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ABSTRACT

Given the high priority granted innovative topics in the school psychology literature, one might question the degree to which practitioners implement these innovations. This paper examines this question regarding innovation, change, and service delivery. Data were drawn from a nationwide longitudinal survey, in which a random sampling of 1000 school psychologists, beginning in 1992, responded to surveys. The surveys included measures of attitudes and trends in the movement toward professional reform. Implementation of reform was compared by geographic location. Results revealed a slow transition toward more innovative practices. Psychological assessment remained the most frequent professional activity despite respondents' stated ideal to increase consultation and direct intervention. The persistent emphasis on innovation was not reflected in service delivery. Concerning regional differences, respondents from the West and West Central regions of the areas surveyed reported significantly more actual time in intervention than did those from the Southeast and North Central regions. The time spent in intervention by those in the Northeast ranked between the two extremes. Furthermore, four areas currently receiving attention in the literature--consultation, individual counseling, classroom observation, and behavior analysis--were ranked high among the professional activities in which school psychologists engaged most frequently. (RJM)

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Running Head: CHANGES IN SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY IN THE NINETIES

A Nineties Perspective on School Psychology: Changes in Service Delivery

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This report is one of several based on the database from a five-year longitudinal study. This paper accompanied a poster session at the 1996 meeting of the American Psychological Association, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

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Abstract

This paper addresses practitioners' implementation of innovation and change in service delivery, a common topic in recent school psychology literature. Data were drawn from a nationwide longitudinal survey, a random sampling of 1000 school psychologists whose responses have been solicited annually since 1992. Those surveys included measures of attitudes and trends in the movement toward professional reform. Results reveal a slow transition toward more innovative practices. Assessment remains the most frequent professional activity despite respondents' stated ideal to increase consultation and direct intervention. Implementation of reform was compared by geographic location. Respondents from the West and West Central regions reported significantly more actual time in intervention than did those from the Southeast and North Central regions; Northeastern respondents ranked time in intervention between the two extremes.

School Psychology Practice in an Era of Educational Reform

In contrast to the traditional role that school psychologists have taken as testers and gatekeepers for special education, the profession, as reflected in its literature (e.g., Lidz, 1991; Reschly, 1988; Reschly & Wilson, 1990; Shinn, 1989; Ysseldyke & Marston, 1990), has had an increasing emphasis on innovation and change. In the 1995 calendar year School Psychology Review (National Association of School Psychologists) and School Psychology Quarterly (Division of School Psychology, American Psychological Association), journals of two national professional organizations for school psychologists, each published articles on school reform, early interventions, alternative assessment, home/school collaboration, preventive programs, technology, and diverse student populations. Reasons for the increased interest in innovation and change are probably varied. These may include the nationally recognized need for reform within the entire field of education as well as the increased diversity within the populations served by school psychologists--populations whose needs have not been adequately addressed by traditional psychology practice. Interest in innovation may also be the result of maturation of the profession with an accompanying desire to carve out a larger role for itself.

Given the high priority currently granted innovative topics in the school psychology literature, one might reasonably

question the degree of practitioners' implementation of those same ideas. This paper addresses that question. It is based on a nationwide survey of school psychologists whose responses have been solicited annually over a four-year period.

Method

In 1992, the survey was mailed to a random sampling of 1000 school psychologists who were regular members of the National Association of School Psychologists. Seven hundred twenty usable surveys were returned that year. Follow-up surveys have been conducted each year since then. There were 438 usable surveys in 1993, 298 in 1994, and 193 in 1995. Table 1 illustrates the fact that, despite attrition over the four-year period, the sample has consistently conformed to NASP membership characteristics from April 1992 in terms of gender, regional distribution, degree status, and national certification.

The first survey focused on the personal, educational, and professional backgrounds of school psychologists as well as their present job satisfaction, professional practice, and career paths. While continuing to focus on many of those areas, more recent surveys have also examined attitudes and trends in the movement toward reform in the profession--areas such as the roles and functions of school psychologists as change agents, attitudes toward inclusion, and preparation for working with diverse student populations.

