A Study of Role and Function Differences Between School Psychologists Working Within the Flexible Service Delivery System and More Traditional Settings

Jaime L. Hahn
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This research is a product of the graduate program in School Psychology at Eastern Illinois University. Find out more about the program.

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A Study of Role and Function Differences Between School Psychologists Working Within the Flexible Service Delivery System and More Traditional Settings

BY
Jaime L. Hahn

THESIS
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
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A Study of Role and Function Differences
Between School Psychologists Working Within the
Flexible Service Delivery System and More Traditional Settings

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Abstract

Practicing school psychologists were surveyed including those working within the Flexible Service Delivery System (FSDS) and traditional settings. The questionnaires were completed by 91 school psychologists from throughout Illinois and Indiana. Participants completed questionnaires examining their specific role and function as a practicing school psychologist. Specific roles that each respondent was asked to rank used a Likert scale consisting of (1) Standardized Testing, (2) Curriculum Based Assessment, (3) Individual Therapy, (4) Group Therapy/Social Skills Training, (5) Consultation with Teachers, (6) Consultation with Parents, (7) Organizational Consultation, (8) Conducting Research, (9) Classroom Intervention, (10) Pre-referral Meetings, (11) Psychological Reports, and (12) Participation in IEP Meetings. Results include traditional psychologists reporting higher ratings than FSDS psychologists in conducting assessment, writing psychological reports, and participation IEP meetings. Further, results show FSDS psychologists rated they spent more time collecting CBA data than traditional psychologists. In addition, implications for future research and limitations of the study are discussed.
Chapter One
A Study of Role and Function Differences Between
School Psychologists Working Within the Flexible Service
Delivery System and More Traditional Settings

Introduction

There are many studies in the literature that examine the role and function of school psychologists. Over the past several years, the creation of various types of service delivery systems has forced professionals to focus more on role and function changes. Within these shifting times, these roles continue to change and research should continue to keep up with these new broader role descriptions.

The question, "what it is that a school psychologist actually does," is addressed from a variety of people within different disciplines. Since my decision to become a school psychologist, numerous people have questioned what one is exactly. Because a vast majority of individuals will not come in contact with a school psychologist during their educational career, many have no idea what type of services they provide. Often times, the answer depends with whom you are speaking and what types of experiences they have had themselves. Usually, the description is compared with a guidance counselor or social worker since the majority of these people have had contact or know someone who has been involved with these individuals. It is important to consider that it is not only the general public that have questions, but also people within the field of psychology itself.

Review of Literature

There have been many arguments about the specific job description of a school
psychologist even within its own discipline. There have been debates regarding the specific role and functions that a school psychologist should and do provide. This debate has taken the form of what roles school psychologists actually perform and prefer to perform. On the one hand, some school psychologists prefer the traditional role of assessment while others feel that a more diverse role is more effective. And while there are many differences across and within these distinctions, most school psychologists just want to do what is best for children.

**Review of Related Research**

Numerous studies have been conducted over the past thirty years examining the role and function of school psychologists. Meacham and Peckham (1978) found that differences in how a school psychologist functions may be a result of local demands or needs rather than a role imposed by the profession. Based on their research, two predominant roles were found to be most significant. The consultation function was becoming more central and, if the practitioners had their way, it would become primary (Meacham and Peckham, 1978). While this study is over twenty years old, the focus on consultation as a central function remains common today. These authors also found that the school psychologist can be an integral “Change Agent” who assists in decisions made regarding educational policy and procedures.

In his research using a national survey, Ramage (1979) examined the preferred roles of school psychologists. Specifically, Ramage determined that they would like to do less psycho-educational evaluations and do more group counseling, research, and in-service training of teachers. A few years later, another national survey was conducted
that assessed the amount of time school psychologists devoted to specific role and functions (Smith, 1984). The results of a study by Douglas K. Smith (1984) listed the overall ranking of professional activities from most time spent to least time spent. First was assessment, followed by intervention, consultation, and research. Furthermore, the study explained that school psychologists would prefer reductions in assessment and increases in consultation and intervention (Smith, 1984).

In addition, two other consistent findings in the research were further confirmed by Benson and Hughes (1985) who concluded that school psychologists spend approximately 50% of their time in assessment and only 20% in consultation, with the remaining time divided among counseling, in-service, administration, counseling parents, research, and program evaluation. They also determined that school psychologists desire to spend less time in assessment and more time in other activities, especially in consultation with school personnel.

In a replication of Meacham and Peckham’s earlier work, Fisher, Jenkins and Crumbley (1986) determined a consistent finding among school psychologists was they would prefer to do more consultative functions. While the purpose of this study examined the competency of school psychologists based on their training, the authors did advise that practitioners utilize their skills and seek out consultation cases on a case by case basis. While school psychology has long debated the preferred and actual role of the practitioner within the school systems, Fisher, Jenkins, and Crumbley (1986) found that school psychologists viewed their job at that time as more closely approximating their preferred than they did previously.

