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THE SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST AS A CHAMELEON

During the past decade psychologists concerned with education have philosophized, hypothesized, categorized, itemized and argued, verbally and in print, upon many occasions and with varying skills, upon the role(s) of the school psychologist, or, to be semantically petty, the psychologist in the school.

Only one thing is crystal clear after perusing, even superficially, the plethora of material—the school psychologist, to be all things to all psychologists, must be God. Or. perhaps equally flippantly, he must at least be an omnipotent, computer-like Superman, all seeing, all knowing, and ever ready to function at maximum efficiency twenty-five hours a day. He must in addition, have spent at least ten years in post graduate training if he is to know all the things that every one feels are essential and be able to use that knowleldge effectively.

It is our contention that this compulsion to define at length a role for a psychologist involved with the schools bypasses too frequently the central question: *Which* psychologist in *which* school in *what kind of* a community?

It seems to us that attempting to define rigidly the role of someone who must in any situation, whether involved in clinical work, research, or training others, remain flexible, without considering the context of his work, is like trying to write a prescription for the perfect marriage without knowing either of the two parties involved; you can define, in principle, some basic guidelines, but you cannot hope for success without a much more concrete knowledge of the specific people involved. To think otherwise is folly at best, stupidity at worst. Likewise the psychologist whose ideal training, skills, and techniques, are defined without reference to the situation in which he is to be submerged is an abstract creation whose real contours can only be filled in by concrete situational referents. It is at best a waste of time to prescribe the perfect psychologist without knowledge of the complexities of a particular situation.

In this paper we will review very briefly some of the more comprehensive views of the functions of the school psychologists, again with the mental reservation that some of these functions will be relevant to some people in some situations, others not. We will present some of the suggestions which have been made in recent years for the training of school psychological personnel, and, finally and at greater length, we will discuss the complex interrelationships between the psychologist and all those people and variables which make up his environment and shape his specific situational role. We will be most interested in those factors which prevent a psychologist, with the best of intentions, from being of help to children, and those factors which best facilitate such helpfulness.

What SHOULD a school psychologist be?

Should he be primarily a clinician, a therapist, a walking test battery, a teacher of teachers, a liaison to community mental health services, a trouble

shooter, a designer of remedial programs for children with learning and/or behavioral disabilities, a grassroots researcher, a co-ordinator of all available pupil services, a curriculum planner, a diagnostician, a public relations man for the profession, a member of a school psychological services team or the managing director of it, a school board advisor—so many possibilities, each of which finds support from some quarter. It seems obvious that the school psychologist must have competency in many areas, and equally obvious that he cannot be competent at fulfilling all these functions. Most of the writers on the subject have seemed to grapple with the same dichotomies: the practical versus the theoretical emphasis, immediate needs versus desirable future goals, a clinical orientation versus a research orientation, school-centered or community-centered. And each of them has written with at least the unconscious realization that the need far outpaces the supply, and that what one would wish to be in theory may be far from what one actually has time and means to be.

Perhaps the most clearly focused on this reality in his discussion of what a school psychologist should be is Trachtman (1961) who lists four priorities in order of greatest general need:

1) Screening, early detection, and prevention. Focused on the primary grades, the psychologist evaluates children's potentials early, using sharpened observational skills, and handles less intensive case work himself, passing referrals to outside agencies and spending more time in consulation with parents and teachers.
2) Evaluation and research. The psychologist conducts practical and applied studies relevant to local educational practices as well as approaching basic theoretical research on problems of child development and learning theory.
3) Efforts to improve the mental hygiene atmosphere of school and community. Including parent education and orientation programs, inservice programs to teachers, and administrative consulations involving planning and policy making.
4) Individual casework. This is mostly channeled to other agencies, as individual clinical casework does not make the most effective use of the very limited time of the psychologist.

This is in sharp contrast to the perhaps more traditional view of the school psychologist as a diagnostician and evaluator, who administers tests and sorts out atypical children, usually at the referral of a teacher, and then works with them directly and with their teachers to evolve academic and therapeutic remedial programs.

