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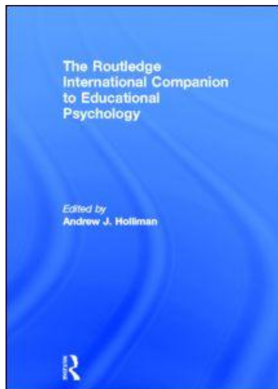

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3

INTRODUCTION TO EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY PRACTICE

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The term 'educational psychology' is in itself something of a 'puzzle' for, as James (2001: 3) once said, 'Psychology is a science and teaching is an art'. So, it is important from the outset to appreciate that any combination of these two will clearly call for a unique blend of scientific knowledge and skilled applied practice. Thus, unlike some of their laboratory-bound colleagues, educational psychologists are 'applied scientists' working across the social contexts of the school, the family, and society. Educational psychology, like education itself, is influenced by both political and societal factors and this becomes particularly evident when looking at the broader, international picture where even the 'prevalence' of educational psychologists is quite diverse: while countries such as the USA, Finland, Denmark, and France report a significant presence of educational psychologists, Jimerson and his colleagues found that in German and Italian schools, educational psychologists are 'almost non-existent' (Jimerson et al. 2008: 22). Boyle and Lauchlan's chapter on *A comparative overview of educational psychology across continents* (Chapter 4, this volume) looks in greater depth at this international perspective while the present chapter focuses primarily on the many changes that have taken place in England in response to government directives, and highlights the current 'shifting sand' nature of the job and the resulting reports of low confidence within the profession (Boyle and Lauchlan 2009).

Despite clear published guidance on occupational standards (British Psychological Society, 2006), there is barely an educational psychology book published, or an in-service training session held, that does not begin by asking the question: 'What do educational psychologists do?' Indeed, educational psychologists themselves could be accused of encouraging this 'professional inquisition' by their seemingly persistent introspection of their own role in a way that would be unheard of in any other professional group – lawyers, for instance. Rather than promulgating such self-critical 'navel-gazing', this chapter looks more positively at the valuable role educational psychologists can play in:

- assessment
- collaborative work
- problem solving
- research
- training.

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It concludes by considering the future of the profession, both nationally and internationally, in an ever-shifting socio-political climate.

Assessment

From the earliest days of educational psychology, the profession has been associated with 'testing'. This association, and particularly the association with 'psychometric' testing, has however consistently attracted negative comments which, interestingly, in the main appear to emanate from within the profession itself.

Cyril Burt was, and probably remains, the best known of all British educational psychologists. His early work in the 1920s set a 'template' where formal, individual assessments came to be seen as the cornerstone of educational psychologists' work. Burt's earliest assessments were, however, based on a 'deficit' medical model where psychometric tests were used primarily to identify the 'feeble-minded' who were deemed to be in need of 'care' rather than 'education'. Later, when he turned his attentions to more able children, Burt championed the 11+ examination which 'filtered out' children who, regardless of their social class, would benefit from an academic education. At both stages of his career, Burt's test results were wholly influential in decisions regarding school-placements.

However, in the 1960s, there was growing research into the multiple factors 'external' to the child that can affect learning. Assessment began to move away from testing 'within-child' abilities and educational psychologists no longer arrived in school carrying a 'black bag' with a standardized intelligence test. They began instead to focus on a broader assessment of the child's 'life experience' by undertaking observations, recording notes of classroom behaviour, evaluating teaching/learning styles and conducting interviews with pupils, teachers, and parents. However, despite this reported 'surge' in more 'holistic' assessments, a recent international survey of school psychologists across some 48 countries reported that intelligence testing was still the most frequently used form of assessment worldwide (Jimerson, Oakland, and Yu 2010). Thus, it would seem, the public perception of the role remains largely unchanged: educational psychologists are still seen as 'testers'; and, in particular, 'intelligence testers'. It is therefore no surprise that today's highly trained body of educational psychologists continues to report in dismay that 'all teachers, parents and psychiatrists ever want to know is "What is the child's IQ?"' (Burden 1973: 8).

