Reclaiming Our Identity: School Psychologists' Perceptions of their Roles in Education Based

on Social, Political, and Economic Changes

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Abstract

Although the roles of school psychologists have been investigated for several years, there is limited qualitative research as to how school psychologists perceived their roles in special education within the social, political, and economic changes associated with education. This interpretative phenomenological analysis examined the inner thoughts of how school psychologists made sense of and attached meaning to these changes. Five school psychologists, two from the west coast of the United States and three from the east coast of the United States, participated in this study. Four salient super-ordinate themes emerged from the research including: (1) The Lost Identity, (2) Reframing the Identity of School Psychologists, (3) Dealing with Tensions, and (4) Dealing with Ethical Dilemmas. Participants voiced strong opinions throughout, but the desire to engage in duties beyond those of testing and serving as gatekeepers for special education services was an overwhelming trend. However with their job duties already ascribed based on district and school needs, the participants believed that their identities were already shaped by others' perceptions of their roles. The findings were significant in that the study first described there was a disconnect in how school psychologists' perceived their roles in education compared to the perceptions of other educational stakeholders. This disconnect explains some of the external and internal tensions school psychologists face in the field. The results of this study can serve as a conversational tool to assist graduate training programs, national and state organizations, and school psychologists in better defining the roles of school psychologists and moving towards reclaiming the identity of school psychologists in a time of educational change.

Keywords: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, school psychology and roles, lack of funding in education, ethical issues in education

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Chapter I: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

School psychologists are highly trained professionals with expertise and knowledge in simply conducting psychological evaluations. School psychologists are well-equipped educationally and professionally to provide schools with supports and services related to consultation, counseling, curriculum development, intervention strategy and much more. Some of these services could benefit schools experiencing a rise in students in K-12 education who exhibit academic and/or behavioral difficulties. For example, there has been a rise in students in K-12 education who exhibit significant behavioral and/or socio-emotional difficulties. Some displayed behaviors include but were not limited to: anger management issues, drug and/or alcohol use, and bullying/cyber bullying. Current research suggested that some factors in the rise of students' exhibiting significant behavioral and/or socio-emotional difficulties may be attributed to an increase in poverty, divorce, lack of parental support, family history of mental illness, significant drug and/or alcohol abuse in families, incarceration of one or more caregivers, and homelessness (Burns, Phillips, Wagner, Barth, Kolko, Campbell, & Landsverk, 2004; Gyfami, 2004; Harry, Sturges, & Klingner, 2005; Paul, 2004; Strohschein, 2005).

For those school psychologists desiring to take responsibility for their roles in education, there were different places where they encountered difficulties to address these needs, from a variety of forces across schools. The roles and responsibilities of school psychologists today seemed wrapped up in the struggles of schools themselves. The school setting is changing with a newly defined socio-economic context in serving specific needs of students, in the politically and legislatively-driven decisions as brought on by recent education laws, and were augmented by the particular individual profiles of psychologists. This, in turn, has created a state of

disequilibrium for school psychologists seeking to identify their professional roles in their schools.

Within the District of Columbia schools alone, almost 10,000 students were identified as students with disabilities as of 2008. Of the students identified with disabilities, only 21% of these students were educated 80% or more of the time with their nondisabled peers (N. Abou-Samra, professional conference, October 23, 2012). These numbers correlated with the timing of recent social, political, and economic changes in education (Evans, Eliot, Hood, Driggs, Mori, & Johnson, 2005; Finkel, 2011; Fusarelli, 2004).

According to the current research, the national average of the number of students in special education indicated that 80% or more of special education students spent their time within the general education setting at a rate of 59% (N. Abou-Samra, professional conference, October 23, 2012). Additionally, 12% of DC Public School special education students attended special schools in comparison to the national average of 3% of special education students attended special schools (N. Abou-Samra, professional conference, October 23, 2012). The level of educational segregation through special education within the nation's capital is larger than all of the other states combined, which suggested that too many students were being over-identified with educational disabilities. The roles of school psychologists were wrapped up in these shifts across schools based on these changing statistics.