There is no argument that the prime concern of the school psychologists, as of other school personnel, is to facilitate learning, and that this may be done in many ways: perhaps by direct intervention with a particularly difficult child, perhaps by pinpointing for teachers involved with a child his particular learning handicap, perhaps by suggesting various remedial techniques, perhaps by placement in a special class of some sort, perhaps by inservice work with teachers to promote ways of dealing more therapeutically with children which might eliminate many seeming behavioral discrepencies, perhaps by suggesting changes in the overall school organization of the curriculum or disciplinary practices, perhaps by dealing with the parents or entire family of the child involved. Again, it seems that flexibility is the keystone; the psychologist must do what needs to be done in a particular situation, and if he can't provide help himself, he must look around for someone

to aid him. How he uses what he knows is equally as important as the knowledge itself.

The school psychologist, says James Magary (1967), in perhaps the most comprehensive and least restrictive definition, is "one who brings a psychological frame of reference to bear upon a set of school-related observations or behaviors of individuals or groups, with the end in view of facilitating learning, creativity, and self-actualization, for as many school children as possible."

A school psychologist is NOT any of the following, according to Paul Mok (1962), and perhaps identification of these extremes can guide us to a realistic view of the working psychologist, his functions, his skills.

> He is not a one-time coach who specialized in locker-room pep talks as the means toward more successful learning. He is not the white haired lady who has grown up in his town and knows everybody in it and who used to teach civics and now chats with the pregnant high school girls about their immediate and future plans and layettes. He is not the sullen, hatchet-faced young man with the glasses who is working on his master's degree in life adjustment and who comes reluctantly into the school for a sustaining paycheck to talk to high school freshmen boys about their pimples and masturbation and nocturnal emissions. He is not the overworked principal who discusses next steps with Johnny's parents after their son has been arraigned in juvenile court . . .

The school psychologist should be, in our view, a person who is capable of fulfilling competently some of the many functions listed at the beginning of this section, a person with a thorough knowledge of himself to bring to bear upon his situation, a person whose finest tool is his ability to transmit his own humanistic philosophy of life and acceptance of people to those he deals with. Towards the end of this paper we will discuss in detail the personality traits we feel are most necessary in a good psychologist, or, for that matter, in anyone who works with people.

What WILL a school psychologist be?

Those who are involved in the training of psychologists for the schools have a large measure of control over what the psychologist will be simply by the inclusion or exclusion of types of knowledge and experience from the curriculum and by the balancing of various sections of this same curriculum. The planning of a comprehensive curriculum presupposes a carefully thought out view of what is needed in practice. In reality, too many curricula are simply a mish mash of trying to please everyone in the education department and everyone in the psychology department at the same time. Unfortunately, since much of what is taught in schools of education (and in psychology departments for that matter) is of at least questionable relevance to what is going on in the public schools, this may not be the best way of deciding how to train people. For example, large doses of educational history are largely meaningless to the future teacher and would seem to have even less importance to the future psychologist in terms of attaining competency to fulfill some of the many and varied functions of his job.

Carl Rogers (1962) has suggested that many of the current assumptions and procedures for training students need to be re-evaluated in light of new facts and findings and in hopes of building graduate programs which would foster "freely independent, openly curious psychologists, unafraid in their search for genuinely new and deeply significant approximations to the truth."

There seems to be little point in listing here the general outline of much current graduate training; even that spelled out in the 1962 APA statement on certification, which while an admirable attempt to raise standards and eliminate grossly unqualified people from the public schools, still falls far short of being, in our opinion, training focused on the realities of the schools and on the abilities of the students. The most valuable part of The APA statement is its emphasis on practical training via some sort of internship experience. Various suggestions have been made from a semester in a school under supervision to two years of part-time involvement in a mental health center in the community, from work only in a school, as a teacher or observer or assistant, to work in treatment centers, out-patient clinics, hospitals, or training schools. Each and every one of these suggestions is of value as it brings the question of training out of stuffy classrooms (with too often boring texts) to the exciting and painstaking realm of human experience. We doubt that it is possible for a future psychologist to get too much experience in different ways of approaching and dealing with people.

Carl Rogers and R. E. Farson have suggested nine principles which they consider relevant to the training of psychologists for the schools and these seem perhaps more in line with our feelings of emphasis on flexibility and growth:

1) The objective of the graduate program is to develop psychologists who can make original, significant, and continuing contributions primarily to the science of psychology but also to the professional practice related to this science;
2) the selection of graduate students should be based on three criteria: originality, intelligence, and independence of thought;
3) the best background for a psychologist is a broad education including the humanities, arts, and sciences;
4) significant learning takes place when the subject matter is seen by the student to have relevance for his own purposes and development;
5) learning is facilitated when the student participates responsibly in the learning process;
6) students have the potentiality for learning, developing, and making suitable educational choices; this can be released best by freedom and stimulation;
7) the time of the faculty member is best spent in providing resources that stimulate the desire to learn rather than in planning a guided curriculum;
8) learning is most likely to occur in the students when the faculty member approaches the interaction as learner rather than teacher;
9) creativity of thought is facilitated when self-criticism and self-evaluation by others is relegated to a position of minimal importance (Margary, 1967).