The role of the educational psychologist in the statutory process was, and indeed still is, to provide an assessment of a child's special educational needs and to make recommendations on how these needs can be addressed. There is recurring evidence that teachers and other professionals greatly value the unique role played by the educational psychologists in these individual assessments. So why, when their work in dealing with often complex individual casework is held in such high esteem by 'other' professionals, do many educational psychologists themselves not share this view? Perhaps it could be that educational psychologists themselves continue to see this form of assessment as identifying 'deficits' (Webster et al. 2003), and are trying to steer away from the 'treadmill of psychometric testing' (Love 2009: 5). Miller and Frederikson (2006) suggest that this 'reluctance' may stem from another 'negative' side-effect of such testing whereby the stereotype of an assessor who uses only psychometric testing has become synonymous with that of a 'resources gatekeeper' with the subtle inference that, when additional resourcing from the local authority is not recommended, educational psychologists may simply be protecting their employers' (i.e. the local authority's) budgets (Love 2009). This may offer some explanation for the almost 'guilty by association' mindset that exists within the profession whereby equating 'individual casework' with 'psychometric tests' results in the inherent supposition that psychometric testing should be seen as 'a bad thing' (Boyle and Lauchlan 2009).

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The recent Green Paper (Department for Education, 2011), in proposing 'developmental surveillance' of children under the age of five years, would seem to have an inherent assumption that early, timely intervention will significantly lessen the former need for formal assessments. Any reduction in statutory assessment work then should be heralded as professionally 'liberating' for educational psychologists, allowing them 'to use their psychological skills more effectively' (Farrell et al. 2006: 4). Yet such reduction would seem to imply the question, 'Does denying psychometric or cognitive assessment always prove to be as liberating for the pupil?' It remains to be seen whether removing statutory assessments, which have often resulted in the award of additional local authority funding, is more a reflection of fast-growing budgetary constraints than a genuinely benign move towards identifying and meeting the needs of children at a younger age.

Whether scores on standardized tests of cognitive ability have any validity in 'predicting' subsequent academic attainment is also still hotly debated, but to vilify testing, and psychometric testing in particular, could be throwing the baby out with the bath water. Psychometric testing requires a carefully managed blend of science and art. It demands a keen understanding of the procedures and purposes of the test materials; specific interpersonal and observational skills when working one-to-one with pupils who may be young, disaffected, less able, or non-communicative; a sound knowledge of how to analyse and interpret data; and an ability to present this in a way that will be clear to those who may or may not have a full understanding of a pupils' needs (such as other professionals and parents).

The work of the educational psychologist has without doubt evolved from the early days when, line-managed by a County 'Medical' rather than a County 'Education' Officer, educational psychologists were merely 'IQ providers' (Love 2009) charged only with determining whether a child was 'educable'. In identifying a particular cognitive profile in those with complex needs, the educational psychologist in today's multi-disciplinary team not only can make a unique contribution to the diagnosis of a range of developmental disorders (see Section 4, this volume) and syndromes (e.g. Williams syndrome, foetal alcohol syndrome, and Tourette's syndrome) but can also take an active role in identifying the most effective intervention.

Collaborative work

The death of eight year old Victoria Climbie in 2000 led to a UK government-commissioned inquiry (Laming 2003), which highlighted and criticized the lack of appropriate training and liaison between professionals working with children and young people. The resulting report (Department for Education and Skills, DfES 2003) focused on the holistic needs of children and young people with the specific requirement that support services should be restructured into collaborative, community-based Children's Services.

Although, to the untrained eye, the work undertaken in these new multi-disciplinary teams appears little different from that carried out by the former Educational Psychology Services, educational psychologists now find themselves with a far broader remit: working with fostering and adoption teams, with youth offending services, with Child and Adolescent Mental Health (CAMHS) teams and in residential children's homes. The 'change' then, as Fallon and her colleagues suggest, may simply be that these opportunities for educational psychologists to undertake their customary broad range of work now occur 'systemically rather than opportunistically' (Fallon, Woods, and Rooney 2010: 13).

Internationally, the majority of psychologists are still based within the health-care (rather than the education) sector (Jimerson et al. 2008). So it may be that these newly formed Children's Services teams in England and Wales are bringing British-based psychologists more in line with

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their international colleagues by enabling them to work with professionals from a broad range of disciplines (e.g. health, social services, and law). In so doing, Fallon and her colleagues suggest, educational psychologists not only develop unique 'pragmatic coherence' skills by 'bridge-building' across these agencies but can often exert significant influence on decision-making in terms of educational, care, and mental health provision and placement because of their valuable knowledge of the resources available within a given local authority (Fallon et al. 2010).