As Dr. Brianna Bates Parsons, former crisis counselor pointed out, the struggles school psychologists undergo with whether or not to evaluate students with educational disabilities might be likened to members within the medical field who must engage in defensive medicine. According to Dr. Bates Parsons, "Defensive medicine occurs when members within the medical field prescribe tests or procedures even when the symptoms are not indicative of what the test or

procedure is for in effort to deter and avoid future malpractice or liability" (Dr. B. Bates Parsons, personal communication, December 19, 2012; citing Studdert, Mello, Sage, DesRoches, Peugh, Zapert, & Brennan, 2005). This can also be likened to the field of school psychology—a form of *defensive psychology*—where school psychologists are 'forced' to evaluate students for special education services without giving serious consideration as to what other factors might influence students lack of academic and behavioral progress.

Significance of Research Problem

Special education services were designed to support the academic and behavior needs of students who struggled to make educational gains under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improved Act 2004 (IDEIA). In fact, research showed that more times than not academic difficulties had underlying emotional and social risk factors which impeded students learning (Lagana-Riordan & Aguilar, 2009). Just like school social workers, school psychologists can help align and improve students' academic learning by providing supports and services to help students deal with social and emotional risk factors prior to evaluating for special education services (Lagana-Riordan & Aguilar, 2009).

The roles of the school psychologist, according to the literature, often was in conflict between best practices in school psychology and pressures from school personnel to evaluate and identify underachieving students for special education services in the reauthorization of IDEA of 2004. This conflict is linked to recent socio-political-economic changes in education (Johnson, Oliff, & Koulish, 2008; Watkins, Crosby, & Pearson, 2001). One of the areas that can also contribute to this mismatch is the practice of having a school psychologist serve more than one school. Proctor and Steadman (2003) surveyed a total of 63 school psychologists who served in the traditional role of psychologist (more than one school) and those who had one school. The

results of the study indicated that those school psychologists with more than one school had lower self-perceptions of their effectiveness as a school psychologist than those who had one school. Specifically, Proctor et al. found the following:

> The results of the analyses suggest that school psychologists who are employed in a single school have higher rates of job satisfaction, lower rates of burnout, and may perceive themselves to be more effective than do school psychologists who serve multiple schools. (p. 242)

Proctor and his colleagues identified some of the major outcomes for school psychologists, yet their study did not fully explore the underlying reasons for this conflict.

The role of school psychologists continuously undergoes significant transformations as educational changes occur. Within any educational system, shifts in administration, policy, and staff create expected or unexpected. Changes in educational systems are often times bureaucratic in nature and usually fail to address the root cause of the issue. This was nowhere more apparent then when dealing with problems concerning lack of growth and progress among underachieving students who failed to make consistent progress throughout the school year (Hanushek & Raymond, 2004). In American public education, for example, many students continue to perform below proficient levels as they lack appropriate educational services and financial resources. According to Darling-Hammond (2007), "Within states, the spending ratio between high and low spending schools is at least typically 2 or 3 to 1" (Darling-Hammond, 2007, p. 247). This lack of educational funding leads to students in low funding schools receiving poorer educational resources, fewer highly qualified teachers, and less time re-teaching students missed concepts. Fusarelli (2004) also indicated that the limited resources and funding to substantiate and fulfill the requirements of No Child Left Behind 2001 (NCLB) was underestimated by

federal policy makers. This lack of governmental preparation and school leaders concerns of not making adequate yearly progress (AYP) has lead to school personnel's uncertainty on improving students' learning (Fusarelli, 2004).