From the 1993 survey, data relating to amounts of time devoted to assessment, consultation, and intervention were

further broken down for analysis by geographic region. An analysis of variance followed by a Student-Newman-Keuls procedure was used to determine difference in practice for those regions.

Results

1992 Survey

The 1992 survey asked respondents to rank 15 professional activities--as well as an open-ended "Other" category--according to time investment. Psychological assessment ranked first as the professional activity in which school psychologists engaged most frequently. Consultation with teachers ranked second; consultation with parents tied with administrative/clerical duties for the third rank. Individual counseling was in a four-way tie for the next rank. The three other activities with which it tied were classroom observation and behavior analysis--areas currently receiving increased emphasis in the literature--as well as screening for general education or psychological assessment.

Another item on that same year's survey asked respondents to endorse the frequency with which they engaged in a number of professional activities. Examples of the same are working in regular education classes and discussing results of child studies with other psychologists. The two activities for which at least 50% of the respondents endorsed "often" (the highest option) were improving professional skills, and evaluating children and recommending interventions. The activities for which respondents endorsed "rarely" or "never" (the two lowest options) were developing and/or implementing preventive mental health programs,

carrying out original research, and becoming involved in the organizational politics of schools.

1993 Survey

Items on the 1993 survey, among other things, juxtaposed the perceived autonomy of the school psychologist with the actual and ideal amounts of time engaged in assessment, consultation, and intervention. Sixty-four percent of the respondents to that survey indicated that they had "a lot" of freedom to decide how to do their work. Another, open-ended question asked respondents to assign a percentage to the amounts of time they actually and ideally would engage in assessment, consultation, and intervention (both direct and indirect). Table 2 shows that only a small number of respondents either desired or estimated that they actually spent more than 50% of their time in each activity. The outstanding exception to this is the category of assessment, the activity in which fully 41% of respondents estimated that they had spent more than half of their time (modal responses were 50% estimated actual time vs. an ideal of 30%). Comparisons of estimated actual time investments with the stated ideal for each activity reveal a desire to decrease time involved in assessment (actual mode, 50%; ideal mode, 30%) and increase time involved in consultation (actual mode, 20%; ideal mode, 30%) and intervention (actual mode, 10%; ideal mode, 30%).

The actual and ideal data for assessment, consultation, and intervention were broken down by geographic region for further analysis. An analysis of variance indicated significant regional

differences [$F(4, 396) = 3.62, p < .01$]. Follow up Student-Newman-Keuls procedures revealed that school psychologists in the West and West Central regions spent statistically significantly more actual time in intervention than did those in the Southeast and North Central regions. School psychologists in the Northeast ranked between those two extremes.

Another area of inquiry for the 1993 survey was how frequently school psychologists check on student progress after placement in special programs. The majority of respondents (56%) indicated that they do so less than 25% of the time.

The 1995 Survey

The majority (70%) of the respondents to the 1995 survey indicated that they had been involved in the development and implementing of innovative programs. They rated their involvement as equal to or greater than that of other school personnel. The innovative programs they developed and implemented concerned primarily collaboration among school personnel (39%) and inclusion (34%).

Most respondents to the 1995 survey did not use innovations in assessment on a regular basis nor had they tried them in the last year. Of the minority who did use them, the assessment innovations that were most often utilized on a regular basis were curriculum-based (21%), performance-based (21%), and portfolio assessment (10%).

In terms of working with diverse populations, the majority of respondents to the 1995 survey indicated that 10% or less of

the population with which they work was culturally diverse. Those school psychologists rated their own training programs as having provided them satisfactory (49%) or excellent (4%) preparation for work with diverse students. The population with limited English proficiency was the one with which they felt least comfortable working.

