

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ASSESSMENT PRACTICES  
OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS IN ST. JOHN'S,  
NEWFOUNDLAND, CANADA, AND WEST ESSEX, ENGLAND:  
A SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY INTERNSHIP REPORT

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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DALE McLEAN







*Comparative Analysis of Assessment Practices of Educational  
Psychologists in St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada, and West  
Essex, England: A School Psychology Internship Report*

By

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An Internship Report submitted to the School of  
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## ABSTRACT

The internship placement component of the Masters of Education (School Psychology) was completed in Harlow, Essex, England. The report has two components: (1) a placement component and (2) a research component. An overview of educational psychology in Britain (specifically West Essex), the intern's goals and objectives, and the internship experience (activities and learning) are outlined in the placement component of the internship report.

The research component consists of a comparative analysis of assessment practices of educational psychologists in St. John's, Newfoundland and West Essex, England. Eight (8) educational psychologists (four from each setting) were interviewed. Results indicate that educational psychologists in both settings reported similarities in assessment practices such as common reasons for referrals. However, educational psychologists in both settings indicated that the referral process, assessment practices, and time spent in assessment activities differed. Limitations of the research are also discussed.

## **Acknowledgement**

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## **PART I : PLACEMENT COMPONENT**

## **Chapter 1 Description of The Internship Setting**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The internship component of the Masters of Educational Psychology (School Psychology) at Memorial University of Newfoundland began on May 1, 1995 and extended for a period of thirteen weeks. Four days per week were spent at the internship placement. The other day each week was spent pursuing independent research and developing the research project component of the internship report.

The setting for the internship placement was the West Essex Formal Assessment and Evaluation Service (FAES) situated in Harlow, Essex, England. More specifically, the intern worked with the Educational Psychology Service (EPS), within the Formal Assessment and Evaluation Service.

Supervision was provided by two educational psychologists on the West Essex team, Ann Ricketts and Paula Crosbie. Both supervisors are registered psychologists in Great Britain and have extensive experience working professionally as educational psychologists in several Local Education Authorities within England.

Supervision from Memorial University of Newfoundland was provided by faculty member, Dr. W.C. Nesbit, Ph.D, Professor and Chair of Special Education. Dr. Nesbit also resided in Harlow for the Spring term, 1995 and provided a great deal of guidance in the completion of the internship report.

## **EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY IN ESSEX**

Essex is a large Educational Authority, providing a broad education for almost a quarter of a million children and young people (Kerfoot, 1995). The Essex Educational Psychological Service (EES) structure, as outlined below, provides the hierarchical management framework of educational psychological service delivery in the Essex Local Education Authority. There is a Principal Psychologist, Sue Kerfoot, who has two Assistant Principal Educational Psychologists with specific county-wide duties, Andre Imich and Peter Parnes. There are six teams that are led by six Area Senior Educational Psychologists. In West Essex, the Area Senior Psychologist is Debbie Orton. She has responsibilities as an educational psychologist and as well is manager of the team of seven educational psychologists based at Bray's House, Traceys Road, Harlow.

## **LEGISLATIVE IMPETUS**

The practice of Educational Psychology in Great Britain is closely linked with governmental legislation. The *Warnock Report* (1978) made many far-reaching recommendations for a broader view of special education and argued for the integration of children with special needs, when possible, with a greater involvement of parents. Further, the *Warnock Report* advocated a phased system of assessment,

ongoing monitoring of children's progress and the defining of educational objectives (Webster, 1994). The Report indicated that 20% of British children have special educational needs. However, only 2% of pupils require a Statement identifying these needs and provision required to ensure that these needs are met. These "statemented" pupils are considered to have special educational needs that are both long-term and complex.

These ideas stated in the *Warnock Report* were further delineated in the 1994 document called the *Code of Practice*. This Code envisages that most children's special needs will be met in the mainstream without statements, and that many other children with statements will receive their education in ordinary schools. Partnership with parents and children, early action, and close inter-agency collaboration are core and fundamental to the *Code of Practice* (1994). This Code clearly identifies and delineates the process of staged assessment. These government documents have been the driving force for the development of the present policy that guides the provision of psychological service to the educational system. Thus, legislation dictates the roles and responsibilities of educational psychologists in Great Britain.

## **OVERVIEW OF THE SYSTEM**

Children who have difficulty in learning have special educational rights. Local Educational Authorities have the responsibility to identify and secure appropriate provision for children's specific educational needs. Further, parents have the right to be involved in the decisions affecting the educational well-being of their children (Baleock & Beebe, 1993).

Where possible, special needs children are educated in ordinary schools, bearing in mind that both parental interests and the interests of the other children in the school must be considered. The Local Educational Authorities' responsibilities include: drawing up a formal statement of the child's educational needs, and a parallel statement of the actions that it deems suitable for meeting those needs. Parents can appeal to a special tribunal if they disagree with the provision set out in these statements (Code of Practice, 1994). Thus, working with parents on providing the best education in the best setting for their children is an essential skill in professional practice for educational psychologists.

## **THE EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGIST'S CLIENTELE**

Each of the educational psychologists on the West Essex team is allocated a "patch" and is required to provide the full range of services to children living in this



area (Kerfoot, 1995). Each "patch" typically includes two comprehensive schools which would be comparable to junior and senior high schools in Newfoundland. Also within this catchment area are feeder primary, infant and junior schools. In addition, the educational psychologist in West Essex is responsible for a special provision school or "unit" that caters to children with special educational needs. The educational psychologist is also responsible for nursery and preschool children that live within their catchment area. Services are also provided to students attending out-county schools and post 16 students (Kerfoot, 1995).

The educational psychologist's activities associated with these educational settings are consistent with the central role of the Educational Psychology Service. This role is to assist the Local Education Authority meet its statutory responsibilities for children with special educational needs by providing advice on the educational needs of children who live within their patch (Kerfoot, 1995). These statutory requirements are guided by the 1993 Education Act which provides a legal framework for special educational needs. The Code of Practice (1994) provides guidance on how schools and others should deal with special educational needs. Essex County Council has adopted this framework for the assessment and support of pupils with special educational needs and has developed the *Essex Stages of Assessment* from that document.

## THE ESSEX STAGES OF ASSESSMENT

The *Essex Stages of Assessment* is a five stage model. The first three stages are related to school-based assessment. Each successive stage involves more detailed assessment and increasingly intensive support arrangements for the pupil (Essex County Council, 1994). There are Individual Education Plans (IEPs) at each stage. Moss (1995) describes the stages as a sequence of action steps that take us from the relatively informal everyday response of the class teacher to more formal arrangements with increased specialist involvement.

**STAGE 1:** *the class or subject teacher identifies or registers a child's special educational needs and, consulting with the school's SEN co-ordinator (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator) takes initial action. This results in a differentiation in the curriculum to meet the pupil's specific needs.*

**STAGE 2:** *the school's SEN co-ordinator takes the lead responsibility for gathering information and for co-ordinating the child's special educational provision, working with the child's teacher. At this stage an individual educational plan is drafted with specific goals and targets specified by the pupil's educational needs.*

**STAGE 3:** *teachers and the SEN co-ordinator are supported by specialists*

*from outside the school* (Code of Practice, 1994, p.3)

At Stage Three, the educational psychologist is consulted regarding progress and planning related to the pupil's needs. At this point, the Individual Education Plan (IEP) is reviewed. Monitoring of the IEP may result in three possible courses of action. Depending upon the Stage 3 review meeting which involves consultation with the school, parents, other agencies, pupils and the educational psychologist: (1) the pupil's needs may be deemed to have been addressed with the consequence that monitoring be reverted to Stage One or Two, (2) the pupil may continue on Stage 3 or, (3) the pupil may move on to the Fourth Stage of the *Essex Stages of Assessment* (Moss, 1995).

**STAGE 4:** *the LEA (Local Education Authority) considers the need for a statutory assessment, and if appropriate, makes a multidisciplinary assessment.*

**STAGE 5:** *the LEA considers the need for a Statement of Special Educational Needs, and if appropriate, makes a Statement and arranges, monitors and reviews provision* (Code of Practice, 1994, p.3)

Once a Stage Four assessment is initiated, all parties will be asked to submit written evidence related to the needs of the pupil. The educational psychologist drafts the Appendix F of that document which addresses a wide range of factors

which may affect the child's functioning. Such factors include the child's cognitive functioning; communication skills; perceptual skills; adaptive, personal and social skills; the child's approaches and attitudes to learning; his or her educational attainments; and the child's self-image, interests and behaviour (extracted from the Guidelines for the completion of Psychological Advice for the Statutory Assessment Procedure). This psychological advice is gathered through observation, assessment, interaction, and examination of work samples. It is envisaged that a Stage 4 statutory assessment would only be for pupils with particularly long-term severe and complex needs, for whom a multi-disciplinary assessment is required (Essex County Council, 1994).