For those school psychologists who work in schools where students failed to make progress, they often walked a "fine line" between doing what was ethically correct based on their educational training while trying to be viewed as a "team player" by school personnel. The latter issue fostered some school psychologists to make educational decisions that may not be in the best interest of students with regards to special education. However the undue social pressures from school administrators, teachers, legal advocates, and sometimes parents in conjunction with recent socio-economic contexts and politically and legislatively driven decisions in education, often dictated what behaviors school psychologists engaged in especially if these pressures or emotional feelings had been experienced in the past. The ongoing ethical battle to either decide to do what was in the best interest of children or give in to the demands of others have fostered many in education to view school psychologists as gatekeepers of special education (Love, 2009). School psychologists found themselves fighting to prove that they were more than gatekeepers of special education. School psychologists were educational change agents who focused on what students could do and not their performance on standardized assessments.

Theoretical Framework

Cognitive dissonance theory suggests that an individual's responses and opinions to change vary when forced to comply (Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959). According to Elliot and Devine (1994), cognitive dissonance theory considers how individuals experienced a level of discomfort when ideas, beliefs, values, and/or emotions are under conflict. An individual's feelings of dominance whether it is high or low, could be positively or negatively influenced by

threatening changes to the environment (Heider, 1944). Additionally, as Festinger and Carlsmith (1959) pointed out, the greater the pressure to accept opinions not their own the greater the likelihood that the individual struggled to find balance based on their own perceptions and deeds.

Historical roots. Cognitive dissonance theory is a theory which has roots in social psychology. According to Gergen (1973), social psychology considers how human behavior is shaped based on the causal relationships of events within the environment. Ayoko, Härtel, and Callan (2002) state that the manner in which individuals' responded to these events is often shaped based on the manner in which changes were communicated by those in leadership roles. More specifically, the manner in which these changes are communicated determines how productively or destructively individuals respond to these changes (Ayoko, Härtel, & Callan, 2002). To minimize the level of social conflict, leaders should understand how changes and events interact with one another if more desirable responses are wanted (Gergen, 1973).

Cognitive dissonance theory as a social psychology can be likened to a social experiment with roots in natural sciences (Gergen, 1973). For example if conditions are stable in an individuals' environment, then it is possible to quantify how individuals behaved within a given situation at the right moment positively or negatively. This in turn makes it easier to change human behaviors by identifying more opportunities to create more desirable events within the environment. However if the environment is chaotic, creating a level of instability, it is difficult to qualify how individuals responded from one event to another. Unfortunately, those involved in creating a more desirable environment find this challenging as different people responded differently at any time. This in turn makes it more difficult to change human behaviors (Gergen, 1973).

Effect on the individual. Human behaviors are not only shaped by events in the environment but also individuals involved within events. Some individuals tend to engage in behaviors based on how they compare their behaviors with others within the environment. Such comparison as Festinger pointed out in his theory of social comparison suggests that individuals accepted or rejected their behaviors based on how the individuals evaluated themselves in comparison to others like them (Suls, Martin, & Wheeler, 2002). Specifically, when individuals compared their behaviors to other individuals, it changed the overall outcomes of individuals' perceptions of themselves including "a person's self-concept, level of aspiration, and feelings of well-being" (Suls, Martin, & Wheeler, 2002, p. 159). This ongoing internal battle of accepting or rejecting changes in the environment creates a state of disequilibrium for one's perceptions of oneself.

Accordingly, an individual's perception can be shaped based on how an individual perceives themselves in comparison to how they view other people within their environment. Additionally, an individual's perception of people and their environment positively or negatively influences the consistency or inconsistency of their behaviors within their environment. This creates dissonance. Freeman, Hennessy, and Marzullo (2001) stated that "dissonance theory proposes that people strive to maintain consistency between all cognitive and behavioral elements in their consciousness and that inconsistencies produce a state of psychological discomfort known as *dissonance*" (Freeman, Hennessy, & Marzullo, 2001, p. 424). Overall, it seems that school psychologists try to create a balance in doing what was ethically right and what was expected of them within their schools. However, when educational changes created patterns of inconsistency for school psychologists, feelings of discourse and disequilibrium can occur. This in turn can lead to tense working relationships with other educational stakeholders as

well as negatively impeded the overall well-being of school psychologists. These constructs informed this study.