Discussion

Despite a persistent emphasis on innovation and change in the recent school psychology literature, a nation-wide sampling of school psychologists reported practice in the field that bears small resemblance to the renewal called for. Psychological assessment continued to be the professional activity in which school psychologists engaged most frequently. Even in that area, respondents reported little use of innovative assessment practices on a regular basis nor had they experimented with assessment alternatives during the year prior to being asked. Likewise, developing and/or implementing preventive mental health programs received little professional attention. The kinds of innovative programs that received school psychologists' attention for development and implementation often concerned inclusion, a movement externally driven by state and federal mandates and special education reforms.

Comparing responses on the 1993 survey for ideal and actual time spent on assessment reveals that many professionals are spending much more time on assessment than they would ideally--time that they claim would prefer to spend on consultation and

intervention. Given that in the 1992 survey 65% of respondents rated their supervisors as "fairly well" or "very well" informed about the school psychologists' job, and given the autonomy endorsed on the 1993 survey, it seems strange that school psychologists do not realize their ideal apportionment of duties. This discrepancy may be key to understanding the slow rate of transition to more innovative practices.

On the brighter side, four areas currently receiving attention in the literature--consultation, individual counseling, classroom observation, and behavior analysis--were ranked high among the professional activities in which school psychologists engage most frequently. Another positive sign for change was that when school psychologists became involved in the development and implementation of innovative programs, those programs most often involved collaboration among school personnel. Curriculum-based and performance-based were the assessment innovations in which school psychologists were most involved. Professionals in this field indicated that they were pleased with their level of preparation for working with diverse students.

One of the early lessons in any course on consultation is that systems change slowly. The markers of change included in this series of surveys point out that the profession of school psychology is no exception to that observation. Though we school psychologists may pride ourselves on being agents for change within schools, we as a profession have been slow to make the present transition to more innovative practices.

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Table 1
Comparison of NASP Membership and Survey Respondents

	Sample									
	NASP ^a		1992		1993		1994		1995	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Gender										
Males	6765	32	241	33	145	33	101	34	62	32
Females	14603	68	479	67	293	67	197	66	131	68
Regional Distribution										
Northeast	4781	30	222	31	142	32	93	31	51	26
Southeast	3140	20	140	19	83	19	54	18	36	19

(table continues)



	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
North Central	3222	20	153	21	81	19	58	20	42	22
West Central	2004	13	75	10	45	10	33	11	19	10
West	2615	17	130	18	87	20	60	20	45	23
Degree Status										
Masters/Specialist	14008	76	516	72	324	74	220	74	144	75
Doctorate	4327	24	204	28	114	26	78	26	49	25
National Certification	17000	75 ^b	532	74	321	73	223	75	144	75

^aNASP Membership Data--April, 1992

^bEstimate per NASP National Certification Department

Table 2

Percentage of Respondents Who Endorsed Varying Time Allocations
for Three Professional Activities

Percentage Range	Activity		
	Assessment	Consultation	Intervention
	Percent	Percent	Percent
Actual time allocation (estimated)			
0-- 10	12	20	43
11-- 20	8	28	22
21-- 30	9	27	16
31-- 40	11	12	8
41-- 50	19	7	5
51-- 60	11	2	2
61-- 70	12	1	1
71-- 80	10	2	2
81-- 90	5	0	1
91--100	3	1	0
Mode	50.00	20.00	10.00
<u>Mdn</u>	50.00	25.00	20.00
<u>M</u>	48.07	26.92	20.79
<u>SD</u>	25.35	17.56	17.48

(table continues)

Percentage

Range Percent Percent Percent

Ideal time allocation

0-- 10	15	4	10
11-- 20	15	14	14
21-- 30	30	35	30
31-- 40	21	29	27
41-- 50	13	12	13
51-- 60	4	2	3
61-- 70	1	2	2
71-- 80	1	1	1
81-- 90	0	0	0
91--100	0	1	0
Mode	30.00	30.00	30.00
<u>Mdn</u>	30.00	30.00	30.00
<u>M</u>	30.75	34.07	32.43
<u>SD</u>	15.57	14.52	15.04



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