Stage Five relates to the issue and maintenance of the "Statement of Special Educational Needs." Essentially, a Statement is a listing of all of the child's special educational needs and a description of the provision that is required in order to meet these needs along with other non-educational needs. Reviews are held periodically with the parents, school and other agencies depending on the unique needs of the pupil. Further, each Statement must be formally reviewed with parents, schools, other agencies and educational psychologists participating in the process during an Annual Review meeting. The purpose of the Annual Review is to integrate a variety of perspectives on the pupil's progress, to ensure that he or she is achieving the

desired outcomes, and, if necessary, to amend the statement to reflect newly identified needs and provision ( Code of Practice, 1994, p.106).

### **PROCEDURES AND TIME LINES IN STATUTORY WORK**

The 1993 Education Act and the subsequent Code of Practice (1994) provide a listing of procedures and time scales for the assessment process. Parents are informed and are given 29 days to provide their opinion regarding the necessity of proceeding with an assessment. Next, information is collected from all sources who are able to provide advice regarding the pupil's needs. Advice is collected from parents, medical personnel, speech-language therapists, social services, education (school) and the Educational Psychology Service. Advice must be submitted to the Formal Evaluation and Assessment Service within six weeks of obtaining the request.

A Statement of Special Education Needs or a parallel statement, a "Note in lieu" is then written within two weeks by another educational psychologist on the team. "Suggested Entries" for the statement list the pupils needs and describe the required provision based upon the information gathered from the advice of all sources. These entries become the Statement of Special Educational Needs. A "Note in Lieu" is drafted when the educational psychologist writing the Suggested Entries

considers that the child's needs can be met from the school's usual arrangements for supporting children with special educational needs and that the Statement is not required (extracted from Notes of Guidance for Preparing Suggested Entries and Proposed Statements in accordance to the Education Act 1993)

The proposed Statement or the "Note in Lieu" (depending upon the child's special educational needs) along with the advice from each source is sent to the parents. They are given 15 days to consider the educational placement of their child. The final Statement is then drafted. The process of assessment is clearly defined as six months. Thus, the educational psychologist in Essex works within strict time frames.

#### **EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS RESPONSIBILITIES IN WEST ESSEX**

The responsibilities of the educational psychologist reflect the professional needs dictated by the *Essex Stages of Assessment*. The following list depicts priority services for children that are provided by the educational psychologist:

- statutory assessment work - preparing psychological advice (Appendix F);
- contributing to Annual Reviews of children with Statements;
- contributions to Transition Plans which draw together information within and beyond the school in order to plan coherently for the young

person's transition to adult life (Code of Practice, p. 117):

- multi-agency case work;
- advising on the needs of pupils who are post 16 years;
- advising on the needs of preschool children;
- Stage 3 work: consultation, direct assessment and intervention;
- Supporting and monitoring the Essex Learning Support Policy and the Essex Stages of Assessment;
- Preparing Suggested Entries (Kerfoot, 1995).

Educational psychologists in West Essex are supported by administrative assistance and supervision. Each educational psychologist is assigned a clerical support staff person who has many responsibilities. For example, after each school visit, the educational psychologist is responsible for documenting the visit in terms of a summary of the discussion and the actions agreed upon. School Visit Summary sheets must be typed, copied and forwarded to the respective school within 21 days. The clerical support staff ensure that this work is done. Both the clerical support staff and the Assistant Administrative Officer of the FAES help ensure that the statutory process is following correct procedures and time frames.

The Essex EPS provides opportunities for the educational psychologists to become involved in various projects and multidisciplinary teams. Several members

of the West Essex team work in other capacities as Specialist Educational Psychologists. For example, Ann Ricketts is the Specialist EP in the area of inclusion and Paul Curran, another team member, is a Specialist EP in the area of professional development as well as being a tutor with the University of East London Educational Psychology training course. These specialist posts were designed to optimize the skills and knowledge of team members and at the same time provide professional contributions to fellow educational psychologists in the area of service delivery, as well as in broader developments and projects associated with the LEA (Kerfoot, 1995). Educational psychologists also contribute to multidisciplinary child and family support teams within Essex. One member of the West Essex team, Paula Crosbie, works as a member of the Child and Family Consultation Service in addition to duties related to her "patch" within Harlow.

#### **SKILLS OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS IN ESSEX**

Educational psychologists in Essex are required to have a first degree in Psychology and teaching qualifications with a minimum of two years teaching experience. A Master's degree which includes professional training as an educational psychologist is also required for EPs working with the Essex Local Educational Authority (Kerfoot, 1994; Lowenstein, 1984).



The educational psychologists employed by the Essex Local Education Authority have many skills in areas that are essential for good practice. They are knowledgeable in child and adolescent development. They are skilled in assessment, problem-solving, intervention and consultation. Inservice training, research, counselling, monitoring and evaluating are also important skills required for the various aspects of the work of an educational psychologist in Essex, England (Kerfoot, 1994).

#### **SUMMARY**

The profession of educational psychology in Great Britain is closely linked to governmental legislation. Further, educational psychologists' responsibilities within the British educational context relate closely to ensuring that children with special educational needs have these educational needs met within both an appropriate and facilitative environment. The *Essex Stages of Assessment* provides guidance to parents, schools and educational psychologists as to the established process in meeting children's special educational needs.

## Chapter 2 Goals And Objectives

This chapter includes a discussion of the difficulties in developing goals and objectives for the internship experience in West Essex, England. The evolution of the final goals and objectives adopted for the internship experience is delineated. The final sections in the chapter outlines these goals and objectives.

### **DIFFICULTIES IN DEFINING GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

In March, 1995, a tentative draft of internship goals and objectives was developed. This draft was developed to provide the West Essex Educational Psychology Team with the opportunity to determine if they would be able to provide a learning experience that was consistent with the goals and objectives outlined by the prospective intern. After linkage with the Essex personnel, the draft was refined and expanded in an internship proposal submitted and approved by the Memorial University faculty supervisor before departure to Great Britain.

The goals and objectives were difficult to develop without a prior working knowledge of the education system in Great Britain. Thus, the goals and objectives reflected key areas highlighted during the intern's earlier practicum experience at the Roman Catholic School Board in St. John's. As such, the goals and objectives were closely tied to consultation and standardized assessment, a competency essential for

good practice within the context of the Masters of Educational Psychology programme at Memorial University of Newfoundland. Further, the goals were general, somewhat abstract, and related to broad categories of intervention. Not knowing the extent to which these duties were consistent with the roles and responsibilities of educational psychologists in Britain, it was difficult to determine specific activities within the British context that would provide further skill development. Succinctly, it was difficult to describe precisely the activities that would be essential to include without a knowledge of psychological intervention within the educational system in Great Britain.

### **EVOLUTION OF INTERNSHIP GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

Through discussions with the on-site supervisors in West Essex, it became apparent that the draft of goals and objectives developed prior to leaving Newfoundland was too general and lacked the specificity necessary to develop a plan of action for the internship placement. Through observation of Essex educational psychologists in their roles, and discussions with on-site supervisors regarding their responsibilities within the educational context, revised goals and objectives for the internship placement became more clear. Thus, specific activities that would provide an overview of psychological intervention and service delivery in the Essex school

system, were decided upon through consultation. The objectives were defined in terms of behavioral tasks and activities that would provide the intern with the professional skills necessary to function as an educational psychologist within the Local Education Authority in West Essex, England.

### **INTERNSHIP GOALS**

The overall goal of the internship experience was to provide an opportunity to continue to build both professional skills and knowledge in the field of school psychology. Mentoring and working as a school psychologist in West Essex would provide an opportunity to experience the full range of activities and responsibilities associated with the role of the school psychologist within an expansive British educational setting. Further, it would afford an opportunity to work independently, with responsibility for case management, with guidance from British educational psychologists.

Further, it was anticipated that the opportunity to work in the school system in West Essex, England, would provide an opportunity to compare the delivery of psychoeducational services by educational psychologist teams in Newfoundland and the United Kingdom, specifically West Essex. Variations in service delivery would provide the intern with a more comprehensive view of approaches to providing

assistance to schools, teachers, students, families and other professionals.