Historically, the role of the school psychologist has been primarily known as a
test giver, interpreter, reporter, and a "gatekeeper" (Will, 1988) of entrance to and from special education. Since the 1970's there has been a projected role change in school psychology within the literature. Particularly, looking back to the adoption of PL 94-142, implications for this role change seemingly solidified the refer, assess, and label process (Ramage, 1981). Alpert and Trachtman (1980), however, argued that PL 94-142 would bring about continued consultative services. Since the adoption of PL 94-142 and other educational reform, there has been more focus on the delivery of educational services.

In recent years, professionals have been looking at additional roles that would reduce the numbers of referrals to school psychologists. Will (1988) explained these additional roles should include a greater emphasis on instructional variables that include the curriculum, task features, teaching functions, and instructionally-based assessment procedures that would call for a shifting from a reactive position to a proactive position in which learning and instructional problems are prevented. This shift in role would then reduce referrals by working with the student within their classroom. In the long run, the role of assessment is then reduced and replaced with a consultative approach.

There are a variety of services that a school psychologist can competently provide to a community, school, classroom and individual children. Over twenty years ago, Lolli (1980) provided a list of such responsibilities which might include the following: educational and psychological assessment; individual and group intervention (i.e., counseling, behavior modification); referral and consultation for teachers; referral and consultation for parents; contributor to individual educational plan committee; liaison with community, county, and state social service agencies; faculty counselor; resource person for school district in related areas of expertise (i.e., program evaluation,
standardized testing); resource person for special education programs; child advocate.

While all school psychologists may not feel completely confident in every area, they do possess the skills to provide these services competently when needed. Further, the school psychologist may be one of a few individuals within the school system who is able to provide these services.

In addition to a reduction in the assessment role, school psychologists have searched for other roles and functions in order to broaden their own job description.

There are many reasons for the necessity of broadening the role of a school psychologist. Some school psychologists seek out other more satisfying and effective roles and others feel it is necessary for job security. Bradley-Johnson, Johnson, and Jacob-Timm (1995) stated that school psychologists have the opportunity to change their role to help ensure the future of the profession and, more importantly, to improve services to children with special needs.

Despite the variety of research, one common theme has been generated from this literature. Fagan and Wise (1994) stated that the traditional role and major role of a school psychologist was in the role of assessment of individual children. While assessment is the primary role, school psychologists should work to expand their role and function, which can only strengthen knowledge and skills. The traditional role of assessment is vital however, and will continue to be at the forefront of school psychology.

As Bracken (2000) stated, advances in psychometrics have been dramatic over the past thirty years and instruments today are better than ever and seem in great contrast to the poorly validated measures of the past. It would be unrealistic to think that assessment
will be erased from the school psychologist's job description. But at the same time we 
must work to expand our knowledge base and continue to explore new ways to meet the 
needs of children. Whatever the reason, school psychologists must search for the most 
effective method to deliver services to children in order for them to become more 
successful learners.

In the past fourteen years there has been an even greater push for changes in how 
services are delivered. Whether the services are direct or indirect, more and more school 
psychologists are looking to provide services that are more than just psychometrics. These 
can include pre-referral interventions, behavioral consultation, behavioral interventions, 
curriculum based assessment, academic survival skills, and instructional 
variables/instructional interventions. Reschly (1988) stated that in the delivery system of 
the future, assessment for classification and placement will be replaced to a large extent 
by assessment for the purpose of developing interventions within the classroom. For 
example, school psychologists are becoming members of the pre-referral process by 
being active participants of teacher assistance teams. They are also consulting with 
teachers so that interventions can be done in the classroom instead of referral. The hope 
is that these learned skills will generalize across students and subjects so that fewer and 
fewer referrals are made. These new roles of school psychologists are being applied 
more and more because the benefits of the expanded roles are being realized due to 
service delivery reform.

Reschly and Wilson (1995) asserted that the purpose of delivery reform was to 
address significant problems in the current system: the undocumented effectiveness of 
special education programs; nonfunctional and stigmatizing classification of students
with mild disabilities; failure of aptitude by treatment interaction approaches to assessment and interventions; poor treatment validity of current measures; overlapping and poorly coordinated special programs; poor quality of interventions; and disproportionate minority placement in programs with undocumented benefits. Delivery system reform holds the promise for the school psychologist practitioner of a more ideal role of less assessment and more consultation and intervention. With any change, resistance is likely to occur with school psychologists who are satisfied with their current role. School psychologists who enjoy their dominant role of assessment are sure to object, and may argue the merits of change and possibly refuse to make these role modifications.

Fortunately, in results from their study using both a practitioner and faculty sample, Reschly and Wilson (1995) found both groups were highly positive toward school psychologists’ involvement with interventions prior to consideration of special education eligibility, changing allocations of personnel and time from eligibility determination to interventions, the usefulness of direct measures, combining special education and Title I programs, and providing special education services in general education classrooms.

