

SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY

KAREN A. JACKSON, PHD
PSI CHI NATIONAL PRESIDENT
TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY as a career option has been a popular choice among students in the U.S. and in Europe. The content and nature of the practice of school psychology has been variously defined and the origins are not entirely clear. I was a school psychologist from 1971 to 1994. In fact, I was one of the first three school psychologists in the state of Texas. The profession was very young then, since it was only in 1968 that the National Association of School Psychology (NASP) was formed and the discipline was formally recognized by the American Psychological Association (APA) as a doctoral speciality; it was later recognized by the American Board of Professional Psychology (ABPP). During these formative years, the educational orientation of school psychologists was varied and changed. The changes in the profession reflect the character of the individual departments and programs as well as the various regions of the country

and diverse populations in the communities and schools where professionals work.

How are school psychologists' roles defined?

The role and functions of everyday practice are dictated by the employment setting and other demographic features of the area. Other major influences have been special and regular education rules and standards; federal and state laws governing public schools; and all employees of the setting. With the passage of 94-142, The Education of All Handicapped Children's Act (U.S. Congress, 1975), school psychologists have been primarily involved in assessment of and intervention with handicapped children, offering counseling and consultation to their teachers and families. Other important federal laws have mandated service delivery to a variety of school populations. The development of the profession has been called random by some writers.

Now, school psychology is a recognized speciality within psychology, with requisite standards for training, credentialing, and service delivery.

Societal and educational contexts, education reform, and school effectiveness literature have had significant effects on the training and practice of school psychologists. In addition, the evolution of the National Association of School Psychology has had a profound

This article is the first in a new series of articles on nonclinical degrees and careers in psychology. This presentation was originally delivered at the 67th Annual Convention of the Rocky Mountain Psychological Association, April 19, 1997.

Dr. Jackson, who currently serves as Psi Chi's national president, is professor of psychology and Psi Chi faculty advisor at Texas Woman's University and has been a practitioner, teacher, and government advocate in the field of school psychology since 1971.

impact on the profession. This organization is made up of nondoctoral professionals (80%) and is a visible, strong, and feasible professional representative for the school psychologist today. At the doctoral level, Division 16, the Division of School Psychology, is a much smaller organization with approximately 2,000 members. It is made up of doctoral professionals, most of whom are trainers in universities and colleges. Most states have state associations of school psychology that have an impact on school psychologists' role and function within their respective states through active lobbying.

What are the actual job functions?

School psychologists, at all levels, work as applied scientists and interventionists, descriptionists, rational empiricists, and systems managers. Their expertise varies according to their level of training and practice, but generally, school psychologists provide assessments and diagnoses, oversee interventions ranging from individual counseling to group and family work, and provide consultation to teachers, administrators, community agencies, parent groups, and youth. They also provide supervision, pre-services, and in-service training to teachers, administrators, and professional groups. In addition, school psychologists perform program evaluations, develop case studies, and use applied research methods to solve school problems and professional practice questions. In response to the growing numbers of children referred for either educational or mental health difficulties, school psychologists also focus on primary prevention in schools and communities.

School psychology has finally laid claim to its expertise in dealing with children in a wide variety of settings. Regardless of where these professionals work, they provide a wide variety of services to the populations they serve. School psychologists share functions with clinical, counseling, organizational, and experimental psychology. In a sense, school psychology is a hybrid of several specialities and continues to evolve in its practice and service delivery techniques. Doctoral school psychologists bring additional supervisory and program evaluation skills. They also possess research knowledge beyond that which nondoctoral school psychologists can provide. However, the bottom line with regard to job role development is the social context and individual creativity of the professional.



Karen A. Jackson, PhD (fourth from left) is pictured at the recent APS Convention in Washington, D.C. with (from left) Kay Wilson, Psi Chi Executive Officer; Elizabeth Yost Hammer, Psi Chi Southeastern Vice-President; Elliot Aronson, who delivered the Psi Chi-sponsored Bring-the-Family Address; Norine Jalbert, Psi Chi Past-President; Dennis Carmody, newly elected Psi Chi Eastern Vice-President; and Harold Takooshian, incoming Psi Chi President-Elect.

Where do school psychologists work?

The primary places of employment for professionals with master's or specialist-level degrees are public and private schools. School psychologists work with diverse ages, from infant programs to high school, and you will find a great variety of services provided by each professional. In many states master's- and specialist-level professionals also have private practice options as well as career paths with clinics or state institutions. School psychologists also work with other professionals in human services and mental health clinics. Those at this level are guided by the National Association of School Psychology Standards of Professional Training as well as state certification and licensing standards for training and functioning.

Doctoral school psychologists have a variety of career options as well. Many doctoral professionals work in private and public schools or at universities and colleges. Others, as recipients of PhD, PsyD, or EdD degrees, have options of public or private practice if they hold the appropriate licenses for the state in which they live. Doctoral-level school psychologists, when employed by school systems, are often in administrative roles as well as service delivery roles. The roles and functions of doctoral psychologists are guided by professional standards set forth by the American Psychological Association (1981) and the National Association of School Psychology (1984).