The more specific internship goals related to building further professional skills and knowledge closely tied to the general domains of consultation, assessment and intervention. Skills in these areas were to be enhanced through the experiential process of casework.

### **INTERNSHIP OBJECTIVES**

The objectives formulated to achieve the established goals relating to professional skill development were delineated into two groups: (1) independent objectives which could be completed without the supervision of an educational psychologist and (2) placement objectives that required the input and guidance of the educational psychologist. The placement objectives required both a participatory and independent aspect. The placement objective activities were undertaken upon the completion of an action plan with supervision from either of the two West Essex educational psychologist supervisors assigned to the internship.

### ***Independent Objectives***

1. To evaluate behaviour management programmes in an infant school, primary school, secondary school and a special provision.
2. To evaluate the interventions for a student in each of the following special provisions: speech and language unit, emotional and behavioral unit, moderate learning disability unit, and an autistic unit.
3. To complete a research component for an internship report (Assessment Practices of Educational Psychologists in St. John's, Newfoundland and West Essex, England).
4. To develop skills in interpreting the Essex Stages of Assessment and the Code of Practice.
5. To develop competencies in using the British Abilities Scales (BAS) and the Wechsler Objective Reading Dimension (WORD)
6. To learn about Brief Therapy (Solution-Focused) and its implications in psychoeducational practice.
7. To increase professional development growth through liaison with the University of East London.

***Placement Objectives***

1. To conduct problem clarification interviews resulting in a descriptive statement of concerns, written in performance terms, with the following individuals:
  - (a) A parent
  - (b) A class teacher/Special Educational Needs Co ordinator
2. To negotiate the design, implementation and evaluation of an IEP for the following students:
  - (a) An infant pupil (age 5-8)
  - (b) A junior pupil (age 9-11)
3. To negotiate the design, implementation and evaluation of behaviour management programmes for the following students:
  - (a) A primary student (age 5-11)
  - (b) A secondary student (age 12-16)
4. To consider issues arising from an educational psychologist's involvement with children of ethnic minorities.
5. To contribute to the preparation of "Psychological Advice" (Stage 4 and Stage 5 Assessments).

6. To develop skills in informal assessment (writing and reading samples) through:
  - (a) classroom observation
  - (b) curriculum-based assessment
  - (c) interviews with parents, teachers, students
7. To observe and participate in the preschool assessment process.

#### **SUMMARY**

The goals and objectives outlined in this chapter evolved from initial observation and participation in the Educational Psychology Service delivery in West Essex. The objectives were derived with the intention of obtaining practical experience and knowledge relating to the established goals for the internship. Related activities allowed the opportunity to learn about the English education system, and roles and responsibilities of educational psychologists within this system. Further, it allowed for the development of professional skills relating to the delivery of effective and efficient psychological intervention for pupil's within the context of this educational system.



## Chapter 3 Reflections of Internship Experience

This chapter is a discussion of the intern's progress in skill development and professional knowledge through the activities related to functioning as an educational psychologist in West Essex, England. The first section of the chapter provides an overview of the scope of activities and the phases of experiential work carried out during the internship placement. Supervision of the intern is also discussed in relation to the development of both professional knowledge and skills. The last sections of the chapter provide an overview of some of the internship learning experiences which are deemed essential to good practice within the profession of educational psychology.

### PHASES OF INTERNSHIP ACTIVITIES

The internship experience had three phases. Each phase provided an opportunity to learn about the English educational system, more specifically, the educational psychologist's duties and responsibilities within the context of this system. The *observational phase* provided the intern with the opportunity to accompany and observe educational psychologists in various aspects of their work. The second phase was the *participatory phase*. During sessions with schools and families, various facets of work were assigned to the intern under the direct

supervision of the internship supervisor. During the final, *independent phase*, a caseload was delegated to the intern and psychological work was carried out independently.

### ***OBSERVATIONAL PHASE***

During our initial meeting with Debbie Orton, Dr. Nesbit and both Memorial University interns were provided with a schedule of visits for the first two weeks of the internship placement. These schedules had been drafted by several educational psychologists on the West Essex team with the expectation that the schedule would provide an opportunity to observe educational psychologists working with a variety of children at different age levels and in different school settings. At that time, Ms. Orton also provided a copy of the *Code of Practice* (1994), the legislation that guides professionals working with pupils having special educational needs. As well, Ms. Orton outlined the organizational structure of educational psychology in Essex. This meeting was an excellent introduction and overview of the Educational Psychology Service in West Essex.

During the first two weeks, the intern accompanied educational psychologists on school visits. Much was learned about the education system in England and the role that educational psychologists have within the context of that system. This

phase was a valuable introduction to many professional competencies essential to effective psychological intervention within *any* educational system. The initial two weeks allowed the intern to obtain a sense of the context of the Essex educational system, the duties and responsibilities of educational psychologists within that system, and the professional competencies required to effectively deliver services to schools and families.

The context of educational psychological work related closely to efficient scheduling and planning sessions with schools. Effective time management was essential. Upon arrival at a school, an agenda for the session was reviewed so that both the head teacher and the educational psychologist were clear on what would be undertaken during the session. These sessions were approximately 3 hours in duration and scheduled well in advance. The educational psychologist met with the school concerning issues involving students at Stage 3 or students who had received Stage 5 Statutory Assessments. On some visits, the educational psychologist would assess a pupil with the goal of writing an Appendix F (Stage 4). The educational psychologist would then document the contents of the meeting and the actions agreed upon on a School Summary Visit Form. The needs of the school would be discussed and the educational psychologist would provide guidance on issues such as behavioral difficulties, individual education plans, and academic difficulties.

The first session that I attended with Ann Ricketts involved meetings with the head teacher, the SEN-CO, and the class teacher. An observational session of the child in the classroom and a meeting with the pupil's parents to discuss statutory assessment were also included. Ann was very thorough and professional, clearly defining the purpose and direction of the session. The school personnel worked with her as a team to ensure that the school visit was both time and resource efficient. This and other sessions demonstrated effective time and resource management approaches to educational psychological service delivery.

The intern observed students both at the secondary and the primary level within the context of their classroom. Educational psychologists were observed during class interactions, using materials from the classroom environment to build rapport with pupils in order to obtain assessment information regarding speech-language skills, cognitive skills, approach to learning, and social interaction skills. Educational psychologists were also observed providing feedback to SEN-COs at various schools and assisting in problem-solving strategy development intended to benefit the child within the classroom.

Assessment in West Essex focuses on information gathered within the context of the class. Children are observed interacting with peers and adults within the class, using academic materials found within the classroom setting. Approaches to

learning, behaviour, social skills, listening skills, focussing skills as well as a wealth of other information were determined by observing and interacting with children in their classroom environment.

During the first two weeks I attended several meetings relating to the various roles and responsibilities of educational psychologists in West Essex. The intern attended a psychological team meeting at the West Essex office. At that time preschool issues were discussed. As well, during the observational phase, I sat in on an Initiation Panel which is a body comprised of educational psychologists and staff from the FAES that determines if a statutory assessment is warranted. At the meeting, educational psychologists' drafts of psychological advice were examined to determine if the pupils' needs were long-term and complex and if the information presented was sufficient to proceed with a statutory assessment.

The educational psychologists also facilitate SEN-CO support groups. These groups are organized to deal with issues arising from the Code of Practice. Paula Crosbie and Ann Ricketts, intern supervisors, allowed both Memorial University interns to sit in on a support group meeting. It was very informative. We met individuals from the schools that we would be working with concerning *Code of Practice* issues.

### ***PARTICIPATORY PHASE***

By the third week, several of the duties of an educational psychologist were assigned. Both supervisors continued to provide opportunities to observe various aspects of their educational psychologist work. However, in preparation, before attending sessions at various schools, the intern was briefed and provided with the opportunity to complete a component of the assessment (e.g., observation of a preschooler). Further, the intern participated in a class inclusion programme called "Circle of Friends." This programme promotes empathy and attempts to build a support network around excluded pupils.

Also as part of the Participatory (pre-independent) Phase, a draft of Suggested Entries was completed for a specific pupil. This draft (previously described) is a tentative Statement of Special Educational Needs for a pupil, taking into account advice from parents, school, social services, medical personnel and other health professionals such as speech therapy, physiotherapy and psychology. The document lists the pupils special educational needs and provisional needs. An observation and individual assessment session were also undertaken by the intern for the purpose of writing an Appendix F. These independent pieces of work assigned by Ann Ricketts, one of the two internship supervisors, were intended to prepare the intern for the independent phase of the internship experience.

