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CONDITIONS EFFECTING SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

School psychology is a specialized branch of psychology to provide services that may enhance academic performance of the students and provide psychological counseling for individuals, groups and families, and coordinate intervention strategies for management of individuals and school wide crises. It is one of several professional specialties within psychology and is not a separate discipline or profession. The nature of school psychology services is determined by two broad conditions: the preparation school psychologists receive and society's need for services. In India the importance of study of psychology as an essential service to schools is yet to be realized. There are no organizations specifically for school psychology. The future of school psychology will be influenced strongly by five external conditions (i.e., a country's cultural history and current conditions, economy, geography, and language, as well as national needs and priorities) and by five internal conditions (i.e., degree of professionalism, definition of school psychology's scope and functions, its legal status, its engagement with education, and scholarly and technical contributions). The need to expand the discipline beyond its somewhat narrow western influences requires school psychologists in non-Western countries to become more engaged in research and development efforts

Keywords: school psychology, school psychologists, school education

INTRODUCTION

School psychology is a specialized branch of psychology to provide services that enhance academic performance, design strategies and programs to address problems of adjustment, consult with other educators and parents on issues of social development and behavioral and academic difficulties, conduct psychoeducational assessment for purposes of identifying special needs, provide psychological counseling for individuals, groups and families, and coordinate intervention strategies for management of individuals and school wide crises (California Association of School Psychologists, 2010) School psychology is one of several professional specialties within psychology and is not a separate discipline or profession. Professional practices within school psychology are derived from the theory, research, and technology within the discipline of psychology to which school psychology has made important contribution together with the instrumental experiences of its seasoned practitioners. At the outset, it is important to know that the study of psychology in India does not have a long history, and, in fact, its importance as an essential service to schools is yet to be realized. As in the United States and the United Kingdom, psychology was studied for a long time as

a part of philosophy (Menon, 1961). In fact, religion and philosophy have been the foundation stones of ancient Indian education, shaping the different systems of education at that time. Psychology has always been an integral part of Indian culture (e.g., the holy Geeta is an ancient book of psychotherapy but in a spiritual context). Religious books like the Vedas, Upanishads, and Puranas all had a strong influence on educational thinking, making ancient Indian philosophy almost as eclectic as modern philosophy of education (Nanavaty, 1973). In ancient India's educational system, the teacher-student relation was important and very traditional. In fact, the teacher's home was the school (ashram), and the student actually lived with the teacher until the completion of his studies. The teacher was the pivotal and creative force behind the learning process. He became the student's "guru," father figure, and was sometimes even worshipped (Verma, 1968). The teacher was expected to have high moral values and qualifications, and the education system was based on the individualization of instruction and direct interaction between the teacher and the student. During his stay in the ashram, the student was prepared for life and had to follow the strict rules of behavior laid down by the teacher. It is evident from this that the teacher played a very crucial role in the overall development of the student.

Preparation of School Psychologists

The 1990 international survey of school psychologists (Oakland & Cunningham, 1992) found considerable similarities in their preparation. Most school psychology programs offer a curriculum that relies heavily on five areas:

- * Courses that focus on core areas of psychology They include psychology of learning and cognition, research design, and statistics, as well as biological,

developmental, educational, experimental, personality, and social psychology.

- * Assessment and intervention services They typically focus on intellectual, academic, emotional, and social qualities through the use of behavioral, affective, educational, and social-systems models.

- * Interpersonal skill development It typically focuses on effective collaboration, consultation and leadership development.

- * Legal and ethical issues They are addressed by being embedded within other courses or as a standalone course.

- * Professional decisionmaking, Courses in research design and statistics are more likely to emphasize the role of the school psychologist as a good consumer of the literature rather than as a contributor to the literature through scholarship.

Nature of School Psychology Services

The nature of school psychology services is determined by two broad conditions:

- * The preparation school psychologists receive

- * Society's need for services.

School psychologists should not offer services for which they are unprepared. However, educators and others responsible for determining the nature of school psychological services may limit their work to a few critical areas. Thus, school psychology services differ between countries. In general, school psychologists provide assessment services and may provide direct (e.g., counseling students, tutoring) and indirect (e.g., teaching psychology, teacher and parent consultation, and in-service teacher training) services. Their services may focus on primary, secondary, or tertiary prevention efforts with individuals,

groups, or systems (e.g., a school or school system).