Currently, then, what a psychologist will be is a product of what some person or persons involved in designing training feels he should be, modified by his own personal characteristics, and, finally and perhaps painfully, by his own perception of his particular role when he accepts a particular job. In the next section we will deal further with this individual specialization which, if Carl Rogers' ideas were adapted to graduate schools and incorporated with many and varied experiences in training, would not be as difficult and would probably produce much more flexible and skillful psychologists for the schools.

What CAN a school psychologist be?

To a certain extent, at least at the beginning of his career, a psychologist is hampered in what he can be by what others have thought he should be and what they have taught him that he will be. The full flowering of what he can be will come as he grows in adaptability and flexibility and brings his personality to bear upon the many functions he has to fulfill.

There are a cluster of personality traits or characteristics, many of which either *are* or *are not* part of a person's way of approaching others and viewing situations, which seem especially important for a professional involved with children, teachers, and parents. Perhaps it is possible to be a fine psychologist without possessing all of these characteristics, or striving for them, but the flexible and skillful psychologist about whom we are speaking has many or most of them as part of his personality:

1) Integrity,
2) honesty,
3) empathy,
4) sensitivity,
5) trustability,
6) caring and concern for others,
7) positive and unconditional regard for others,
8) a sense of humor,
9) objectivity,
10) self control,
11) a high frustration tolerance,
12) a desire to learn from others.

It can be seen that many of these are highly inter-related and that some seem to depend on the presence of others: for example, a person who has what a former student described as "trustability" probably also is honest, sensitive, empathic, and his concern and regard for the child or adult involved is evident—this is what makes him the kind of person that a suspicious child, frightened parent, or defensive teacher will open up to. The first seven are essential tools for direct dealing with the children and adults involved, whereas the last five are perhaps more important to the sheer survival of the psychologist in what is often a bureaucratic, defensive, time-wasting, frustrating situation where the priorities seem stacked against those concerned primarily with the child. The last one is of special importance as there are many people in any school and community who have important things to share, if one is open to sharing without transmitting a feeling of "I am a professional, you are an ordinary joe."

Several studies have shown that the students in a school can be of value in sorting out those among them who have special problems, and indeed in exposing their own problems willingly. A long-time teacher who has a genuine rapport with students may have many techniques for helping students which she does automatically and which she may be able to share with both the psychologist, who lacks her expertise in the classroom, and with other less tuned-in or less experienced teachers, if only she is made to feel that her ideas count too. The mother of a physically handicapped child may have special techniques garnered over the years for helping her child to be more independent, which she could share with school personnel if she thought they were interested in what "an ordinary housewife" knows.

Perhaps it is appropriate to mention at this point some of the characteristics anyone who hopes to be of use in the schools can do without. At the

head of the list is smugness, followed closely by superiority, defensiveness, an inability to accept criticism of a personal program or idea, impatience with others, the fixated idea that he and only he has the revealed answer on some particular problem, a rigid role perception which doesn't allow for any elements of the situation to change it (as the psychologist who sat in his office in the slum school and gave every test known to man while all around him children with critical problems were barely coped with by a frightened, inexperienced staff he was "to busy" to see), a reliance on jargon for communication purposes, an unwillingness to accept faculty members as human beings, and the strange idea that children aren't as important as statistics, or research, or inservice meetings.