In their reaction to the article by Bradley-Johnson, Johnson, Jacob-Timm (1995), Tapasak and Keller (1995) argued that delivery system reform was not the responsibility of the individual practitioner but instead resides at multiple levels including university training, professional organization, school systems, and the individual. The authors stated that the burden of change should not be the responsibility of the individual school psychologists but rather that of more complex systems. Conoley and Gutkin (1995)
agreed with this argument and stated that in order to bring about change it was necessary to understand and influence interactions among competing and converging forces that emanate from building, school district, community, state, and national levels. Regardless of where the push for system reform begins, the role of the individual practitioner should and will change in favor of less assessment and more problem solving consultation.

In a recent article, Fagan (2002) stated that school psychologists spend their time doing what their training program prepared them to do and what every school district is required to provide through special education regulations. Therefore, school psychologists are practicing the roles and functions that were stressed and taught to them within their university training program. Further, Fagan (2002) discussed that the practice of school psychology has long been attached to special education and in order for role change to occur other solutions for the assessment needs of special education must be found. Despite the desire for many school psychologists to have less of an assessment role, special education requires assessment for students.

Ross, Powell, & Elias (2002) further extended the role options of school psychologists by introducing the social and emotional learning/emotional intelligence (SEL) which examines the social and emotional skills of children. Despite the needs of special education, the roles of school psychologists continue to widen and extend into different areas. Roles such as counseling allow school psychologists to examine social and emotional issues of children. Specifically according to the authors (Ross, et al., 2002), school psychologists are in a pivotal position to take the lead in addressing the social and emotional needs of youth through prevention and health promotion programs, professional development for teachers and administrators, and collaborative efforts with
other educators. As the job description of school psychologists broadens, specific service delivery programs have stood out which provide these less traditional and more desired roles.

Two examples of different service delivery models have been implemented in Tennessee and Iowa. First, Roberts and Rust (1994) described advances in Tennessee to expand the role of the school psychologist to include a variety of services such as supervision, counseling, and consulting. In addition, the authors recommended the creation of school support teams that provide immediate help and expertise to teachers to reduce inappropriate referrals. Further, Roberts and Rust (1994) also described Project ADOPT, which included these earlier suggestions and also expanded the role of the school psychologist by working with numerous opportunities in consultation.

Project RE-AIM was developed in Iowa by support services personnel to address the need for delivery system reform. Relevant Educational Assessment and Interventions Model, (RE-AIM) was comprised of three modules: the Behavioral Consultation Module (BC), the Curriculum-Based Assessment Module (CBA), and the Referral Question Consultative Decision Making Module. (RQC) Reschly and Grimes (1991) identified the common elements among these three modules for support services personnel, particularly school psychologists, as: (a) interviews with referral agents, typically teachers; (b) data collection procedures using observation in natural settings or collection of permanent products provided the basis for defining problems, establishing target behaviors, monitoring interventions, and evaluating outcomes; (c) emphasis on interventions in natural settings rather than changing the student’s placement; and, (d) decreased emphasis on eligibility determination.
Renewed Service Delivery System (RSDS) was another example of service delivery reform that was developed in Iowa. Roberts and Rust (1994) described the role of the school psychologist within this more comprehensive program as a problem solving approach providing both direct and indirect services. Direct service delivery included individual and group counseling, family therapy, and crisis intervention. Reschly and Grimes (1991) stated that RSDS was based on the following principles: (a) use outcome criteria as the basis for decision making; (b) combine special programs and integrate resources; (c) modify eligibility criteria and eliminate traditional categories of mild handicap, that is, implement a noncategorical system; (d) emphasize functional assessment procedures directly related to interventions rather than standardized tests used primarily for classification purposes; (e) develop, implement, and evaluate high quality interventions prior to consideration of special education eligibility; (f) change eligibility criteria to primary consideration of discrepancies from classroom averages and documented insufficiency of high quality interventions; (g) use progress monitoring with formative evaluation decision making to produce program changes; and (h) tailor services to meet the needs of local attendance centers. While there have been successful reform changes implemented in Iowa, Reschly and Grimes (1991) stressed that successful reform requires changes among individual practitioners and in the system.

Another recent initiative which has been implemented throughout Illinois is the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS) which is a systems approach to dealing with problem behavior. According to the Illinois Youth At-Risk Commission (2002) “PBIS is a proactive systems approach to preventing and responding to classroom and school discipline problems.” (www.ag.state.il.us) Further, “this process focuses on
improving schools' ability to teach and support positive behavior of all students and the emphasis is directed toward developing and maintaining safe learning environments where teachers can teach and students can learn.” PBIS programs have been seen throughout the state including the northern/Chicago region, central and southern regions of Illinois. PBIS works to assist with problem behaviors of students such as fighting and insubordination in which disciplinary actions such as suspensions and detentions have proved ineffective. PBIS is a systems approach that emphasizes a team based planning through problem solving. Other important components of PBIS include an instructional approach with classroom management, support from administrators and staff commitment through professional development and long term planning.