The nature of school psychological services within a country necessarily reflects the level of development and acceptance of the discipline of psychology within the country, the development of the profession of psychology, and the need for services (Catterall, 1976, 1977, 1979). For example, school psychology commonly is found in countries in which the discipline and general profession of psychology are strong (e.g., Australia, Canada, Israel, New Zealand, United States, and Western Europe) and is not found in countries in which the discipline and profession of psychology are not strong (e.g., Arab countries, India, and the People's Republic of China). Additionally, school psychological services generally occur after a country develops universal education for boys and girls from Grades 1 through 12 and establishes special education services. As previously noted, a country's gross national product also influences school psychology services (Oakland, 2000). Professional services often are provided in the context of an unwritten social contract between a profession and society. The social contract allows the profession to establish university-based professional preparation programs, select applicants for the programs, determine their preparation, establish standards for entrance into the profession, conduct research, and engage in other activities that further the profession. The social contract also requires the professional to serve everyone: urban and rural, rich and poor, male and female, young and old. The profession of psychology often is regulated by external standards, including laws, administrative regulations, and ethics statements. The degree to which external regulations govern a profession can be used as a gauge of its commitment to its social contract as well as its professional development.

Conditions that will Influence School Psychology's Future

The future of school psychology will be influenced strongly by five external conditions (i.e., a country's cultural history and current conditions, economy, geography, and language, as well as national needs and priorities) and by five internal conditions (i.e., degree of professionalism, definition of school psychology's scope and functions, its legal status, its engagement with education, and scholarly and technical contributions). Each is discussed in this section.

External Conditions That Influence School Psychology

Cultural history of the country and current conditions. A country's cultural status often reflects long-standing historical national policies. For example, the national policies of some countries lead to their being engaged with other countries, sharing knowledge and technology, valuing various beliefs, and engaging in other activities that lead to cultural pluralism. In these countries, psychology can be expected to grow by serving national values. In contrast, national policies of other countries lead to their not engaging with other countries and instead remaining insular. Examples include the Soviet Union as well as many countries in the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa (Friedman, 2005). In these countries, Psychology is not strong and is likely to remain weak. School psychology is strong only when Psychology is well accepted and serves national needs and values. Additionally, the discipline of psychology has a decidedly Western emphasis. For example, individual differences, the keystone of the discipline of psychology, are more important in Western cultures than in some other

cultures. Thus, a discipline dedicated to the study of individual differences will be seen as less relevant in countries that favor collectivist beliefs. Psychology and thus school psychology will be more acceptable when its theory, research, and technology extend beyond its current dominant (e.g., Israeli, North American, Western European) scholarship to include theory, research, and technology from countries in which psychology is emerging.

Economy of the country Psychology and school psychology generally are stronger when a country's economic resources are stronger. Countries that have a higher gross national product tend to have well developed educational institutions (i.e., preschools through postdoctoral education), provide services to children with special needs, educate both boys and girls, have a larger percentage of professionals, and provide higher incomes to professionals. Psychology is likely to be strong in these countries. In contrast, people in low gross national product countries often struggle to find sufficient money for food, clothing, and shelter. Psychology and school Psychology cannot be sustained under these conditions.

Geographic location of the country. Geographic qualities have influenced the development of psychology. Psychology tends to be strong or weak regionally. For example, it is strong and thriving throughout most of Europe and weak and generally nonexistent throughout Africa. Countries that are contiguous often develop in like fashion. A country's geographic distance from the epicenters of psychology often has helped define its acceptance. However, the availability of knowledge to anyone who has a word processor, an Internet connection, and knowledge of English removes many of the previous barriers to knowledge. Thus, a country's geographic isolation is becoming less of a major barrier to the

discipline of psychology and to knowledge of school psychology.

Language of the country. Many of the earliest writings in psychology were in German and French. English has become the international language of science. More scholarly journals are published in English than in any other language. International conferences typically use English. Thus, knowledge of English has become a prerequisite to scientific and professional knowledge. The growth of psychology, including school psychology, will be most rapid in those countries that either use English as their first language or teach English as their second language. Thus, in most parts of the world, psychologists are expected to know English. Those who do not know English are less likely to have access to current knowledge. Needs and priorities of the country. The issues that fuel the development of strong disciplines and the nature of related professional services always reflect national needs and priorities.

For example, school psychology became established in Western Europe and the United States in response to national needs and priorities. The initial and continued acceptance of psychology and school psychology depends, in part, on practitioners' ability to communicate their relevance in meeting important national needs. For example, psychology is acquiring a strong foothold in the People's Republic of China by assisting in its economic development a national need and priority. Clinical psychology's acceptance is growing in Japan, in part, in response to helping the country deal with gender role changes a national need and priority. School psychology is not strong in either of these two countries. Its growth may be furthered following the recognition that it too can help address national needs and priorities. Addressing the educational and psychological needs of students and promoting the well-being of children are

important ways in which school psychologists can facilitate educational success and contribute to the public health of a country.