Working in this new way with teams from very different professional backgrounds, however, clearly demands a more flexible, coordinated service delivery and unsurprisingly this new way of working has not been without its problems. Despite efforts to 'pull together' professionals from different disciplines, physically (by combining office accommodation) as well as philosophically, Cameron et al. (2008: 259) believe that the advent of integrated children's services in local authorities has resulted in a 'less distinctive' professional identity for educational psychologists. This viewpoint is supported by concerns that the new breadth of educational psychology work, across different contexts and fulfilling different functions, may cause confusion 'within' the profession itself. Reports that many educational psychologists insist they need to maintain their professionalism through regular contact with other educational psychologists emphasizes the 'challenge of collaborating' when educational psychologists working with colleagues from very different backgrounds need to learn the 'language' of these other professionals and to accommodate different professional cultures, visions, and legislative imperatives: a challenge that has proved to be 'at once stimulating and rewarding and sometimes frustrating and exhausting' (Fallon et al. 2010: 13).

Problem solving

If the demands for statutory assessments following the 1981 and 1983 Education and Science Acts (Department for Education and Science, 1981, 1983) may have 'limited' the educational psychologists' role (Farrell et al. 2006), then it seems the introduction of the new multi-disciplinary teams may once again enable educational psychologists to use their professional skill more fully by not only contributing to the identification of problems but also promoting new initiatives to address them.

Traditionally, educational psychologists have worked alongside schools to address problems and implement change. Yet, following the *Every Child Matters* (ECM) initiative (DfES 2004) comes the acknowledgement that children's lives are split between school and home and that events in one environment can impact significantly on events in the other (see Lewis, Miell, and Coiffait, Chapter 12, this volume). In line with the ECM focus on the child, rather than focusing solely on the school system, educational psychologists have now begun to employ a range of 'systemic therapies' working across the broader 'systems' of the school, the home and the community.

Fox (2009), however, notes some confusion (even among educational psychologists themselves) regarding the distinction between 'system work' and 'systemic therapy'. Whereas traditional 'system work' focused on organizational change, the newer 'systemic therapies' set out to identify the roles played by individuals within a given community. For example, structural family therapy (Cottrell and Boston 2002) can identify whether problematic behaviour in school or at home arises as a result of blurred boundaries between parent and child, while narrative therapy (White and Epston 1990) highlights the damaging 'person as a problem' effect of using terminology such as 'she is dyslexic' or 'he is autistic'. Although educational psychologists' use of therapies such as these is still comparatively rare, Pellegrini (2009: 281) found solution-focused brief therapy (SFBT) to be 'a clear favourite of educational psychologists' possibly, he suggests, because

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SFBT demands only a comparatively short-term commitment and is, understandably perhaps, a form of intervention that is obviously more 'attractive' to a profession already over-burdened with heavy caseloads.

Research

In England, these changes to the delivery of educational psychology services coincided with the long-awaited, much-debated introduction of a three-year doctoral training route for all new educational psychologists. The titles of several of the programmes, such as the University of East London's *Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology*, make it clear that educational psychologists are now fully trained, competent 'applied' psychologists who will use their research-based knowledge in a working arena far wider than the former close focus on schooling. Interestingly, in Scotland, although there is currently no requirement for doctoral-level qualification, the choice of the term 'psychological services' rather than 'school' or 'educational psychological services' has for some time identified this broader role of the psychologist both within and beyond the education system. The Currie Report (Scottish Executive Education Department 2002), perhaps pre-empting legislation elsewhere in the UK, had clearly outlined the five functions of work (assessment, intervention, consultation, training, and research) that should be delivered at the level of the individual child or family, at the level of the school or establishment such as a children's home, at a post-school level (i.e. in a young offender unit) and at the level of the local authority (Mackay 2009).