The Flexible Service Delivery System (FSDS) is a recent change attempt that has become widespread around Illinois. This system was approved by the Illinois State Board of Education in the fall of 1995 and is currently being implemented within 25 sites. The central focus of this effort is to provide services that are more flexible and tailored to each individual child within the regular education setting. The Flexible Service Delivery System was developed because of the inherent problems within the existing traditional system. Changes should be made with assessment practices, service delivery, and implementation. These changes require school psychologists and other school personnel to expand their role and function. The Northern Suburban Special Education District (2000) described the specific changes as the use of special education and any other school staff more flexibly for interventions. Also flexibility in who is providing these intervention services, the amount of intervention provided, and the location of the services was described. Based on their research, Swerdlik and Aloia (1999) concluded
that the roles of school service personnel are changing as a result of the greater emphasis FSDS placed on providing direct interventions to students and on collaborative consultation.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the particular role changes of school psychologists within the Flexible Service Delivery System. Specifically, this study will assess role and function differences between school psychologists working within the Flexible Service Delivery System and those in more traditional settings. This study is important in order to determine which service delivery system school psychologists should provide to ensure that services are the most effective for children, their parents, and school psychology as a profession. This study also assessed in which direction school psychology is moving by evaluating role and function of school psychologists in this system compared to more traditional systems. According to my hypothesis, traditional school psychologists will rate their role higher in the areas of standardized testing, psychological reports, and participation in IEP meetings. Further, FSDS school psychologists will have higher ratings in the areas of curriculum-based assessment, pre-referral meetings, consultation, and therapy.
Chapter Two

Method

Participants

Participants were obtained by mailing and faxing to randomly selected school psychologists throughout Illinois. Addresses and fax numbers were secured using the Illinois School Psychologist Association Membership Directory and the Flexible Service Delivery System website. (www.fsd.org) Additional data were also collected using the Flexible Service Delivery System Consortium’s list-serve available for those school psychologists online. Participants were comprised of two separate samples of school psychologists, one group including school psychologists working within FSDS sites and one group of those working within non-FSDS sites with traditional roles. Assistance in selection was obtained from school psychologists in central Illinois from the Bureau-Marshall-Putnam Tri-County Cooperative in order to obtain the sample of practitioners working within FSDS sites. All subjects were informed of this study through email, phone, and/or fax. School psychologists in the final samples were practicing within a public school system, interns were excluded.

Procedure

Each participant completed a questionnaire originally developed by Martin (2000) for his Specialist thesis (see Appendix 2), consisting of a Likert scale of 1 to 5. Because response rate in these types of studies is usually low due to time constraints, the questionnaire was designed to only require ten to fifteen minutes to complete. The questionnaire was supplemented with an addressed and stamped envelope when possible.
to encourage response. The questionnaire prepared by Martin (2000) included the following areas: 1) Testing and Assessment, 2) Counseling and Therapy, 3) Consultation, 4) Intervention and Pre-referral, 5) Administrative duties, and 6) Research. A demographic data sheet was included that required information such as gender, age, and experience. (Appendix 1) In addition, information regarding the purpose of the study and instructions for filling out the questionnaire with a consent form attached (Appendix 3) was included that explains that confidentiality will be a primary priority.
Chapter Three
Results

One hundred school psychologists were mailed questionnaires. Data were also collected using the Flexible Service Delivery System Consortium’s list-serve and also by fax. Based on the combination of data collected through mail, list-serve, and fax a total of 91 school psychologists were included in the sample. Of these, one was discarded due to being filled out incorrectly. All respondents reported being practitioners in a public school setting either with a Flexible Service Delivery role or a traditional role.

Twenty-five of the ninety-one questionnaires were completed by Flexible Service Delivery (FSDS) school psychologists for 27% of the total respondents. Therefore, the sixty-six remaining psychologists (73%) indicated they have a traditional role within their school setting. According to the hypothesis, traditional school psychologists would rate their role higher in the areas of standardized testing, psychological reports, and participation in IEP meetings. In addition, FSDS school psychologists would have higher ratings in the areas of curriculum-based assessment, pre-referral meetings, consultation, and therapy. A Chi-square analysis was used to analyze the data collected for this study.

Gender of Participants

Results of the Chi-square analysis revealed a difference between the number of male and female school psychologists who completed a questionnaire. Of the total of 91 returned questionnaires, 58 were completed by females and 33 by males, 64% and 36% respectively. Of the 58 females, 19 indicated a FSDS role while 39 have a traditional role. Further, 6 of the 33 males had a FSDS role while 27 indicated a traditional role.
Age of Participants

Psychologists indicated their age by specifying between seven categories: 20-25, 26-30, 31-35, 36-40, 41-45, 46-50, and 50+. The FSDS sample of psychologists was evenly distributed within these seven groups. The traditional sample, however, clustered around the 46-50 and 50+ groups. Nearly half of the 66 traditional psychologists were between 46-50 or 50 and over.