Internal Conditions That Influence School Psychology

School psychology's degree of professionalism. The social contract between psychology and society must be acknowledged in order for the profession and its specialty areas, including school psychology, to be strong. Psychology, including school psychology, must work to develop and institute high professional and legal standards governing the education, including continuing education, of psychologists, ethics that serve the public, a commitment to serve persons from all walks of life, and a commitment to provide services to the public that are effective and highly regarded even indispensable.

The strength of a profession within a country is directly related to the strength of its national professional association(s). A sufficiently large workforce precedes the development of professional associations. Psychology is strong only in countries with well-developed professional associations. This holds true for school Psychology too. Professional associations are needed to assume leadership for developing high standards and then working to ensure they are met.

The presence of strong international associations within psychology and its specialty areas is a good barometer of its health and vitality internationally. Two strong international associations represent psychology. The International Union of Psychological Sciences was founded in 1951 to serve as an association of national psychological associations of which approximately 70 are members. In contrast, membership in the International Association of Applied Psychology consists of individual psychologists

engaged in the practice of psychology. The International Union of Psychological Sciences and the International Association of Applied Psychology alternate in sponsoring international conferences every 2 years. Psychology also is strengthened through various regional associations (e.g., in the Americas, Asia, and Europe). School psychology also has had a viable international presence through the International School Psychology Association. The International School Psychology Association has established a code of ethics (Oakland, Goldman, & Bischoff, 1997), defined the specialty (Oakland & Cunningham, 1992), and recommended a model professional preparation program (Cunningham & Oakland, 1998). Its small membership of individuals (approximately 400 to 500) and 30 national associations of school psychologists currently limit its impact (see Oakland, Chapter 47, this volume). School psychologists in various parts of the world see considerable potential for the International School Psychology Association to have an important role by providing workshops and other training activities during its annual colloquium, facilitating collaboration among international colleagues, and promoting the exchange of information, resources, and research internationally (Jimerson et al., 2004; Jimerson et al., 2006).

Definition of school psychology's scope and functions. A profession must define itself clearly to be credible to other professions and the public. Thus, professional associations must take leadership in preparing statements that define the nature and scope of services and their functions. The definition of school psychology's scope and functions should be inspirational, yet achievable. It serves to establish the parameters of school psychological services to be consistent with its social contract.

Legal status of School psychology. School Psychology is strong in countries that have laws requiring the provision of, and financial support for, its services. A national definition of school psychology's scope and functions typically is prerequisite to establishing such a law. Moreover, this action typically requires the presence of a strong national association. School psychology's engagement with education. School psychologists straddle two fences: psychology and education. Educated mainly in the discipline of psychology, they strive to apply its theory, research, and technology, together with their personal instrumental knowledge, to issues important to both children and youth and, more narrowly, to students. Educators typically determine educational policy and hold the purse strings for services. Educators may or may not welcome the services of school psychologists. Thus, the nature of relationships between education and school psychology is critical to the welfare of school psychology.

The first author met recently with a group of school principals in a Central American country to discuss how school psychology services may better assist them. Some principals were critical of school psychologists for not being team players and not contributing to the overall objectives of their schools. Their comments serve to remind us that a social contract exists between school psychology and education. School psychologists must work in ways that benefit the institution of education or face the possibility of having other specialists serve in their stead. While being a team player is important, school psychologists also need to be critical of services that do not serve students well and be an objective voice to the schools.

School psychology's scholarly and technical contributions. As noted previously, professional practices within psychology, including school psychology,

are derived from the discipline of psychology. School psychology is not merely a consumer of this discipline, as it has made important contributions to its theory, research, and technology. Moreover, the discipline of psychology expects the specialty of school psychology to serve as an active and important conduit to children and youth, especially within the context of education (Oakland, 2003).

Results of an international survey of school psychologists in 10 countries revealed that school psychologists are more likely to identify external challenges than internal challenges to the profession (Jimerson et al., 2004; Jimerson et al., 2006). Prominent external challenges include lack of money to properly fund services and the low status of school psychology. Prominent internal challenges include deficiencies in research and evaluation methods, professional leadership, and supervision.