The demand for a doctoral training route in England arose in part from comparisons between the parallel people-centred professions of education and medicine: Webster and Beveridge (1997) noted in particular the differing attitudes to research between the two professions. They found that in medicine there was a constant search by practitioners for better diagnoses, more efficient interventions and more effective treatments. Conversely, educational research was usually carried out by academics and neither disseminated in schools nor valued by teachers. So educational psychologists with their scientific training and their propensity to 'oil the wheels' between pupils and teachers, schools and homes, schools and local fund holders were in an ideal position to 'negotiate and design research briefs, prepare bids and secure funding, implement, administer, commission, evaluate research' (Webster and Beveridge, 1997: 161) and so enhance the quality of teaching and learning in schools. Burden (1994) had earlier taken a similar viewpoint and proposed two types of research that should be endemic in educational psychology work: the first, 'process–product' focuses on linear causality between variables and the second, 'interpretative meaning' focuses on the views and the context of the clients themselves.

However, despite the increasing and seemingly convincing calls for the profession to be research-based (Edwards 2002), there is to date a noticeable dearth of evidence that research has taken any 'priority' in the profession. As Boyle and Lauchlan (2009) ask: why, if educational psychologists are fortunate enough to study their discipline not once, but twice at university (i.e. at graduate 'and' postgraduate level), are they not researching and applying their discipline? It may be that once admitted to the profession many educational psychologists find their aspirations to continue research and apply psychology in educational settings are thwarted by administrative work, statutory assessments, and endless meetings (Webster, Hingley, and Franey 2000). Or it could be, as one study noted, the continuing 'preference' of some local authorities to call upon the services of external academic consultants to carry out school-based research and evaluation work (Eodanable 2005).

Whatever the reason, the increasing demand for accountability in the caring professions, coupled with the requirement since 2009 for educational psychologists in the UK to be legally

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registered with the Health Professions Council, would suggest that the practice of applied or practitioner psychologists not only can but should emulate that of their medical colleagues, in that research should indicate the evidence on which they base their practice. Educational psychologists' professional practice must reflect the best available research evidence and the interventions they recommend or initiate should be monitored using appropriate outcome measures.

However, as Cameron et al. (2008: 266) suggest, the task of making the link between research and the 'often-messy demands of the real world . . . requires considerable creativity and high level communication skills' and, it could be argued, a high level of appropriate professional training.

Training

The debate concerning educational psychology training was waged for years both within and outside the profession. The final decision that there should be 'only' one, doctoral training route (in England) was in response to widespread demands for a greater depth of training that would bring educational psychologists in line with their clinical psychology and medical colleagues. Yet, particularly at a time when there is clear evidence that as few as 20 percent of other countries demand, or indeed offer, doctoral training for school psychologists (Jimerson et al. 2010), the question must be asked: Has the doctoral training really addressed the former concerns that educational psychologists lacked not only the training but the confidence to emulate the practices of their clinical and medical colleagues (Webster et al. 2003)? The answer would seem to be that for newly qualifying trainees it has: reports indicate they are confident in negotiating and designing research briefs and securing funding to implement, evaluate, and communicate their research. However, Monsen et al. (2009) found that educational psychologists who qualified prior to 2006 were still reluctant to undertake research and tended to pass any applied research work to psychology graduates who are working (prior to joining a doctoral training programme) as Assistant Psychologists in the same Educational Psychology Service (EPS).

This reluctance of some educational psychologists to undertake research, Eodanable and Lauchlan (2009) suggest, emphasizes the need for 'research training' programmes to form a regular part of continuing professional development, and that this training should be monitored by the profession's regulatory body, the Health Professions Council. However, as Cameron and his colleagues (2008) comment, there is little incentive for educational psychologists to undertake research training when many local authorities are now disbanding EPS teams and for the individual educational psychologists there is little hope of promotion or any immediate financial reward.

Conclusion

In a paper aptly named *Educational psychologists: the early search for an identity*, Love (2009: 7) cites three topical questions facing educational psychologists some 60 years ago, namely:

- What can you do that no-one else can do?
- Who is the client?
- Who needs Local Education Authority Psychological Services?

Although this chapter began by suggesting that the questions today are little different, the answers would seem both to reflect and to anticipate some significant changes in the profession of educational psychology as a whole.

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What can you do that no-one else can do?

Despite continuing debate, to Fallon et al. (2010: 14) the main role of the educational psychologist is clear: educational psychologists are 'fundamentally scientist-practitioners who utilize psychological skills, through consultation, assessment, intervention, research and training, at different levels (organisational, group or individual) across educational, community and care settings, with a variety of role partners'. This chapter has demonstrated that the 'unique' blend of these high-level skills firmly establishes why educational psychologists are professionally qualified and strategically placed to do what 'no-one else can do'.

