:

_____

E-Mail:

_____

Mailing Address:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Many thanks for participating in the study.

Kelly Murray

Appendix D: Follow-up Postcard

Dear _____,

By this time you should have received a survey as part of my study on the consultation practices of Nova Scotia school psychologists. If you have already completed and returned the survey, I am most appreciative. If not, I hope that you would consider doing so. If for some reason you have not received a survey, I would be happy to send you another copy. You can contact me by phone ay [redacted] or by e-mail at [redacted]

Many thanks,

Kelly Murray
School Psychology Graduate Student
Mount Saint Vincent University