Education of Participants

The education of the participant was revealed by information provided on the demographic questionnaire. The groups included Master’s Degree, Specialist Degree, Doctorate Degree, and other. The majority of the FSDS sample (60%) indicated they have a Specialist Degree. The majority of the non-FSDS sample, however, was divided between the Master’s Degree and Specialist Degree, 42% and 46% respectively.

Psychologist to Student Ratio

Results of the Chi-square analysis revealed a difference between the student to psychologist ratio of FSDS psychologists and traditional psychologists. The FSDS psychologists revealed ratios clustered around 1-500, 501-1000, and 1001-1500. The traditional psychologists indicated higher ratios, specifically within the 1001-1500 and 1501 and 2000 categories.
Standardized Testing

Results of the Chi-square analysis revealed that non-FSDS school psychologists are doing more standardized testing than FSDS school psychologists. Within the FSDS sample, 24% indicated they are not doing standardized testing at all. Moreover, 64% rated their involvement with standardized testing from 1-20% of the time, while 4% of the FSDS rated their involvement with standardized testing to be 61-80%. In addition, of the FSDS sample, 8% rated standardized testing from 21-40%. Conversely, almost half (47%) of the traditional psychologists considered 21-40% of their time is spent doing standardized testing. Only 2% of traditional psychologists rated standardized testing as not at all. The remaining traditional psychologists were as follows: 18% of the sample rated 1-20%, 22% rated 41-60%, and 11% indicated 61-80%.

Curriculum-Based Assessment

As hypothesized, analysis of the curriculum-based assessment (CBA) role revealed that FSDS school psychologists are utilizing CBA data more often than traditional school psychologists. Specifically, 48% of the FSDS psychologists rated they use CBA 1-20% of the time, while 48% indicated 21-40% of the time. The remaining 4% use CBA 41-60% of the time, while 0% of the FSDS psychologist stated they do not use CBA. Conversely, 55% of the traditional psychologists do not collect CBA data at all. Additionally, 44% of the traditional sample states they use CBA 1-20% of the time and 0% from 41-60%.
Individual Therapy

Results within the individual therapy role revealed similar responses between the FSDS and traditional psychologists. Specifically, 64% of the FSDS psychologists and 61% of the traditional psychologists revealed they do not do any individual therapy. In addition, 24% of the FSDS sample and 39% of the traditional sample rated they do individual therapy 1-20% of the time. Finally, ratings of 21-40% of the time category were reported for 12% of the FSDS psychologists and 0% of the traditional.

Group Therapy/Social Skills Training

There was not a significant difference between the responses within the group therapy role. Of the FSDS sample, 64% rated not at all, 24% rated 1-20%, and 8% indicated 21-40%, and 4% reported 41-60%. The traditional psychologists responded as follows: 82% rated not at all and 18% from 1-20%.

Consultation with Teachers

Ratings of the consultation with teachers role were also fairly similar. Of the FSDS psychologists, 40% rated 1-20% of their time they consult with teachers, while 56% of the traditional psychologists reported this percentage. Thirty six percent of the FSDS psychologists and 33% rated their time in the 21-40% category. Consultation with teachers was done 41-60% of the time by 12% of the FSDS and 8% of the traditional psychologists. Finally, within the 61-80% grouping, 12% of FSDS and 3% of traditional psychologists rated this way.
Consultation with Parents

Consultation with parents also revealed consistent findings between the two samples. Of FSDS psychologists, only 8% rated not at all and 8% considered 21-40% of their time is spent consulting with parents. The majority of the sample (84%) rated their involvement within the 1-20% grouping. In addition, the majority of traditional psychologists (74%) rated the 1-20% category. The remaining traditional practitioners were 3% not at all, 20% 21-40%, and 3% 41-60%.

Organizational Consultation

Twenty four percent of the FSDS sample reported that they do not do organizational consultation and 37% of the traditional psychologists concurred. The remaining FSDS practitioners rated as follows: 52% indicated 1-20%, 20% rated 21-40%, and 4% measured 61-80% of the time. The traditional psychologists rated as follows; 50% considered 1-20% of the time, 11% rated 21-40%, and 3% measured 41-60%.

Conducting Research

The research role generated different ratings between the samples. While 60% of the FSDS psychologists indicated they do not do research, 96% of the traditional psychologists stated they do not conduct research. Within the 1-20% ranking, 32% of the FSDS and 5% of the traditional psychologists rated they are doing research. The FSDS sample also considered 21-40% (4%) and 41-60% (4%) of their time was spent doing research.
Classroom Interventions

The classroom intervention role was very dispersed for the FSDS sample. Sixty-four percent stated they do intervention 1-20% of the time. The remaining sample rated as follows; 16% indicated 21-40%, 12% rated 41-60%, 4% measured 61-80% and 4% indicated 81-100% of the time is spent doing classroom interventions. Twelve percent of the traditional practitioners revealed they do not do classroom interventions. The majority (71%) of traditional respondents indicated they implement classroom interventions 1-20% of the time, while 11% felt 21-40% and 6% indicated 41-60%.