Who is the client?

The Lamb Inquiry (Department for Children, Schools and Families, DCSF, 2009) investigated ways in which the Special Educational Needs assessment process might be improved and recommended that parents should have 'direct' access to the multi-agency teams working with children and young people. Historically, the work of the educational psychologist has been primarily school-based, working with children, their parents and their teachers, so educational psychologists have always had a unique and 'strategic vantage point' standing between education and the wider community and so have always been in a prime position to alert the education service 'to the community's needs and in particular to the needs of the underprivileged' (Loxley 1978: 103). Educational psychologists may then already be 'ahead of the game' in that their traditional role in working 'with' parents and teachers 'for' the benefit of children and young people indicates they have always had a clear professional understanding of 'who the client is'.

Who needs LEA psychological services?

With a growing number of educational psychologists undertaking expert witness work in educational tribunals and civil law cases (Ireland 2008), there seems good evidence that educational psychology services are 'needed'; what seems less certain at the present time is whether the majority of these services will, necessarily, remain within the jurisdiction of local authorities. The House of Commons Select Committee report on Special Educational Needs (DCSF, 2009) made strong recommendations that an evaluation of a number of different educational psychology service models should be carried out. In response to this, the Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP, 2010) has outlined a range of models whereby educational psychologists would work as now for local authorities but with a service-level agreement between the EPS and local authority that 'guarantees' the EPS has independence in providing advice: it can only be hoped that this may, perhaps, finally rid the profession of its historic 'gatekeeper to resource' label. Alternatively, educational psychologists may be employed in a 'stand alone' service where a local authority 'buys in' their services, yet this is questioned by Fallon et al. (2010) in their observation that there will be less money held centrally within a local authority to 'buy in' these traditional services. As some practitioners in private practice are already reporting an increase in appointments in maintained schools, it seems that the third option of a 'genuine private company' that is fully independent of the local authority may be a real possibility. However, it remains to be seen if these services will be 'publicly funded' as the AEP advocates. So while there is little doubt as to 'who "needs" psychological services?' perhaps the question should be rephrased to ask 'who will actually be able to "access" psychological services?'

This change in how EPS are commissioned will bring into sharp focus the need for regular evaluation of work in relation to its effectiveness in improving outcomes for children and young

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people. While there are 'clear parallels' between the range of practices apparent today and that of Burt some 90 years ago (Frederikson and Miller 2008: 7), the arguments for and against individual casework continue and, have contributed in no small way to the eternal frustration within the profession (Leadbetter 2000). Yet such 'casework', so positively valued by other professionals, can bring together every aspect of the educational psychologist's skill as assessor, collaborator, problem solver, trainer, and researcher and, in future, with more emphasis on multi-disciplinary and multi-agency working, it seems plausible there will be more opportunities for such 'unique' casework. It would, then, seem perverse, at a time when 'accountability' is paramount, for educational psychologists to move away from an area of work where they are so highly valued; as Boyle and Lauchlan (2009: 76) suggest, 'EPs [educational psychologists] may seem like "turkeys voting for Christmas" if they dismiss their unique professional value in individual assessment and casework'. So what is the future for educational psychologists, not only in England and Wales, but for the profession as a whole?

The profession of psychology, and particularly educational or school psychology, is relatively young and, in many parts of the world, still emerging and, Hall and Altmaier (2008) warn, there is a pressing need for universally agreed standards in recruitment, training and practice within the profession. However, it would seem that such 'global' standards for educational psychology practice may first require educational psychologists in England and Wales to undertake a more productive form of 'professional navel-gazing'. Relatively recently the American psychologist, Martin Seligman, used the term 'Positive Psychology' to address the seemingly intransient 'deficit' model with the aim of changing the focus of psychology 'from preoccupation only with repairing the worst things in life to also building positive qualities' (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi 2000: 5). Educational psychologists impact on the lives of the children and young people with whom they work, but if they are to realize their own unique and very specific worth as scientific practitioners in the new era of multi-professional, multi-national working, then perhaps they now need to adopt the mantra of Positive Psychology for themselves.

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