Along with the characteristics we've been discussing come two groups of specific skills which rely heavily on these characteristics to make them effective: observational skills and communication skills. Both of these require artful concentration as well as technical or scientific knowledge, and without them the psychologist might just as well be blind and dumb. It is an art to sit in a classroom and observe children without totally destroying the natural classroom tone and mood. It is essential that both the teacher and the students perceive one as a helpful, friendly, non-critical visitor who shares in the daily mood of the classroom rather than as a hyper-critical special guest for whom a show must be put on. This is perhaps best achieved after the psychologist is a familiar face around the school, highly visible in halls, the playground, the lunchroom, seen talking and laughing with faculty and students. The psychologist needs to feel comfortable in the classroom, and to be alert to nuances of feelings in those around him; this is more likely to happen if he regularly visits classrooms (unladen with papers, charts, books and so forth), and if he takes only those notes which are absolutely essential while in the classroom, rather than going only when he has a specific child to observe and taking copious notes. It is also helpful if he has a chance to sit down and listen to the teacher talk about the class and its students informally afterward. There is a lot to be gained from informal observation on the playground or in the gym or lunchroom, as well as in the faculty lounge, as long as these can be done non-judgementally.

Communication skills are perhaps the real bugaboo of many well-meaning professionals in several fields. It is far too easy to get so knowledgeable about the highly refined science one practices and to get so used to talking about it in the terms most familiar to oneself and other professionls as to be totally incomprehensible to others. While this may bolster the sagging morale of a psychologist who feels inadequate to deal with the situation he fiinds himself in, or who just generally looks down on all those who are not of his own profession, it acts as a terrific stumbling block to being of any help to anyone. It is essential to be able to transmit to people, in language they can understand, the dimensions of the problem without a patronizing air. It is just as necessary to be able to listen to their perceptions of the problem, and to read between the lines and offer the encouragement and personal support they perhaps need. Even the psychologist who lacks ascribed status in the eyes of a dubious parent or teacher or a hostile administrator has it within his power to earn the status he needs to be understood and believed by giving evidence of his sincerity, credibility, fairness, and trustworthiness, as well as his genuine concern for the individual he is talking about and his uncondi-

tional acceptance of him as a person. The psychologist is not talking just to listen to himself expound—the response from the listener is the ultimate goal of his, as of anyone's, communication. It is also important to be aware of not just how and what one is communicating, but when; timing is very important, as is awareness of the appropriateness of the message. The issue of confidentiality is of course important here as well; one needs to know how much that is personal about a student should be revealed to whom, when, and to what purpose. Only if the psychologist knows the faculty members can he really be sure whether the information he is dispensing can be of use to them, and, most importantly, if it is in the child's best interests. On the other hand, assumption that no teacher is competent to have information about a student, from test scores to family background to personal problems, is a snide and surefire way of asserting one's own superiority and defeating the entire purpose of one's presence in the school: to facilitate learning for the child—and for the adults.

The psychologist who possesses these characteristics and skills is likely to be able to make himself extremely valuable in the schools without hurting or alienating anyone in the process; if he possesses these things he will quite likely be able to overcome the handicap of other's perceptions of his role and the probably not entirely relevant training he received. He will be a person who sees himself not as an agent of the status quo, but as an agent of social and educational changes. He will be eager to help the others involved with the child to buid and maintain their ties with him, especially the teacher, who is the central person in the school's attempt to reach the child. At the same time, he will speak out against the elements in the school or the community which might have a detrimental effect on all who experience them, children and adults alike, and against anything which does not contribute to a child's feeling of self-worth and to his ability to grow to his optimum potential. As Rogers (1962) has said, "It is the quality of the interpersonal encounter which is the most significant element in determining effectiveness."

The competent school psychologist will bring to his job a rigorous scientific training, much previous experience with people, a humanistic philosophy of life, and the personal characteristics and skills necessary to adapt himself to his environment rather than to be handicapped by its exigencies. In the following pages we will discuss the aspects of the school and community which need most to be taken into account by the psychologist in his development of his own role as a professional.

The school itself needs to be considered from several directions. Of major importance to the psychologist in terms of his adaption to the situation is the attitudes of the administration, faculty, and students to psychological personnel. The attitude and role that, for example, the school board may have in mind when hiring a psychologist, and that the principal may have in orienting him to the school, need to be looked at carefully, for they may be very different from the role he sees himself in. If they are suspicious, dubious, of overtly hostile to such a "newfangled" idea, feeling that it breaks down discipline and casts doubt on their judgement, the psychologist will have to bring to bear all his communication skills in order to gain even initial acceptance. Likewise, if this feeling is passed on to the teachers, he is unlikely to get their cooperation or to be able to extend himself to them in any meaningful way. In many cases, teachers in such a situation may feel that the mere