   Conceptual model. When school psychologists find themselves in a state of dissonance due to combativeness associated with unneeded testing for special education services, the manner in which school psychologists perceived this level of combativeness influences whether or not their attitudes and behaviors towards those involved in the situation are positively or negatively favorable (Fointiat, 2004). Depending on the degree to which the force to comply occurs, some school psychologists choose to change their behaviors or opinions on a matter as a means to 'push back' against what may or may not be in the best interest of the child and/or retaining their jobs. When this occurs, the state of cognitive dissonance could be reduced (Graham, 2007). This study investigated how school psychologists dealt with this state of disequilibrium and how it informed their perceptions of their roles in special education and their schools. More specifically, this researcher explored school psychologists' perceptions of their abilities to be of service to their schools based on recent social, political, and economic changes in education through the lens of cognitive dissonance theory using the proposed conceptual model:
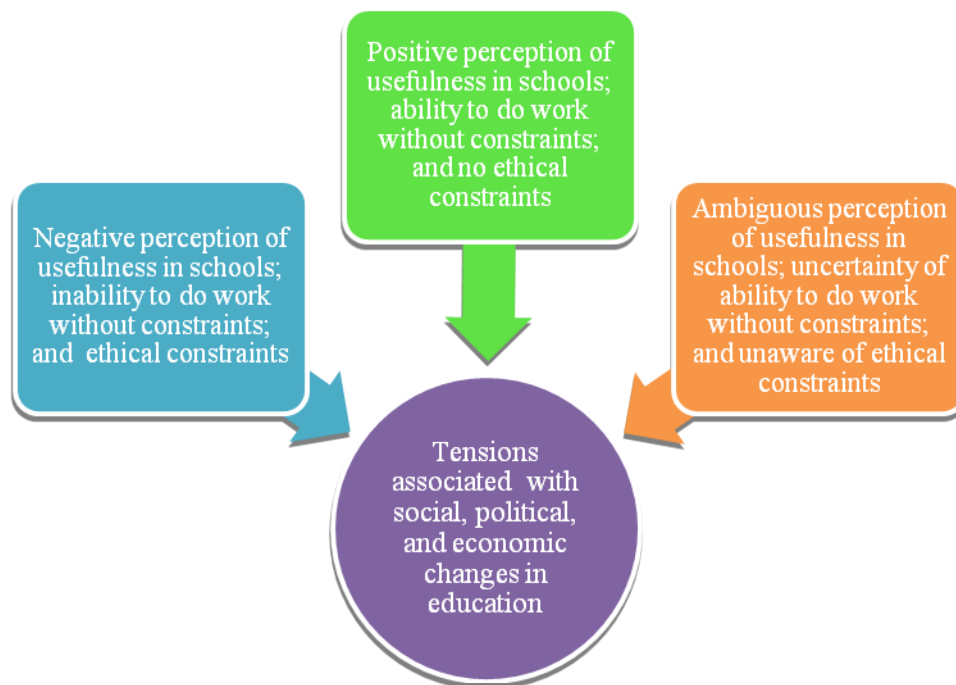
Figure 1: Cognitive dissonance theory applied in the study. Illustration of the relationship between the tensions associated with change and the range of reactions school psychologists may have.

Building from this research question, cognitive dissonance theory was deemed to be the most appropriate theoretical framework to address how school psychologists' perceptions of their abilities to be of service to their schools because this theory clearly and convincingly considers how the disruptions of events and individuals fosters a state of disequilibrium for those most affected by the change in this case school psychologists. The roles of school psychologists continuously change based on federal laws, because of expectations from school administrators, teachers, students, and other educational stakeholders. It has been an ongoing internal struggle to do what is right based on best practices while remaining a team player at the school level as noted above within the conceptual model Figure 1 shows. Depending on the actions, attitudes, behaviors, and manner of communication from school administrators, teachers, students, and legal advocates during the cycle of dissonance, school psychologists' perceptions and/or

reactions towards these behaviors may positively or negatively influence how school psychologists respond to these pressures via their behaviors, attitudes, actions, and preferred means of communication. This in turn may cause some school psychologists to respond negatively when working with educational stakeholders, school administrators, teachers, and students. This could lead to unwanted contention between the gatekeepers of special education and those who simply wanted students evaluated for special education services.