### ***INDEPENDENT PHASE***

During the final six weeks of the internship placement, educational psychology activities were undertaken independently. Visits were made to several special provisions within West Essex and a caseload was assigned to the intern.

#### **(i) Professional Development**

Both interns attended the National Conference of Educational Psychologist Trainees in Cambridge. Sessions focussing on family issues, the Circle of Friends programme, and systems theory were included. These sessions were extremely helpful in furthering professional development. In addition, the opportunity to liaise with other trainees from England, Ireland, Wales and Scotland was a valuable learning experience.

#### **(ii) Visits to Special Provisions**

Visits were made to several units or special schools for pupils with special educational needs within Harlow.

- Tye Green School - a special school for children with severe learning difficulties ;
- Mead School - a special school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties

- Harlowbury School-Speech and Language Unit
- Pupil Referral Unit - a unit for pupils whose behavioral and emotional needs are beyond the scope of the mainstream academic setting
- Mencap Nursery for preschoolers with moderate and severe learning difficulties

Visits to these provisions afforded knowledge about the facilities and resources available to meet the educational, cognitive and social needs of the pupils involved in the caseload. Information concerning special educational equipment, teacher-student ratio, programming, and support staff availability were important factors in determining pupil placement. It was essential to be knowledgeable in the area of provision and services in order to work effectively with schools and parents in Great Britain.

### **(iii) Caseload**

British educational psychology trainees on their final placement take on a caseload of approximately ten cases. Through discussion and consideration of the internship goals and objectives previously described, the supervisors provided a list of possible cases. Cases were chosen by the intern to provide experience in working with pupils of various ages having a wide range of needs. The caseload reflected a



sampling of the range of special need pupils that receive psychological intervention within the West Essex Local Education Authority. The caseload work provided an opportunity for the intern to be responsible for the scheduling, time lines, report writing and assessment. Skills in consultation and intervention were also developed through the experiential process of working with teachers, head teachers, SEN-COs (Special Education Needs Co-ordinators), parents, students and other agencies.

The caseload consisted of:

- a preschooler with possible special educational needs;
- a primary pupil with learning difficulties;
- a primary pupil with emotional and behaviour difficulties;
- a secondary pupil with learning difficulties;
- a secondary pupil with emotional and behavioral difficulties;
- a pupil with moderate learning difficulties;
- a pupil with speech and language difficulties;
- a pupil with a physical impairment.

#### **(iv) Activities**

Casework involved many activities that are fundamental in delivery of

educational psychology services. The expectation was that, the intern would be responsible for the initial contact, scheduling and arranging visits with schools and parents. Scheduling included developing an agenda and negotiating a plan of action with the school staff and parents. During school visits, meetings were held with SEN-COs and on several occasions with parents. Meetings with class teachers were also an important component of casework.

Assessment of pupils' needs included classroom observation and interaction with the pupil both within and outside the classroom environment. Informal and curriculum-based assessment skills were developed during these periods. However, some standardized assessment measures were used. Two WISC-3 (Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Third Edition) and a WORD (Wechsler Objective Reading Dimension) as well as some of the subtests of the BAS (British Abilities Scales) were administered.

Feedback to parents and school staff concerning assessment was also the responsibility of the intern. This approach provided an excellent opportunity to experience further facets of the educational psychologist's role. Skills in the area of information gathering, informal and standardized assessment, consultation, administration and follow-up were gleaned from the independent phase of the internship.

Reading and research in areas such as writing difficulties, reading difficulties, cerebral palsy, conduct disorder, Aspergers syndrome, and speech and language difficulties as they related to individual cases, were essential in the development of effective casework and in the development of effective action plans to ensure that proper provisions were established.

## **SUPERVISION**

Psychological work within the educational system was carried out by the interns with the following model of supervision. The intern observed the educational psychologist in various aspects of their work. Classroom observations, meetings with Special Education Needs Co-ordinators, meetings with class teachers, meetings with parents, attending Stage 3 reviews meetings, Annual Review meetings and team meetings were a major component of the initial use of internship time. This provided an excellent overview of the educational system, the roles of the educational psychologist, and the professional competencies essential to effective psychological intervention within schools.

During the final six weeks of the internship placement, supervision meetings were held for one hour each week to discuss cases and other professional issues. These supervision sessions were directed by the intern's needs in term of professional

growth and development. Issues included administration issues and instruction on administration and scoring the British Abilities Scales (BAS). The supervision meetings were chaired by the intern with one supervisor from the West Essex team present to discuss progress on cases. The supervision meetings allowed an opportunity to plan the upcoming week in terms of visits and other administrative duties.

Supervision provided by the West Essex EPS was extremely beneficial as it allowed an opportunity to further enhance professional development under the guidance of an experienced educational psychologist. Skills in evaluating processes and planning casework were developed under the supervision of both Paula Crosbie and Ann Ricketts. Questions such as: What do I know about this child's needs?, What do I need to know about this child's needs?, How do I obtain this information within the context of the school?, and, How do I evaluate the information gathered in relation to the information gathered from other sources? were dealt with in the context of the supervisory meetings. Professional supervision relating to the action plan aspects of educational psychology were valuable in terms of developing competencies in dynamic assessment, consultation with parents and schools, and most important, in finding the best way to meet the pupil's educational needs.

## **EVALUATION OF THE INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE**

The experience of working with the West Essex Educational Psychology team provided the opportunity to develop a wide range of professional skills. The internship placement also moved philosophical and theoretical knowledge into the realm of practical knowledge. This experience allowed for the development of an awareness of the professional skills that are essential to good practice within the context of providing psychological services to an educational system. This experience greatly contributed to the intern's professional development.

The knowledge gained during this internship placement is expansive. The following sections comprise an overview of the knowledge gained and areas of professional development enhanced during placement in West Essex, England.

### **Critical Thinking**

Overall, the most significant skill learned during this internship placement was critical thinking. It provided the opportunity to develop as a "reflective practitioner." Questioning What? Why? How? Where? When? fosters an approach to all educational psychology work in a problem-solving, constructive and proactive manner. This approach encourages competency and confidence in one's ability as an educational psychologist.

### **Assessment Techniques**

Informal assessment skills were observed and developed during the internship placement with the West Essex Educational Psychology Service. An appreciation for the massive amount of relevant information that can be obtained by observing a pupil within the context of the classroom, interacting with peers and the teacher has been an important learning experience. Looking at the child's approach to learning, to approaching a task, to listening to instructions, and the examination of work samples, reading samples and other contextual information provides important knowledge about the pupil's strengths and needs in relation to learning.

A range of assessment materials and techniques were explored and used during the internship placement. Standardized assessment procedures (WISC-3, WORD, BAS) were utilized in both a norm-referenced and a dynamic manner. Curriculum-based assessment involving reading and spelling assessment, as well as memory and general knowledge retention, were also employed during the internship placement. Checklists, observation, discussion and consultation also proved to be important information gathering and informal assessment techniques.

Much was learned concerning assessment. A professional approach to collecting information concerning pupils within the context in which they learn is essential in the development of an accurate picture of the child's strengths and needs.

Further, the skill of developing hypotheses, collecting information and testing these hypotheses through assessment and discussion is essential in the development of effective interventions. Because interventions must be well planned and relevant, it is important that feedback to parents, pupils and school staff be done in a sensitive manner, with the information provided being relevant and practical.

### **Time Management**

Because the Educational Psychology Service and the Formal Assessment and Evaluation Service work within such strict time-lines for the statutory process, the intern's time management skills became more highly developed during the internship placement in West Essex. However, in working with schools, one learns that "human" elements must be factored into time management (e.g., pupil's illness, teacher illness). As a consequence, schedules are often altered. The intern learned that flexibility and careful preparation are essential for appropriate and effective service delivery.

Other management skills acquired related to effective use of time during sessions with schools. In West Essex, the educational psychologist plans sessions that last approximately three hours. The agenda is set and the purpose and process of the visit is agreed upon before the session. Therefore, the educational

psychologist is able to efficiently complete many essential activities such as Annual Reviews, assessment of specific children, and consultation with parents, teachers and school staff. Time management is critical if this is to be effective.