Current Issues Impacting School Psychology

In India, a visit to a psychologist carries a social stigma. This is due to the widely prevalent belief that any kind of therapy or counseling sessions for readjustment is related to some sort of mental instability. This often means that the psychologist is the last resort, rather than the first choice. Therefore, the success of a psychologist's practice depends, to a great extent, on the kind of society he or she works in. As mentioned earlier, some professionals in the teaching profession hold a bachelor's degree in psychology. This knowledge, together with the experiences they have in working with children, facilitates the development of a career as a school psychologist. Despite the fact that parents and children have proclaimed a desperate need for more support and guidance in the areas of severe learning disabilities and coping problems in mainstream schools,

no positive steps have been taken to tackle this problem. Clinical psychologists who work in hospitals rarely visit schools (Farrell, 2005)

Another major area of concern is related to the present education system. Indian schools have an extremely rigorous academic curriculum. There is severe competition, and children are pressured to perform. Rote learning takes precedence over developing analytical skills and logical thinking. The ominously accelerated pace of teaching in the classroom, in order to complete the syllabus, is compounded with an increased burden of homework for the student. Most children have to be sent for private tuition after school hours, so that they can keep up with the pace of the class. Then, there is the added stress of learning a second and third language. As a result, extracurricular activities generally "take a backseat" to the academic frenzy in which most students are absorbed. In fact, every year, when the final examination results are declared, many students who fail or are disappointed with their marks commit suicide. The nation's schools should consider the gravity of the present problems and take necessary and prompt action to overcome them. In such an alarming scenario, the interventions of a school psychologist are urgently required. However, at present, there is no association of school psychologists, and, in fact, "the profession does not really exist" (Farrell, 2005, p. 2).

It is about time that schools and the education boards acknowledge their responsibility in building up a sense of security and self-worth in each child. All children should be accepted with all their shortcomings, varying intelligence levels, and disabilities and be encouraged to grow in a safe and invigorating environment leading to a feeling of success. One of the most destructive emotions is fear (Nath, 1964). Both teachers and parents must ensure that children develop in an emotionally stable environment and are

armed with skills to tackle the heightened performance pressure. There should be a shift in focus, away from exam-oriented learning, to inculcate the joy of learning in students.

The teacher-as-counselor model may not be effective in many schools due to the fact that the large class sizes make it difficult to promote adequate teacher-student relationships. Furthermore, not all teachers have sufficient knowledge of child and adolescent psychology. Therefore, they are not professionally equipped with the skills necessary to efficiently handle the multidimensional problems of the youth. The current effort of the government to implement inclusive education in all schools is another issue that has a considerable impact on school psychology. Most teachers, parents, and even students need to be counseled and sensitized to accept the presence of children with disabilities in their schools. The role that school psychologists play in ensuring a smooth transition and stress-free implementation of inclusive education is a crucial one. Having properly trained school psychologists in all schools is unquestionably among the most pressing needs of the day. Research in this area is not a priority at the moment. What is important is that the government should take the initiative and start an association for school psychologists and take the lead in establishing the profession.

Infrastructure of School Psychology

In India, there are no organizations specifically for school psychology. However, there are a few mental health institutes and counseling and therapy training centers that train psychology students in doctoral degrees or diplomas in psychotherapy and counseling only for master's degree holders with a theoretical knowledge of psychology. The national and regional Psychology associations in

India include the Association of Clinical Psychologists, the Indian Association of Clinical Psychologists, the Indian Psychological Association, the Indian Academy of Applied Psychologists, the Indian Psychoanalytical Society, and the Rajasthan Professional Psychology Association. In India, a person can practice psychology with a master's degree; no license is required. However, the process of developing laws relevant to this field has begun. All professionals (including psychologists) working in the field of rehabilitation, which covers the area of special education, have to register with the Rehabilitation Council of India. Often, teachers take on the role of school psychologists, because there are very few school psychologists in India. Many teachers counsel schoolchildren along with their teaching assignments, though most of the time this is not carried out in an organized way. They are not trained school psychologists and do not have a degree in Psychology. However, some of these teachers undergo courses in educational psychology and counseling during their teachertraining program (Mukhopadhyay, 2005).

The most common publications referred to by school psychologists are The Journal of Counseling Psychology, published by the American Psychological Association, and RCI News Letter, published by the Rehabilitation Council of India. School psychologists refer to very few journals, one of the reasons being that most of them do not have easy access to such literature.

The need to expand the discipline beyond its somewhat narrow Western influences requires school psychologists in non-Western countries to become more engaged in research and development efforts. These efforts may be aided by establishing partnerships between well-established scholars in school psychology and those living and working in countries

in which school psychology is emerging. Together, they can combine resources to help address important issues in developing countries with a degree of scientific rigor that may otherwise not be achievable.

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