Positionality Statement

As a professional within the field since the inception of many of these educational changes, I must be honest in stating that I do not a support the changes spurred by political and legislative measures. This is because they have failed to provide equitable supports and services for all students especially those in urban districts. With a lack of equitable supports and services for all students regardless of community residency, it has been challenging to state that children were disabled when our educational system has failed to provide adequate resources to support student growth and development. More was expected of educators to perform miracles in increasing students' performances in reading and mathematics with insufficient funds to assist in the process. Hence, in my opinion educators had not 'left behind' children, but instead, a broken educational system that failed to meet the needs of all children.

In order to avoid bias within this study, I evaluated my role as the researcher in this process and reminded myself that it was more important to understand how other individuals perceived their roles within special education and not that of my own. I was aware that I would have my own personal opinions on what I perceived individuals responses should be when it came to this issue. However, my role as the researcher was to be as objective as possible in learning through the stories of others. I saw this process through their eyes and not my own. I

protected the integrity of those individuals who participated within the study and provided them with opportunities to discontinue participating within the study if it became of concern to the participants.

Research Questions

The overarching research question for this phenomenological study was to explore "How have recent socio-political-economic changes impacted the perceived roles of school psychologists?" This question was further investigated using the following sub-questions:

- How do school psychologists perceive their usefulness in their schools based on their service delivery practices?

- How do school psychologists report their experiences regarding their ability to work based on imposed tensions associated with socio-political-economic changes in education?

- How do school psychologists perceive their ethical commitment as special educators in the wider field of special education based on imposed tensions associated with socio-political-economic changes in education?

Organization of Study

This interpretative phenomenological analysis study is presented into five chapters, including this introduction. The introductory chapter provides background information for this research and an overview of the history of the problem, the level of significance of the problem as related to school psychologists, the researcher's position regarding the problem of practice, and the theoretical underpinnings of the work whereby the research was considered. The second chapter focuses on the current literature, specifically presenting information relevant to the topic as well as the absence of relevant information, contributing to a better understanding of the

problem of practice as explored at the center of this study. The foundation of any research is a

discussion of the methodology selected for the study, which is outlined in chapter three. Chapter

three also includes information regarding the site and participant selection process as well as the

approach to data collection and analysis. In chapter four, the researcher presents the findings of

the research and chapter five discusses an overview of the implications and benefits of this work

for educational practice.

Chapter II: THE LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review for this research study includes the following four categories of literature: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA); educational spending or lack thereof; tensions within education as related to school personnel's perceptions of the roles of school psychologists; and school psychologists' perceptions of their roles within special education. These categories guided the theoretical framework and research questions as it was the hope that the information gathered would provide information as to how school psychologists' perceptions of their abilities to be of service to their schools was affected by massive constraints associated with socio-political legislation and limited educational funding.

The survey of the literature first explored school personnel's (teachers and administrators) view of the roles of school psychologists within their buildings. Secondly, the literature explored school psychologists' perceptions of their roles in special education. Then the literature reviewed contributing factors which affected school psychologists' perceptions of their roles in special education. The key terms which were used to conduct this literature review included: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act; administrators and school psychologists; teachers and school psychologists; school psychology and roles; lack of funding in education; and ethical issues in education.

From this initial investigation, the researcher assessed how the educational changes associated with social, political, and economics defined the roles of school psychologists within special education. Finally, the researcher explored common roles school psychologists engaged in at the school level as well as which roles school psychologists wished to participate in more within special education and the challenges they faced if these roles failed to align with the perceptions of school personnel. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how school

psychologists' perceptions of their abilities to be of service to their schools changed based on massive constraints associated with socio-political legislation and limited educational funding.