### **Professional Skills**

#### *i) Consultation Skills*

Consultation skills come, to some degree, with experience in the role of an educational psychologist. However, during this internship placement, there were opportunities to participate and independently consult with school personnel (e.g., Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators, class teachers, head teachers), parents and other professionals (e.g., speech-language therapists). Given the high level of support and supervision from the EPS, much was learned about effective consultative processes and techniques to increase the likelihood that a consultation session will be successful.

Skills in relating to parents concerning their child's special educational needs is a fundamental component of effective consultation. The importance of being directive, yet at the same time non-confrontational and supportive, is a skill that was consciously developed and evaluated during the internship.



### ii) *Report Writing Skills*

Closely tied to the skills that are essential for effective consultation are the skills required to write psychological reports. It is essential to write reports that are clear, specific and knowledge-based yet tempered with sensitivity concerning the pupil's special educational needs and the subsequent provision. Effective report writing is, in many respects, applying consultation skills in a written format.

### iii) *Knowledge-Base*

As part of the internship, a wide variety of casework was sampled. The cases related to various special educational needs: cerebral palsy, specific learning disabilities, emotional and behavioral difficulties, developmental delay, and speech and language difficulties. The casework provided an opportunity to do research and read in these areas in preparation for related activities. Further, casework research emphasized the importance of having a good knowledge-base from which to draw when working with children who have special educational needs. Knowledge and understanding of special educational needs is essential in developing credibility with parents, with the pupil and with other professionals. Succinctly, knowledge is essential for the educational psychologist to be effective.

#### iv) *Casework Planning*

Another "good practice" that developed during the internship placement in West Essex was effective casework planning. For example, prior to calling a school and scheduling a session in relation to a particular student, the pupil's file would be read and notes taken to precisely determine the purpose of the visit; that is, what information had been gathered and what information needed to be gathered. This identification of needs is essential when planning a school visit. A tentative schedule must be drafted with an agenda for the meeting and related activities. Not only does this approach provide an opportunity to develop a clear understanding of purpose, it also facilitates the development of professional confidence. Further, it helps establish professional credibility with the school personnel with whom the educational psychologist works. Casework planning constitutes a very effective use of time and resources.

#### **Systems**

Educational Psychology practice in Great Britain is very much a "systems" approach to service delivery. In order to understand a pupil's educational needs, it is fundamental to examine and have an awareness of the systems which impact upon him/her and of which he/she is a part. To illustrate, the family, church and

neighbourhood grouping are all legitimate components in a comprehensive systems approach. The system from a legislative view includes the *Code of Practice*, the *Education Act* and the *Childrens Act* which are essential sources of knowledge as they help to guide the system in working with children in Great Britain from a legal point of view.

As noted, the "system" is not limited to professional entities. It includes the child as a member. It affects the pupil's opportunities to learn-- past, present and future. Issues such as the school's understanding and approach to the *Essex Stages of Assessment*, the strengths and needs of the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator and the class teacher working with the pupil, the politics of the provision, and the available funding within the system all impact upon the pupil's opportunity to receive differentiated and appropriate educational provision.

Thus, to work efficiently within a system, an understanding of the dynamics and underlying guiding principles of the system is essential. In order to work effectively with the child, the school staff, the parents and outside agencies, a systems approach seems a requisite.

The initial introduction to the systems approach afforded by the internship is viewed by the intern as a base-line on which to build. Working competence within a system's approach would require further experience, and as well, further academic

and theoretical underpinning. Nevertheless, the experience provided numerous insights.

### **Evaluating And Processing Learning**

During the internship, a support network was developed to assist in processing new knowledge and to facilitate an understanding of the English educational system through discussion of casework activities. Discussions with both supervisory educational psychologists and a fellow Memorial University intern placed with the West Essex team, provided an opportunity to develop creative problem-solving techniques, critical thinking skills, solution-focused skills and skills in action planning. As a group, during intern supervision meetings, cases were discussed and action plans were developed. Both Paula Crosbie and Ann Ricketts provided feedback and presented the opportunity to develop skills in evaluating systems and individuals within systems. Feedback on written reports was constructive. It provided an opportunity to process the experience and learning that went on each day. This approach proved valuable in terms of professional development.

**SUMMARY**

The internship experience in West Essex, England provided an excellent opportunity for professional growth and skill development. The activities involved in casework were varied and required the development of an understanding of the English educational system and the process of providing effective educational psychology service delivery to schools.

Skills were developed in the area of cognition involving problem-solving in a solution-focused manner. Professional skills in assessment, consultation, report writing, and action plan development began to emerge and the importance of such skills became more evident as casework became the responsibility of the intern. An awareness of systems work, time management and the importance of evaluating and processing learning were some of the many learning experiences gleaned from the internship placement in Spring term 1995 in West Essex, England.

## **PART II: RESEARCH COMPONENT**

# **Chapter 4 Comparative Analysis of the Assessment Practices of Educational Psychologists in St. John's, Newfoundland and West Essex, England**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The relationship between school psychology and assessment is one that is built into the historical tradition of the profession (Shinn, Rosenfield & Knutson, 1989). A primary responsibility of a school psychologist is to provide assessment services. Graduate training programmes in school psychology continue to promote assessment as an important function of the professional development and skills required within the field (Gutkin & Conoley, 1990). Further, the activities associated with assessment form the basis of contemporary research in school psychology (Gutkin & Conoley, 1990). Thus, assessment practices are a core element in educational psychology training, research and practice.

Interest in assessment procedures used within schools has grown as a result of the legal requirements for comprehensive and fair assessment of students in the

United States (Hurlow & Ysseldyke, 1982). Further, it is becoming more common that parents are better able to advocate for their children's educational rights to ensure that educational needs are met. Accountability has increasingly become a concern for educational psychologists. In line with this, the utility and effectiveness of standardized assessment is being questioned by researchers, school personnel and parents. Shinn (1989) reports that over the past 20 years, assessment practices have come under intense scrutiny and criticism. The purpose and effectiveness of assessment practices has emerged as a key issue in the literature.

As a consequence, the assessment roles and responsibilities of educational psychologists are being redefined. Throughout Canada and North America, we are witnessing trends that are departing from the historical notion of the school psychologist solely as a psychometrician (School Psychology in Newfoundland and Labrador, Policy Document, p.2). The practice of school psychology as a profession has expanded and diversified from its historical role of assessing special educational needs children for the purpose of placement (School Psychology in Newfoundland and Labrador, Policy Document, p.2). Educational psychology assessment practices continue to evolve. Even though, educational psychologists are no longer viewed as psychometricians, assessment practices remain as a fundamental component of their professional role.



Most psychologists view the profession as having achieved only a shadow of its potential. Visions of what school psychology should be and could be are not congruent with the reality of what school psychology has come to be (Gutkin & Conoley, 1990). One of the greatest difficulties facing the profession is the perceived ineffectiveness of many of the psychological interventions presently used within the school system.

Over the last several years there has developed substantial dissatisfaction with the use of norm-referenced, standardized tests for evaluating the academic performance of students (Shapiro, 1994). The assessment method required is one that provides information which is of value in determining students developmental and instructional levels, in evaluating curriculum placement and monitoring academic progress of students. This kind of information is considered to be much more practically based and is perceived as necessary in meeting students' needs within the school environment. Teachers report that an informal approach to assessment is more beneficial to instructional planning for students. In contrast, some research indicates that school psychologists continue to favour standardized tests almost to the exclusion of all other types of data (Shapiro & Eckert, 1994; Thurlow, Rosenfield, & Knutson, 1989). Thus, it appears that educational psychologists and teachers view the effectiveness of existing assessment practices

differently.

Regardless of the format of assessment practices, educational psychologists devote approximately 50% of their time to assessment (Hutton & Dubes, 1992). Assessment is not clearly defined or delineated in much of the literature. Research into the effectiveness of the various assessment practices of educational psychologists is warranted. Research concerning effective assessment methods and practices is important in terms of promoting accountability and increasing the success rate of psychological interventions within schools.

What is assessment? Assessment is broadly defined in the *Principles for Fair Student Assessment* (1993) as "the process of collecting and interpreting information that can be used to inform students and their parents/guardians where applicable about the progress that they are making toward attaining the knowledge, skills and attitudes and behaviours to be learned or acquired and to inform various personnel who make educational decisions (instructional, diagnostic, placement, promotion, graduation, curriculum planning, programme development, policy) about students"(p.3). Thus, assessment includes information gathering, collation, analysis, synthesis, evaluation and the subsequent actions determined by this process.