Pre-referral Meetings

The pre-referral role was very consistent between groups and revealed the majority of FSDS and traditional psychologists consider 1-20% of where their time is spent, 48% and 64% respectively. Of the two samples, 16% of FSDS and 5% of traditional do not do pre-referral meetings. Of the remaining FSDS sample, 20% rate 21-40%, 12% consider 41-60%, and 4% felt 81-100% of the time they are in pre-referral meetings. As for the traditional psychologists, 21% rated 21-40%, 9% indicated 41-60%, and 2% felt 61-80% of their time was spent in pre-referral meetings.

Psychological Reports

When looking at the psychological reports role, there are differences between how FSDS and traditional psychologists rate their time. The traditional psychologists are widespread, half (47%) consider 21-40% of time is spent doing reports. Only 3% of traditional psychologists indicated they do not do reports, while 35% rated the 1-20%
category. Of the remaining traditional psychologists, 11% rated 41-60%, 3% indicated 61-80%, and 2% felt 81-100% of their time is spent writing reports. The majority (68%) of the FSDS sample indicated 1-20% of their time is spent writing reports. In addition, 12% indicated they do not write reports at all. The remaining FSDS sample indicated the following: 16% rated 21-40% and 4% felt 41-60% of the time they write psychological reports.

**IEP Meetings**

Participation in IEP meetings was the final role and 80% of the FSDS sample rated 1-20% while only 33% of the traditional psychologists rated this percentage. Within the 21-40% category, 16% of FSDS and 49% of traditional psychologist indicated this is how much they participate in IEP meetings. The final 4% of the FSDS sample rated within the 61-80% category. The traditional psychologists were more widespread in their ranking of time in IEP meetings. Results of the remaining traditional sample was as follows, 2% revealed not at all, 14% indicated 41-60%, 2% rated 61-80% and 2% rated 81-100%.
Table 1
Percentages of Role and Function Ratings for Reporting School Psychologists

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role/Function</th>
<th>Not at All</th>
<th>1-20%</th>
<th>21-40%</th>
<th>41-60%</th>
<th>61-80%</th>
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Note. The values represent percentages.
Chapter Four

Discussion

The goal of this study was to investigate the role differences between psychologists practicing within FSDS settings and those working in traditional locations. In order to examine these differences, several role categories were identified in which respondents ranked their time spent engaged in those functions. The roles are as follows and will be discussed individually.

**Standardized Testing**

The standardized testing role revealed significant differences between the traditional and FSDS psychologists and how much time they spent doing assessment. Most traditional psychologists are doing assessment for a significant amount, half of their day. In addition, not only are the majority of these psychologists conducting assessment, but they do so much more than FSDS psychologists. Therefore, most traditional school psychologists continue to primarily do assessment much of the time. Further, a significant number of FSDS psychologists indicated they are not doing any assessment, with most others stating they conduct assessment, but in small amounts. Therefore, it can be concluded that traditional psychologists continue to fill the role of evaluator while FSDS psychologists are filling their time doing other functions that do not include assessment.

**Curriculum-Based Assessment**

The curriculum-based assessment role also revealed significant findings. All of the
FSDS psychologists indicated they collect CBA data, therefore identifying this as a primary role of FSDS psychologists. This is in contrast to traditional psychologists who are not using CBA data as frequently in their role. Over half of the traditional psychologists indicated they do not collect CBA data at all. We can conclude that FSDS psychologists value CBA data and consider curriculum based assessment a primary component of their role as a school psychologist. In addition, even though a large number of traditional school psychologists do not use CBA, still many are conducting curriculum based assessment at least as a portion of their role. Possibly, even those that indicated they do not use CBA will begin to test the use of this data in the future.

**Individual Therapy**

The individual therapy role did not reveal significant differences between the two samples of psychologists. The majority of both the FSDS and traditional psychologists indicated they do not do any individual therapy at all in their daily activities. Similar findings were also seen with the remaining respondents who expressed they do individual therapy as a small portion of their role. Further, there was a group of the FSDS psychologists who conveyed they are doing individual therapy for a significant portion of their overall role. Overall, while the majority of sampled school psychologists indicated they do not conduct individual therapy, there still remains a portion who is counseling children and adolescents as part of their role as a school psychologist.

**Group Therapy/Social Skills Training**

The group therapy role revealed similar findings as the individual therapy role. The
majority of both samples indicated they do not participate in group therapy and social skills training in their everyday activities. As with the individual therapy role, these psychologists may work closely with social workers whose primary role is counseling. A portion of both samples, however, indicated that a part of their role is spent doing counseling. Further, a fraction of the FSDS psychologists reported that they spend approximately half of their day doing counseling. These psychologists may be working in a high school setting where assessment needs are minimal.