What's in a Name?: IDEA to IDEIA

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 1975

Prior to 2004, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was simply known by the year in which it was amended. IDEA was first enacted in 1975 under the name of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act to ensure that children identified with disabilities received a free and appropriate public education to meet their needs and prepare them for the future (Martin, Martin, & Terman, 1996). In the past, students with disabilities were denied access to public education. According to Katsiyannis, Yell, and Bradley (2001), IDEA specifically opened doors that denied many children in the past, both those in general education classrooms who received less than adequate support for their needs, as well as those who were placed in separate classes from their peers.

With improved access for all children ages 3-21, IDEA made education better for children with disabilities since by law, all states had to provide students with disabilities quality educational support (Martin, Martin, & Terman, 1996). Strict regulations were established in order for state and local school districts to receive federal funding through IDEA (IDEA, 1997). Since the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) into the educational legislation surrounding No Child Left Behind (NCLB), IDEA policies required educational improvements to further benefit the needs of students with disabilities. In 2004, IDEA was amended to incorporate significant changes to ensure that all children including those within disabilities were not 'left behind'. Therefore, changing to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA).

Changes to IDEA since No Child Left Behind 2001

Since the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the process of how assessment data was gathered documenting the progress of students with disabilities changed. For example, Hardman and Dawson (2008) pointed out that the original 1997 version of IDEA expected less educational progress from children with disabilities than their non-disabled peers and failed to gather sufficient research data as to how specialized instruction assisted in improving the learning of students with disabilities. However, even though the expectation of student learning and engagement had increased and students were given more accessibility to the general education curriculum, many students with disabilities have not made adequate progress as set forth by No Child Left Behind 2001 (NCLB) (Etscheidt, 2012; Ferretti & Eisenman, 2010).

The changes associated with NCLB have failed to adequately align with regulations set forth by IDEA as many students with disabilities have not achieved at the same level of performance or progress as their non-disabled peers (Allbritten, Mainzer, & Ziegler, 2004). For example, although it was the hope of NCLB to increase the performance of students with disabilities (as it is with general education students), Etscheidt (2012) wrote that the educational requirements for NCLB do not adequately assess the needs of students with disabilities especially with regards to district and statewide assessments. Better alignment was needed during the development of students' Individualized Education Plans (IEP) to benefit the needs of students with disabilities to ensure that data gathered actually reflected students' progress throughout the year and not simply their progress on state and district level assessments.

Students with disabilities are assessed with their general education peers to measure their yearly growth and progress. However, the requirements set forth in NCLB failed to adequately

align these exams with students' IEPs. For school psychologists, it is important to assist special education teachers and school administrators in understanding how students' disabilities and learning styles impact their overall progress on all types of exams, including standardized exams. School psychologists can assist IEP team members in gathering information that is meaningful regarding students' progress in order to guide instruction. This information should be grounded in research and aid teachers in developing more effective plans for students as well as strategies to assist students with disabilities in performing better on state and district level assessments (Yell, Katsiyannas, & Shiner, 2006). If these elements are not aligned, students' growth and progress cannot be adequately measured and students with disabilities will be left behind when compared to their non-disabled peers.

Conclusion

For many years educational advocates and lawmakers in the Department of Education have tried to find ways to improve the education of all students especially disadvantage students. However, a perfect resolution had never fully met the needs of all children even with changes associated with NCLB and IDEIA were imperfect solutions to meet the needs of all children. Unfortunately the requirements of NCLB did not readily align with IDEIA as many students with disabilities are unable to perform at a level consistent with their non-disabled peers within the metrics associated with NCLB. For school psychologists working to create meaning for school administrators and teachers as to why students are not meeting progress great contention may arise as there may not be a clear answer. Therefore, policy changes and reasonable accommodations should be made to ensure that students with disabilities are not left behind based on standardized testing alone. Alternative progress monitoring strategies could be used to address the effectiveness of students' growth and progress based on students' IEP goals and

objectives. School psychologists can assist teachers in creating data and making meaning as to expected yearly grade level progress versus appropriate growth levels based on how students learn because of their disabilities.