Research is emerging that indicates that informal or more curriculum -based assessment is a viable alternative to norm-referenced, standardized assessment

procedures. There are several models of curriculum-based assessment (CBA). Each model is grounded on the premise that a direct link must exist between instructional interventions and assessment practices (Shapiro & Erkert, 1993). A survey conducted by Shapiro and Erkert indicates that 46% of school psychologists are using some form of CBA. In another survey, the same authors reported that curriculum-based assessment was significantly and consistently rated as more acceptable than standardized tests by school psychologists (Shapiro & Erkert, 1994, p.176).

## **RATIONALE**

During the Winter 1995, the writer completed a 2 day per week practicum with the Roman Catholic School Board in St. John's, Newfoundland. During that placement, the student was exposed to the practices of educational psychologists within that educational jurisdiction. During Spring 1995 the writer obtained further practical professional development during a three month internship placement with the West Essex Educational Psychology Team. A research component was required to be completed within the context of the British internship placement. Because assessment is a core component of educational psychology in North America, a comparative analysis of the assessment practices of educational psychologists in St.

John's with the practices of educational psychologists in West Essex seemed appropriate as it provided an opportunity to compare service delivery models of psychological interventions in two educational systems. This comparison would provide valuable insights into the practices of educational psychologists in both settings. Further, it provided an opportunity to glean from both experiences the most beneficial assessment practices for pupils and for overall delivery of educational psychology services.

Increasingly, the assessment practices of educational psychologists are being researched and are now more open to debate and criticism. Although standardized tests do not directly provide the information necessary for instructional decisions, there is little information available on the extent to which teachers' reports and observational data can be used successfully to plan instructional programs. Further, educational psychologists within the United Kingdom have moved steadily away from an emphasis upon the "within child" explanations for success and failure in learning to a more "systems oriented" approaches that concentrate upon evaluating the total context in which learning is expected to occur (Burden, 1978). Issues that educational psychologists in Great Britain address often relate to classroom management and curriculum assessment rather than the constructs of intelligence and achievement. In contrast, the purpose of assessment in North America is often the

identification of an underlying construct or disability that interferes with the student's academic achievement (Knutson & Shinn, 1991).

Because of the differences in the focus of educational psychology, both in scope and orientation, between the Roman Catholic School Board in St. John's, Newfoundland and West Essex, England, much was learned through the experience of working in both settings. Further, interviews with individual educational psychologists regarding their assessment practices were valuable. The assessment practices of educational psychologists in St. John's Newfoundland and West Essex, England comprise the focus of this comparative analysis.

## **PROCEDURE**

The research project had two phases. Phase 1 was carried out in St. John's, Newfoundland and the second phase was conducted at Brays House, Tracey's Road, Harlow. A semi-structured interview format was developed (**Appendix A**). The questionnaire focused on the assessment process and the assessment practices of educational psychologists. More specifically, questions relating to the reasons for assessment referrals, the types of practices used in assessments, time management issues and the referral process were posed during the interviews and became the basis of the comparative analysis.

In total, eight educational psychologists were interviewed for this research project. Each interviewee signed a written consent agreeing to be interviewed, to be audio-taped, and for the subsequent information to be analyzed and quoted in this report (**Appendix B**). Permission to interview was also obtained from the employing institutions. The interviews were approximately twenty minutes in length. Each interviewee was presented with a standard set of questions during the interview. Each interview was audio-taped and the contents were later transcribed to form a data-base for this research project.

## **SAMPLE**

Eight educational psychologists presently employed in an educational setting were interviewed--four in St. John's, four in Harlow. Each of the four registered psychologists at the Roman Catholic School Board in St. John's were interviewed. One interviewee from this sample was the Co-ordinator for Guidance and Psychology Services with the Roman Catholic School Board. This psychologist has a caseload of pupils with severe emotional and behavioral difficulties as well.

The West Essex sample was selected based upon contact that the intern had with the interviewees within professional setting. Both English internship supervisor/psychologists were interviewed. Another educational psychologist was

selected because of his vast professional experiences in assessment practices. The Area Senior Psychologist was also interviewed as manager of the West Essex team, a parallel position to the Co-ordinator in St. John's.

In order to protect the identities of all interviewees, the sample from Newfoundland were given the descriptives Psychologists 1, 2, 3 and 4. The educational psychologists from the West Essex team were given the descriptives Psychologists A, B, C and D.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

### *Reasons For Assessments Referrals*

Educational psychologists at the Roman Catholic School Board in St. John's and in the West Essex Educational Psychology Service in Britain reported common reasons for psychological assessment referrals. Half of the educational psychologists reported that behavioral and learning/academic difficulties were the primary reason for assessment referral. Both an educational psychologist from the Roman Catholic School Board in St. John's and the West Essex Educational Psychology Service reported that schools come to them for advice regarding pupils needs (**Psychologist B**) and when {counsellors} are stumped and want a more indepth assessment (**Psychologist 2**). **Psychologist C** added that referrals are received when "the

schools feel that they've done sufficient work and are looking for something different for the pupils with special needs." **Psychologist 2** with the Roman Catholic School Board in St. John's additionally reported that he is responsible for all French Immersion pupils as well as pupils with neurological difficulties.

Educational psychologists in both settings are faced with similar types of educational difficulties and needs in terms of their caseload and casework. School personnel and parents require their expertise in the areas of learning and behavioral difficulties. However, the activities associated with determining the pupils needs and the subsequent actions associated with meeting these needs vary in terms of assessment procedures, time management and perceptions of successful educational psychology work.

### ***The Assessment Procedures Used***

Three of the educational psychologists at the Roman Catholic School Board in St. John's, Newfoundland reported that they use both informal and formal assessment procedures.

**Psychologist 2** "standardized assessment is a given. If they want an assessment, a large component is standardized...beyond that scope depending on what I'm looking for it could be standardized or informal."

**Psychologist 4** "informal assessment is initially used to collect information and from there it really depends on the issue as ...to the format of assessment I'll use."



**Psychologist 1** "I usually try to talk to the parents and interview the students and teachers to find out what the teacher is saying about the child. Then there are intelligence or ability tests. I usually use some kind of an intelligence or ability test when I doing a formal assessment and I always use some kind of an achievement test."

Educational psychologists' assessment reports at the Roman Catholic School Board in St. John's often require standardized or normed-referenced assessment measures such as an intelligence test and an achievement test. **Psychologist 2** raised an important point with regards to his reasoning for relying upon standardized measures. He explained that he is very comfortable with his informal assessment skills but you "still do {standardized tests} to protect yourself." Further, educational psychology assessment work in St. John's is dependent upon the results of initial standardized assessment. There is no planned format at the outset of the assessment (**Psychologist 1**). Both **Psychologist 2** and **4** reported similar approaches to assessment procedures.

In contrast, to the approaches of the above psychologists, **Psychologist 3** reported that she uses informal assessment procedures. "{Her} role is to bring school personnel...the counsellor...the special education teacher, and people from outside the school setting...Department of Social Services and the Community Health Department...and take all the information and pull it together to decide on what the more demanding needs of that child are with respect to an educational programme."

Thus, informal assessment and information gathering procedures are important to **Psychologist 3's** educational psychology work.

In contrast, three of the educational psychologists interviewed in West Essex reported that they rely heavily upon informal assessment techniques in assessing the needs of pupils. Formal assessment reports (Appendix F) which are often written by educational psychologists are based completely upon informal assessment measures. These informal assessment measures include such things as structured observation within the classroom, information gathering from teachers, and obtaining teachers', parents' and students' perspectives (**Psychologist A**). **Psychologist B** added that looking at the child's work, speaking to children about their perceptions of school and what they think their difficulties are, and relating this to what {she, the psychologist} sees in their school work and what their teacher tells {her} are important components. Then the psychologist puts all of this together, analyzes and comes up with recommendations related to the child's needs. In contrast, **Psychologist D** reported that he uses standardized assessment practices in his work, in terms of basic literacy and numeracy.

These differences in assessment practices can be explained to some degree by the differences in training orientation in North America and Great Britain. Educational psychologists in Great Britain are highly trained in informal assessment

measures. In contrast, North American training relies much more heavily upon standardized assessment. Experience and comfort in using assessment techniques (either formal or informal) dictate their use by individual psychologists. In each setting, 3 of the 4 psychologists interviewed relied heavily on one type of assessment procedure and in each setting, there was one psychologist that employed a different philosophy and approach to assessment.