**Consultation with Teachers**

Consulting with teachers is an integral part of the role of a school psychologist. Because teachers provide invaluable information to the needs of their students, it is clear why school psychologists look to teachers on a frequent and regular basis. Results of the study proved to strengthen these statements; all respondents indicated that consulting with teachers was an important role. Both FSDS and traditional samples do consult with teachers, but to varying degrees. While nearly half of both samples do consultation for a small portion of the day, there are many who are consulting for a significant amount of their workday. Several respondents of both FSDS and traditional psychologists conveyed they do consultation with teachers more than half of the time. Therefore, results indicate that consultation with teachers is a primary role of all psychologists and will continue to be as practitioners look to teachers as sources of information of students.

**Consultation with Parents**

Results showed similar findings between the FSDS and traditional psychologists in the
role of consultation with parents. A small portion of both samples indicated they do not consult with parents. The majority of both samples, however, conveyed they consult with parents for a small part of their day. There were also some psychologists in both samples who indicated they consult with parents on a frequent basis. Much like the consultation with teachers role, consultation with parents provides school psychologists information regarding children in their two primary settings, home and school. Parents and teachers can provide such useful information which can give insight into children's lives and therefore many school psychologists spent some of their consulting with these individuals. When a parent is involved in school and the parent-school relationship is positive, consultation is likely to occur between individuals. For many psychologists, however, the case study process does not allow for a significant amount of free time and often psychologists do not meet parents until meetings take place, which could account for the majority of ratings in the 1-20% category.

Organizational Consultation

According to the data, organizational consultation is not a primary role of the psychologists included in either sample. The majority of both samples either did not provide consultation to organizations or do so in small amount. However, there still remained a fraction of both FSDS and traditional psychologists doing organizational consultation for a more significant amount of their day.

Conducting Research

Conducting research was a role in which the two samples of psychologists differed
significantly. Nearly all of the traditional psychologists indicated they do not do any research in their daily activities. Conversely, while about half of the FSDS psychologists responded they don’t conduct research, the remaining sample indicated they are doing research to varying degrees. While neither sample is conducting research for a significant amount of time and for much of their role, the data showed that many more FSDS psychologists are doing some research as part of their role. Research may be in many forms, possibly examining local norms through the collection of curriculum-based measurement in a school. Other FSDS psychologists who are considered trainers in the Flexible Service Delivery model may also be collecting data related to the implementation and effectiveness of the model compared with more traditional models. Whatever the topic of research, there are more FSDS psychologists conducting research compared to traditional psychologists.

**Classroom Interventions**

Results showed that FSDS and traditional psychologists did differ in their ratings of time spent implementing classroom interventions. Overall, both samples of psychologists were dispersed throughout the spectrum of time spent conducting interventions. This range spanned from both not doing interventions at all to spending a significant amount of time implementing interventions. While there was a wide range of rating by both samples, the majority of both FSDS and traditional psychologists spend about 1-20% of their time doing interventions. However, when examining the number of non-FSDS who do not do classroom interventions, results revealed that overall more FSDS psychologists are conducting classroom interventions than traditional psychologists.
Pre-referral Meetings

As with the classroom intervention role, the results of the pre-referral meetings role was also similar between the samples as was the range in how the psychologists ranked the amount of time spent in these meetings. The majority of both the FSDS and traditional psychologists indicated they are participating in pre-referral meetings but for a small amount of their day. The remaining psychologists’ ratings were dispersed suggesting variability in the time spent in pre-referral meetings in both populations. Therefore, many psychologists are participating in pre-referral process but in varying amounts of time. Considerations which may have impacted these results include the type of pre-referral meeting. Specifications between a problem solving (FSDS) meeting or a domain assessment meeting may have differentiated these results.

Psychological Reports

The ratings for the psychological reports role were also dispersed for both samples of psychologists indicating many psychologists are doing reports but to varying amounts of time. There were also fractions of both samples who indicated they are not doing psychological reports. When examining the majority of both samples, the traditional psychologists indicated more time in a day is spent dong reports when compared to the majority of traditional psychologists, 1-20% and 21-40% respectively. It is difficult to determine how much variability there is between the two samples given the variability when using categories of time. Overall however, the data showed that traditional psychologists are spending significantly more of their day writing reports than FSDS
psychologists.

**IEP Meetings**

The IEP meetings role was similar to the psychological reports role. The results showed variability within each sample, but the overall majority of each sample was different when looking at the time spent each day participating in IEP meetings. The majority of traditional psychologists ranked their involvement in IEP meetings more often than FSDS psychologists. There were a number of traditional psychologists who indicated that they spent half of their day writing reports, in contrast to the FSDS psychologists who do not spend that much time in this role.