How do you find training programs?

The two best guides to training programs are APA's *Guide to Graduate Programs in Psychology* (1996) and

NASP's *Directory of School Psychology Training Programs* (1984). The APA guide gives descriptions of programs at the doctoral level, while the NASP guide has descriptions of master's, specialist, and doctoral programs.

Training programs can be found in every state at the specialist, master's, and doctoral levels. These programs are equally housed in education departments, in educational psychology departments, and in psychology departments. Your state psychology board should have a list of training programs in your area, and your state's school psychology association should also maintain lists of the programs in the NASP *Directory*.

What do these training programs entail?

Programs range in hours and training from 40 hours at the master's level to 124 hours at the doctoral level. NASP-approved programs include practicum and internship requirements. APA programs have similar requirements for all doctoral programs, which are more diverse in training than the NASP programs. The NASP programs lead to students becoming qualified to take the National School Psychology Certification Examination. This specialist certification is often connected to the state certification and licensure laws and rules. You need to check with your state board of psychology and your state education agency for local requirements.

Doctoral programs will also have a specific model of training, either the *scientist-practitioner* model or the *applied professional* model. In the past it was more common to find a *scientist-researcher* model program whose graduates were primarily trained to take academic positions and be researchers. 30 ▶

School Psychology

◀ 27 Few such programs exist today.

The *scientist-practitioner* model assumes that all psychologists receive basic training in core areas of psychology, such as quantitative methods, personality theory, history and systems of psychology, developmental psychology, learning, motivation, cognition, social psychology, and the biological basis of behavior. Programs based on this model are similar to those offered in other fields of psychology.

The *applied professional* model also is currently employed in a number of programs. This model focuses more on applied course work rather than on core theoretical courses. Typical course work for programs espousing this model include intelligence assessment, learning problems assessment, consultation, social problems assessment, general educational theory, special education, behavioral interventions and assessment, history and systems of psychology, developmental and learning theories, neuropsychology, and abnormal psychology. Current trends are shifting away from the scientist-practitioner model and toward the applied professional model. New programs in school psychology at the doctoral level tend to be PsyD rather than PhD programs.

What about salary, flexibility, job satisfaction, demographics?

If you work in the public service sector, you can expect slightly lower salaries than if you work in private busi-

ness. Salaries are competitive with all other school or clinic professionals, and if you work in the schools, your work contract will follow the school calendar. It is an especially excellent choice for both men and women who want to marry and raise a family. The close ties of the employment contract with the school work day and school terms can be a great advantage in your family life.

Reschly and Wilson (1995) reported on the characteristics of practitioners and faculty from 1986 to 1992. These authors suggest that there have been some changes in demographics, in that women are more likely to be practitioners and men are more likely to hold faculty positions. High job satisfaction was reported in both settings with some concern about advancement opportunities among the practitioners. Salaries were good, but there was a difference between faculty and practitioners. Faculty reported more outside employment income than practitioners and differed by \$9,000 on the average salary. Average faculty income was \$57,000; doctoral practitioners, \$51,000; and nondoctoral, \$40,000. These are not entry-level salaries, as the mean years of experience was about 15. Also, this study did not consider gender, age, or geographic area. Overall changes from two earlier studies suggest a graying of the school psychologists and significant degree changes from fewer master's degrees to more specialist-level degrees. Eighty percent of the graduates in school psychology training programs are at the specialist level as reported in 1991 in a study by Reschly and

McMaster-Beyer.

After 24 years, I can say with confidence that school psychology is a promising field, and there are many job opportunities in a variety of settings. You can work at the nondoctoral level or at the doctoral level, in traditional or nontraditional settings. As you narrow your career choices, take some time to consider school psychology! (E)

References

- American Psychological Association. (1996). *Graduate study in psychology*. Washington, DC: Author.
- American Psychological Association. (1981). *Speciality guidelines for the delivery of services by school psychologists*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Batsche, G. (1995). Best practices in credentialing and continuing professional development. In *Best Practices* (5). Washington, DC: NASP.
- Brown, T., & Minke, K. (Eds.). (1984). *Directory of school psychology training programs*. Washington, DC.
- National Association of School Psychology. (1984a). *Standards for the provision of school psychological services*. Washington, DC: Author.
- National Association of School Psychology. (1984b). *Standards for training and field placement programs in school psychology*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Prus, J., White, G., & Pendleton, A. (1988). *Handbook of certification/licensure requirements for school psychologists* (4th ed.). Washington, DC: NASP.
- Reschly, D., & McMaster-Beyer, M. D. (1991). Influences of degree level, institutional orientation, college affiliation, and accreditation status on school psychology graduate education. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 22(5), 368-74.
- Reschly, D. & Wilson, M. (1995). School psychology practitioners and faculty: 1986 to 1991-92 trends in demographics, roles, satisfaction, and system reform. *School Psychology Review*, 24(1), 62-80.