#### ***Time Devoted To Formalized Assessment And Report Writing***

Educational psychologists at the Roman Catholic School Board in St. John's, Newfoundland reported that the time they spend assessing pupils varies. The amount of time devoted to formalized assessment ranged from 20% to 50%. In contrast, **Psychologist 3** reported that 90% of the time is involved in conducting informal assessment. This psychologist does not employ formalized assessment due to the nature of her position. Standardized assessment is completed before she receives the referral which initiates her involvement.

In West Essex, formalized assessment take up much less of the educational psychologists' time. On average, 10% (range 5% to 15%) of time management is devoted to assessment. **Psychologist C** included consultation time and observation time and concluded that 50% of overall time is devoted to assessment both informal

*and formal in nature.*

Thus, it is logical that the number of formalized assessments with reports completed each year is drastically different for educational psychologists in West Essex and St. John's, Newfoundland. Educational psychologists in St. John's complete on average 50-75 assessments with reports each year. In West Essex, the educational psychologists reported a significantly lower number of formal assessments (Appendix F). On average, the psychologists within the West Essex team complete 6 formalized assessments with reports each year. In Essex, educational psychologists work with the schools to meet pupils' special education needs. However, special educational needs are met without the reliance upon standardized and formal assessments. Needs are addressed through consultation with parents and staff and through observation and interaction with the pupil within the context of the classroom.

This lower number of reports completed by the West Essex team is consistent with the Warnock Report (1978) which stated that only 2% of pupils with special educational needs in England require a "Statement of Special Educational Needs." Further, the mandate and framework of educational psychology work in Britain differs significantly from that in North America.

### ***School Board/Local Education Authority Referral Process***

Educational psychologists in St John's, Newfoundland and Great Britain work within very different frameworks in terms of structure and process. In Great Britain, educational psychology work is dictated by the *1994 Code of Practice*. Under this Code, educational psychology work is closely tied to the statutory requirements of identification and provision for special educational needs. Educational psychology work in St. John's has evolved differently. It is not guided by legislative directives. Work in Newfoundland is closely tied to the mandate and needs as determined by the employing school board. Educational psychologists with the Roman Catholic School Board of St. John's work within a framework for accepting referrals for assessment. In St. John's **Psychologist 3**, Co-ordinator for Guidance and Psychology Services described the process as:

"When children first present themselves as having difficulties with the standard programme...at the level of the classroom teacher, he or she will try to address the problem through consultation with other teachers at a grade level meeting...consultation with the parent and the teacher would have taken place and, depending upon the child's needs....consultation with the special education teacher as well, to suggest ways of dealing with the problem. Once these things have been tried, and if the decision is--that there has not been progress, it would go to the principal. The principal would then call a Programme Planning Team(PPT) meeting or a STAT meeting, most often the school counsellor is involved. It may be decided at that point whether informal but a more focused assessment is done, looking at work samples of the child....conducting more interviews with outside agencies possibly. At that level, the educational psychologist, might be involved.

**Psychologist 1** continued to describe the referral process: "The school must invite the educational psychologist to a PPT meeting or to review the minutes of the PPT meeting including the parental consent and the completed parental questionnaire. A PPT referral form from the school must be completed and sent to the educational psychologist." **Psychologist 2** added that he requires the school to send full file information. He then goes on to check medical information. "To do a decent (assessment), you need all those forms completed and be certain that process has taken place." **Psychologist 1** reported that the standard referral form states what has been done already, what the child's problems are, what his needs are, what his strengths are...grades repeated, and if he has had therapy or psychological assessment. Therefore, in order to obtain psychological assessment in this setting, information must be collected and collated by the school personnel. However, **Psychologist 4** reported that this process is often bypassed. He is more interested in obtaining anecdotal information by talking and note taking rather than by utilizing the referral form which is primarily a checklist. At times referrals are not accepted due to lack of information.

In contrast, each educational psychologist at West Essex provided a very similar description of the referral process that is employed by the Educational

Psychology Service in Essex. The roles and responsibilities of educational psychologists within this setting are dictated by the *Education Act* (1989), the *Code of Practice* (1994) and the *Essex Stages of Assessment* (1994).

The referral process employed by the West Essex team is briefly outlined..

"We have a staged assessment procedure which has been laid down in the Code of Practice. There are five stages. Stage 1 and 2 are really school based stages where the responsibilities are with the class subject teachers and special needs co-ordinators working with parents to ensure that the programmes are appropriate. At Stage 3...the educational psychologist is most likely to be directly involved, although at any stage the psychologist can be consulted. At Stage 3, there would be a discussion, looking at the school's records and then I would do some observation in the classroom and that would initially be fairly loose ...seeing how the child is managing....how adults respond to child. ...There is a process of ongoing assessment and reviews and the frequency of {involvement} would depend on the case and the targets...set. For some children you may go forward to a statutory assessment. In which case nothing terribly different happens...because you have done a lot of work before that stage in order to come up with that decision" (**Psychologist A**).

Stage 3 review information regarding particular pupils is forwarded to the educational psychologist assigned to that particular school. Educational psychologists are consulted during school visits about the pupil's educational progress and needs in relation to the review process. **Psychologist C** explained that when

"a kiddie is first placed on Stage 3, I would say let's look at the documentation. ...let's look at what you've done at Stage 1 and 2...what have the reviews said? what are the parents views?...the IEP and how has it been monitored? Often my involvement is to tell them what they could be doing further... If they have done what you want them to do at Stage 3 and there is still minimal progress, I might be involved in terms of doing some class observation. It would depend on what the purpose of the referral

is. I might look at their books, seeing where the IEP is appropriate ...problem-solving with the teacher...possibly working with the youngster...in a solution-focused manner. If after some time, and I'm still concerned, the school is still concerned and the parents are still concerned that the {pupil} is still not making progress at Stage 3 and the programmes are appropriate then there might be a consideration that we need to go on to Stage 4 or not. Similarly, if they are making progress on the programmes...encourage some active thinking about moving back to stage 2.

Educational psychologists in Great Britain work within a framework which places a great deal of responsibility upon the personnel that work directly with the pupil. Further, the framework provides the educational psychologist with a manageable level of casework and protects the EPS system from being overwhelmed with referrals. The process for assessment is much longer than that employed in Newfoundland in terms of ongoing assessment, reviews, evaluation, monitoring and general involvement. Nevertheless, the British system attempts to provide all children with special needs with the professional and educational services necessary, in a manner that best meets their special educational needs.

#### ***Definition of Success Upon Completion Of An Assessment***

Educational psychologists in St. John's, Newfoundland and West Essex, England focus upon different aspects of their work in defining success. Two of the educational psychologists in St. John's defined success in terms of accurately describing the child so that their findings "confirm what the teacher feels"



**(Psychologist 1)**. Further, **Psychologist 2** added that it is also rewarding to be "able to pinpoint something that someone has overlooked." Two of the educational psychologists defined success in terms of possible outcomes or possible action as a result of an assessment. **Psychologist 3** defined success as "the identification of an approach for the child that is arrived at through the involvement of parents...that the child has a new sense that there is a caring concern and genuine effort to address his needs and his experience of school is a little more positive one."

Educational psychologists in West Essex report that success is closely tied with identifying pupils' needs and identifying appropriate provision to ensure these needs are met. **(Psychologist A and Psychologist C)**. **Psychologist B** added that in order to be successful, "the pupils are able to make progress at a level that is appropriate for them and that the people working with the child feel that they know what they are doing.. and the parents feel happy about the provision that has been made."

Educational psychology work in West Essex goes beyond the level of identification. Not only are needs identified in this system, but the statutory and legislative mandate is that educational psychology service delivery be provided. This legislative provision outlines how educational needs as identified by the psychologist are to be met. There is a legal requirement to ensure that these needs

are met. In contrast, educational psychologists at the Roman Catholic School Board in St. John's, Newfoundland, identify educational needs, however, subsequent action regarding provision for these needs is dependent upon the availability of the school's professional and financial resources.

#### **LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH**

There are several significant limitations in this research project. Difficulties with the questionnaire format, lack of experiential knowledge concerning the educational system in England, as well as other issues are described.