**Conclusions**

According to the hypothesis, traditional school psychologists would rate their role higher in the areas of standardized testing, psychological reports, and participation in IEP meetings. In addition, FSDS school psychologists would have higher ratings in the areas of curriculum-based assessment, pre-referral meetings, consultation, and therapy. The research results support the hypothesis when examining the time spent of traditional psychologists but not all of the roles of FSDS psychologists. Results included traditional psychologists reporting higher ratings than FSDS psychologists in conducting assessment, writing psychological reports, and participation IEP meetings. Further, results revealed FSDS psychologists rated they spent more time collecting CBA data than traditional psychologists. Therefore, while ideally the Flexible Service Delivery System would support higher role ratings in all areas including CBA, pre-referral meetings,
consultation, and therapy, the process of implementing these changes remains slower for some FSDS school psychologists than others. This slow rate could be due to a variety of reasons including lack of administrative support, teacher resistance, an assignment with many students/schools which requires significant travel, high referral rates, significant number of re-evaluations, and overall due to the assessment demands of school psychologists. As the FSDS process continues to grow and evolve, more FSDS psychologists will continue to expand their role and functions. In addition, in many geographic areas the need for assessment is significant and therefore there will continue to be a necessity for school psychologists to provide this function for which they are trained. In addition, traditional school psychologists may choose to also expand their role and provide a variety services.

Implications for Additional Research

As the FSDS delivery system continues to become more widespread the need for additional research will be imperative in order to determine its effectiveness. The implementation of FSDS is a continuous process for all of the schools. More research as the process continues to strengthen will investigate this effectiveness and reveal methods of improvement. In addition, the No Child Left Behind legislation will also have future implications into specific service delivery systems in the schools and therefore research is necessary in order to investigate these implications. Further, as the two roles blend more and more, specifying between the two groups becomes more complicated. Future research could further investigate the role differences between school psychologists who have an assignment in which they work in both FSDS settings and more traditional
settings. Research could investigate this "both" category and therefore the implications of this daily role division for school psychologists. Future research could also investigate why FSDS psychologists are not doing more consultation as the current hypothesis predicted.

Limitations of the Current Study

One specific limitation derived during the data collection process. Several questionnaires were returned in which the respondent indicated they work in both FSDS schools and more traditional schools. Therefore, one limitation was not including a "both" category in order to collect data. Because service delivery reform is relatively new, it is understandable that specific roles of school psychologists are overlapping. This overlapping may continue to grow as one system slowly fades in favor of a new system. Another limitation of the study was the absence of geographic location data. In order to determine whether geographic location is significant to the delivery of the Flexible Service Delivery System, location of the psychologists' school would have been useful information in order to determine geographic trends. In addition, the current sample was not a representative sample of school psychologists.
References


Psychology Review, 31, 43-52.


Demographic Data Sheet

Please indicate your identifying information by circling:

1. **Gender:**
   - Male
   - Female

2. **Age:**
   - 20-25
   - 26-30
   - 31-35
   - 36-40
   - 41-45
   - 46-50
   - 50+

3. **Highest degree level:**
   - Master’s
   - Specialist
   - Doctorate
   - Other (please indicate) ______________________

4. **Primary Job Description:**
   - a. School psychologist with a FSDS (flex) role (school is a grant site)  OR
   - b. School psychologist with a non-FSDS role

Please answer the following questions:

5. What is the ratio of school psychologists to students within the coop/district you work in?

6. What is your student-to-school psychologist ratio within your educational setting?

7. Please indicate the number of years of experience in your present position __________

8. Please also indicate the total number of years you have been a school psychologist __________

9. Are you currently a school psychology intern?  Yes  No
Please indicate by circling the appropriate number from 0 to 5 the amount of time in a typical day you spend working as a school psychologist in the following activities:

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Dear School Psychologists:

Hello, my name is Jaime Hahn and I am a school psychology intern working for BMP Tri County Special Education Cooperative. I am currently seeking a Specialist degree in School Psychology from Eastern Illinois University. As a part of their degree requirements, I must complete a thesis. In order to accomplish this, I am asking for your help with my data collection. My hope is to collect data from as many school psychologists as possible. In order to collect data from a representative sample of school psychologists, I hope you will take the time to fill out these short questionnaires. Your help and participation would be very much appreciated. If you agree to participate, please complete the consent form at the bottom of this letter and the enclosed demographic questionnaire with the role and function survey on the reverse side. These questionnaires will only take 5-10 minutes of your time, but will provide invaluable information. After completing the forms, please return them to me using the provided self-addressed stamped envelope. The purpose of my thesis is to examine the differences in the role and function of school psychologists working in Flexible Service Delivery Sites versus those in traditional settings. My hope is to better understand these differences and how they influence services available for children. All participants will remain anonymous, and this information will be used only for mailing purposes. Also, at anytime you may withdraw your participation in this study. Thank you for your participation in this important project.

Jaime L. Hahn, School Psychologist Intern
BMP Tri County Special Education Cooperative
526 Bureau Valley Parkway Suite D
Princeton, IL 61356

Consent Form
I understand that the information I provide will be used in psychological research. I understand that the information is confidential and that my name will remain anonymous. I understand that I may include my address, and I will be mailed a copy of the results once completed.

__________________________  __________________________
Signature  Date