presence of a psychologist is calling their competency into doubt, and they may be suspicious and defensive as a result. At the other extreme is the community with many problems who hires a psychologist for the school with the hope that he will be able to solve all the problems for them; administration and faculty alike may look to the psychologist as a god-like creature and he may be given much more work than is humanly possible to get done, always with the seemingly kindly attitude, "but I thought you knew what to do." In either case the chance of the psychologist to get anything done has been indirectly or subtly sabotaged by the misperception of his role. Perhaps the first major task for the newly arrived psychologist is to familiarize himself as quickly as possible with the school itself and with the political situation within it, and then to assess for himself what seems to be the greatest need for his services, assemble a list of priorities and present them to the administration for discussion, honestly presenting his own strengths and weaknesses. Next he could meet with the teachers and center the discussion on general problem areas perceived by the teachers in the school, and outlining the role he sees himself filling in the school, then providing a good deal of leeway for questions from the teaching staff about himself, his background, his skills. Hopefully this kind of session can clear the floor for real interaction, not dealing with specific problems, but rather in terms of communication between teachers and psychologist, while giving each teacher a chance to clarify his own feelings and attitudes about psychologists and classroom problems.

Part of his assessment of the school itself upon which the psychologist will base his perception of his own role is purely practical—what size is the school, what kinds of pupil services are already available, what type of school is it, (i.e., rural, urban, slum, institutional, suburban, primary, junior high, secondary, public or private). Obviously the role of psychologist as the only non-classroom staff in a very large inner city slum school with only very overburdened outside agencies available and very many severe problem children will be completely different from that of a psychologist who finds himself part of a team made up of social workers, guidance counselors, psychometrists, remedial specialists, and perhaps a psychiatrist in a good private school or a large wealthy suburban system. The scope and nature of the functions he will have to fulfill can be partly defined in terms of the other facilities available and the size and nature of the problems in the school.

The school can then be analyzed as part of the larger macrocosm, the community of which it is a part and a reflection. The psychologist needs to be able to assess the community by making himself familiar with it physically and by making contacts with as many different parts of the community as possible, logically at first through teachers and parents. Unfortunately a good many large city schools are no longer neighborhood schools—the teachers often come from outside the neighborhood itself and have no particular feel for it or knowledge of it, which undoubtedly makes their load that much heavier. Regardless of such a situation, the psychologist can try to reach into the neighborhood, visiting stores, introducing himself, and making contacts with parents himself rather than through the school offices. He needs to get to know how people feel about the school, about social agencies, about psychologists, about whatever they feel are their own or their children's unmet needs. Again, the size, type, and location of the community will make a good deal of difference. Community and therefore parental and eventually school

board support for ideas and innovations depend at least to some extent on whether it is a large urban school in a decayed neighborhood, a small rural school in a politically conservative and perhaps still largely ethnic community, a liberally oriented progressive new school in a largely professional middle class area, or a resistent lower middle class school where money is important and status even more so.

Such an assessment of the people and situations among which he fiinds himself should enable the psychologist to define what he feels is necessarily a part of his role and to accommodate himself, Chameleon like, to what the school and community feel is most important in their perception of his role. As long as he is continually aware of the children as his first focus, and doesn't let his role be changed by outside forces so that he no longer feels he is facilitating children's learning first, a flexible person with the personality characteristics and skills and knowledge we have spoken about will arrive at a role definition for himself which is imminently satisfactory to all involved, and which will allow him to continue to grow and change within it into a fuller person and a more thorough going, useful professional.

To conclude, James Magary provides a thoughtful focus on the role of a school psychologist, a focus which is equally valid for teachers, parents, social workers, child care works, and all who involve themselves in a meaningful process of interaction and self-knowledge and growth with children:

> To be a school psychologist is to understand and love children and to be opposed to expediency, egocentrism, and compromise in the treatment of children.

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LE ROLE DE CAMELEON DU PSYCHOLOGUE SCOLAIRE

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L'auteur fait l'inventaire des attentes irréalisables qu'on demande au psychologue scolaire de satisfaire et met en relief qu'on ne peut définir ses fonctions de façon convenable que si l'on tient compte de ce qu'il est, de l'école et du genre particulier de communauté dans lesquelles il se retrouve. L'auteur fait ensuite état des diverses fonctions que l'on peut concevoir, des caractéristiques personnelles désirables et des idées de Carl Rogers relativement à la formation. Il termine en faisant des recommendations sur la façon de commencer à travailler dans une nouvelle école.