Where is the Money?

Addonizio (2000) stated that prior to 1990, the growth pattern of K-12 educational spending was steady. Since 1990, the cost of student spending and provisions for educational resources have plummeted, fostering alternative revenue strategies in school districts, like seeking private donations (e.g. corporations or usage of the Internet to sell products) in order to offset a limited budget (Addonizio, 2000). Yet school districts across the country have been unable to provide support for all students, as the distribution of many of these private donations are not equitably distributed among schools. In turn, those children are hurt the most.

Reviewing the research, there was a concern as to how the current educational system is run. Those supporting the business approach to education, it was noted that if students have a chance to learn and be successful, education needs to function as a business. According to Howard and Preisman (2007), there were individuals like William Ouchi, a renowned professor in business management, who suggested that when school districts apply management principles in education, students will learn, society will prosper, and parents will be happier. However, when unexpected budget cuts arise, even the best management principles are often unsuccessful and students' learning and achievement suffers (Howard & Preisman, 2007).

Simply put, the US educational system is broken. The question of educational spending or the lack thereof is a historical issue for the US educational system as many of the educational reforms were politically- and legislatively-driven, and had been this way since the mid-1960s. With tight stipulations on governmental spending, school districts across the country have to

work with the money that is given to them (Fusarelli, 2004; Kaestle & Smith, 1982). Often, the

limited resources and funds proved challenging for schools struggling to provide adequate

resources to their schools in turn impacting students' overall learning and achievement.

The financial crisis in the current US educational system continues to worsen every year

with deeper budget cuts placed on school districts (Oliff & Leachman, 2011; Oliff, Mai, &

Leachman, 2012). Although the federal government provided emergency funding to assist

school districts to improve their budgets, the funding stopped in 2011, prior to schools

recovering from the sharp losses taken over multiple years (Oliff, Mai, & Leachman, 2012). In

the past, school districts were able to rely on private funds to offset their budgets. However with

businesses and other organizations having financial difficulties themselves, those funds were no

longer available. Not only were these losses experienced in education but in industries across the

United States. For example, in 2011 Oliff and Leachman indicated that local school districts

suffer tremendously when K-12 funds are cut at the state level. Oliff and Leachman (2011)

stated the following:

> Some 47 percent of total education expenditures in the U.S. come from state
>
> funds (the share varies by state). Cuts at the state level mean that local school
>
> districts have to either scale back the educational services they provide, raise
>
> more revenue to cover the gap, or both. In particular, cuts in state aid may
>
> particularly affect school districts with high concentrations of children in
>
> poverty… As a result, reductions in ―formula funding may result in particularly
>
> deep cuts in general state aid for less-wealthy, higher-need districts unless a state
>
> goes out of its way to protect them. (pp. 1-2)

Unfortunately when ongoing budget cuts are made, it becomes more challenging for school districts to fulfill the mandates set forth in politically- and legislatively-driven initiatives associated with NCLB (Goertz, 2005).

Conclusion

The US educational system has failed to meet the educational needs of all students due to ongoing budgets cuts. The growth and development of students in all states, especially those in poorer areas, was hindered because of deep budget cuts with limited potential to secure funds from private donations. Some school districts attempted to implement a business-oriented model into their educational systems, only to incur a loss of money over the fiscal year (Oliff & Leachman, 2011; Oliff, Mai, & Leachman, 2012). The current ongoing recession in the US has hurt all industries, including education. As long as there are limited funds in the market to support education, greater tensions arise, not only the equitable distribution of funds within schools but also in school personnel's abilities to meet the needs of all of their students in accordance with NCLB.

Tension within General Education and Special Education

The current US educational system appears to be broken. With ongoing budget cuts and mandates associated with NCLB, school administrators, teachers, and related service personnel have found it challenging to do their jobs. The imposed pressures placed upon school personnel at the local level by federal and state officials has created tension as to what was deemed acceptable outcomes in general and special education.