#### ***Questionnaire***

The focus of this research was assessment practices of educational psychologists within two different educational settings. The questionnaire was developed during the Winter Term 1995. At that time, the format for questions was drawn from practicum experience at the Roman Catholic School Board in St. John's, Newfoundland. At that point, very little was known concerning the British educational system. Therefore, the research information gathering process drew heavily upon the prior practicum experience. Thus, during the interview process in England, it became apparent that some of the interview questions were not applicable

and that others were not effective in terms of obtaining relevant information about issues relating to assessment practices within that educational setting. For example, educational psychologists in Great Britain work with pupils with special educational needs only. Thus, the first question about reasons for assessment referrals was irrelevant. Further, in England, it is the educational psychologist himself/herself decides that a child should move on to Stage 4 (a statutory assessment). Thus, no one in the educational system refers pupils for psychological assessment in the manner that referrals are made in Newfoundland. In Essex, pupils' needs may require an educational psychologist's input but this does not necessarily result from a referral for assessment.

### ***Framework of Educational Psychology Work***

These differences in assessment practices are the result of different frameworks of orientation. Educational psychology work in Great Britain is mostly dictated by the *Code of Practice (1994)*. Educational roles and responsibilities are clearly outlined by the mandate of this governmental legislation. In contrast, there are no provincial guidelines in terms of legislation to determine and monitor educational psychology in Newfoundland. There is, however, a draft document called *School Psychology in Newfoundland and Labrador Policy, Guidelines and*

*Professional Standards.* This document outlines the roles and responsibilities of government, school board, school personnel and the educational psychologist within a service delivery framework. However, this document is not a policy manual and does not provide precise directions to guide educational psychology practice. At times, during the analysis of interviews and the drawing from personal experiences during both practicum and internship, it was difficult to compare assessment practices because the settings were so vastly different in terms of support and structure.

### ***Questioning Skills of the Researcher***

The first set of interviews were conducting in April, 1995. The second set of interviews were conducted in June and July, 1995. During this time span, much knowledge was gained about assessment practices and the educational psychology profession. A knowledge-base developed during the intervening time. Thus, questions asked during the second set of interviews (in Great Britain) were more highly developed than those utilized in the interviews in St. John's. Further, several of the interviewees from both settings interpreted the questions in a somewhat unique manner, responding from a personal perspective, in retrospect, not providing information on issues relative to the research subject. For example, one psychologist

from St. John's did not describe the assessment practices that were employed during educational psychology work. Skills in interviewing and questioning evolved through time and with experience.

## **SUMMARY**

Educational psychologists in both West Essex, England and St. John's, Newfoundland reported common reasons for assessment referrals. Educational psychologists in St. John's reported that they rely on both informal and formal assessment procedures. In contrast, educational psychologists in West Essex rely almost exclusively on informal assessment procedures in their work. In each setting, there was an educational psychologist whose assessment practices were dissimilar to that of his/her colleagues. Educational psychologists devote much more time to assessment and report writing in Newfoundland than do their English counterparts. This difference can be explained to some degree by the differences in structure and direction of educational psychology services delivery as dictated by legislation in Great Britain.

Differences in time management are also apparent in the referral process employed by each group. The West Essex team has a clear mandate regarding their involvement in intervention within the school system. In St. John's, educational

psychology is less structured and is dictated to a greater degree by the school board and school administrators. Educational psychology work in St. John's is determined by the approaches that psychologists' develop to allow them to individually work most efficiently with schools.

Educational psychologists in each setting define success differently. Educational psychologists in Newfoundland define success in terms of accurately describing the student's educational functioning. An assessment is considered successful when remediation of problem(s) is facilitated because of assessment. In contrast, educational psychologists in West Essex consider an assessment successful when a pupils' needs have been identified and *appropriate provision has been determined*. Because the provision for needs is a British legislative mandate, children's educational needs are addressed beyond the definition of needs level. The educational psychologist is responsible to monitor the process. In Newfoundland, the provision of special educational needs is the responsibility of the school and is subject to resource allocation.

Limitations became obvious in the information gathering process linked to interviewing in both St. John's and West Essex, England. Although assessment practices in these settings differ in scope and orientation, both settings strive to meet children's needs in the best way possible, within the existing framework.

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## **APPENDIX A**

**Internship Research Component:  
Comparative Analysis of Assessment Practices used by Educational  
Psychologists in St. John's, Newfoundland  
and West Essex, England.  
*Interview Questions***

### **CLIENTELE**

- In your opinion, what are the most common reasons for referrals for assessment?  
    Who can be referred ?  
    What types of problems can be referred?

### **SERVICE DELIVERY**

- What are the assessment procedures that you most commonly use in your work? (Informal, Formal)
- What activities are involved in completing assessments?
- How much time in hours do you spend each week devoted to assessments?
- How many formalized assessments with reports do you complete each year?
- What do you consider a successful outcome after you have completed an assessment?

### **REFERRAL PROCESS**

- Could you outline the referral process within this school board/local education authority.

### **EVALUATION**

- What is your evaluation of this referral system employed by your school board/ local education authority?
- Any comments related to the assessment procedures employed within the context of your roles and responsibilities as an educational psychologist?

## **APPENDIX B Consent of Educational Psychologists to Participate in Research**

### **LETTER-ST JOHN'S**

Dear Educational Psychologist,

We are Educational Psychology Graduate students in the Faculty of Education at Memorial University of Newfoundland. With the Faculty of Education's approval, we are conducting research concerning Educational Psychologist's experience in the areas of assessment and consultation. The data collected will be used in comparative analysis research components of our respective internship reports.

Central to our research is the gathering Educational Psychologist's views concerning assessment and consultation. To do this, we wish to interview four (4) educational psychologists in St. John's, Newfoundland, and four (4) educational psychologists in Harlow, Essex, England. The interview, approximately 25-35 minutes in length, will pertain to such things as: the role and responsibilities of the school psychologist in St. John's and Harlow, and assessment and consultation as it relates to the educational psychologist. Upon completion of this research, we will include our findings in our respective internship reports. It is expected that such a comparative analysis of the Newfoundland and British Education system will benefit practitioners by presenting information that they may not personally have access to.

The information gathered in this interview will not reference any school or students within the school board. The interviewer do, however, seek permission of the interviewees to identify and quote said participants. We also request permission to audio-tape each interview to ensure accurate transcriptions of the interview information.

This letter is to ask you to participate in an interview. We would appreciate you help, but you are certainly under no obligation to give your consent. The results of this study will be made available upon request. If you are in agreement with being interviewed, please sign below and return one copy to the interviewers ( the other copy is yours). If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Dale McLean

Christopher Mercer

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I, \_\_\_\_\_, hereby agree to be interviewed for the research project on educational psychological assessment and consultation undertaken by Dale McLean and Christopher Mercer. I understand that participation is voluntary, and I can withdraw from the interview at any time. No individuals (except the interviewee) or schools will be identified, and I give permission to be audiotape and quoted in any research article produced.

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Interviewee's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

## LETTER-WEST ESSEX

Educational Psychologist  
 Formal Assessment and Evaluation Service  
 Harlow, West Essex.

Ms. Dale McLellan, Educational Psychology Intern  
 Mr. Christopher Mercer, Educational Psychology Intern  
 Memorial University of Newfoundland, Harlow Campus  
 The Malings, Old Harlow  
 Essex,

Dear

Please consider our request to interview you as one (1) of four (4) Educational Psychologists with the Formal Assessment and Evaluation Service, Brays House, Tracey's Road, Harlow, Essex. Our research is designed to be a qualitative comparative analysis of the Assessment and Consultative practices of Educational Psychologists in St. John's and Harlow, Essex. The information collected through interviews will form the basis of the research components for our respective final Masters of Educational Psychology Internship Reports, required for the fulfilment of our Masters programmes. The complete interview time is from 30-40 minutes, and will be conducted at Bray's House.

As our research is qualitative, we are requesting that each interviewee agree to be identified by name and quoted in the final research document. To ensure accuracy and efficiency, we are also requesting permission to audiotape the interviews for detailed analysis. Any references identifying individual students, parents, teachers, administrative staff, or individual schools will be omitted. You are under no obligation to participate, and can withdraw your support at any time. Copies of the final report will be made available to you, the other interviewees and the Local Education Authority.

Interviews conducted in April 1995 with Educational Psychologists in St. John's are in the process of transcription and analysis. We are planning to have our respective final reports completed by September 1st, 1995. Copies of the questionnaire are included in your files. If you have any concerns or queries, please contact us at 0279-430266. To facilitate the scheduling of interviews, we are asking that you fill in two (2) possible interview times at the bottom of this page, from which we can negotiate a session. Please forward your response to either Dale or Chris. Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

Dale McLellan

Christopher Mercer

**Preferred Interview Appointment:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Alternative Interview Appointment:** \_\_\_\_\_