Inclusion of special education students in traditional classrooms with their general education peers is one of the goals of special educators and policy makers. But, in practice, the inclusion process for many general education and special education teachers is quite challenging.

There were times when this model of including students with disabilities in the general education setting worked well and other times when this process proved disastrous because of individuals' personal perceptions regarding inclusion. Buell et al. (1999) exhaustively surveyed 289 teachers (6% special educators and 4% general educators) regarding their perceptions and inservice needs regarding inclusion (Buell, Hallam, Gamel-McCormick, & Scheer, 1999). The results suggested that general education teachers were less confident in their abilities to support the needs of students with disabilities in an inclusive setting in than special education teachers (Buell, Hallam, Gamel-McCormick, & Scheer, 1999). This creates tension between special education teachers and general education teachers within a collaborative setting (Stempien & Loeb, 2002). As a result, Stempien and Loeb found that some general teachers' perceptions of their own abilities to instruct at-risk students when coupled with the potential tension they experienced with some special education teachers influenced the number of referrals made for testing in any given school year.

When tension between professionals in general and special education settings occurred, school psychologists were often caught in the crossfire as (1) they were the gatekeepers of special education and (2) they were required to work collaboratively with general education teachers to assist in the remediation of students' educational needs prior to an evaluation (Stempien & Loeb, 2002). However, without appropriate data from the general education setting, it was a struggle for school psychologists to determine if students needed to be evaluated for special education services, or if a student required intervention strategies and/or changes to the curriculum to remediate the students' educational needs. School psychologists can be under strenuous pressure to do what was ethically right while working under conditions that made them question their usefulness within their schools.

Ethical Dilemmas

Describing the roles and responsibilities of school psychologists as professionals is not a simple task. Many school psychologists hold state licensures, national certification and/or are members of professional organizations all of which have strict ethical expectations that govern the work of school psychologists. For educational stakeholders unfamiliar with these expectations, it may be challenging to understand why school psychologists struggle to balance what is ethically right (defined by these external organizations) while still proving their status as team players. It is during these times that school psychologists can experience a sense of disequilibrium during their careers (Elliot & Devine, 1994).

Flanagan, Miller, and Jacob (2002) stated that school psychologists were required to know the ethical codes that regulate the profession. By operating within these ethical codes, in a broad sense, school psychologists are better equipped to anticipate, prevent, and make sound decisions when faced with an ethical dilemma. Yet, as Lasser and Klose (2007) mentioned, "School psychologists must frequently navigate systems' boundaries, conflicting values and beliefs, and multiple roles" (Lasser & Klose, 2007, p. 484), which may be difficult during times when others expect a difference course of action that psychologists view as an unethical decision making practices.

Helton, Ray, and Biderman (2000) investigated school psychologists' and special education teachers' responses to these pressures to incorporate unethical practices, specifically actions fostered by administrative personnel when administrative directives conflict with ethical obligations. With a total sample of 271 (141 school psychologists and 130 special education teachers), Helton et al. suggested that both school psychologists and special education teachers

upheld their ethical responsibilities as practitioners rather than engaging in unethical decision making practices. More specifically, they found:

> The responses of the majority of the respondents suggest that they view mandates
>
> to practice in accord with law and ethics and act as student advocates as
>
> obligations to be taken seriously, even in situations in which there are pressures to
>
> do otherwise. (p. 129)

However, it is important to note that both school psychologists and special education teachers agreed that other individuals may not respond ethically when under pressure to engage in unethical decision making practices (Helton et al., 2000). School psychologists who find themselves in such a situation may find it more challenging to work in such intense environments, with dissonance between their own expectations of behavior and that of the environment. This level of intensiveness fostered school psychologists' questions of their usefulness in schools.

Mandates

School psychologists are charged to make ethical decisions and not to give into pressures from individuals who were unfamiliar with special education regulations. The mandates established in school psychology are the first things learned in graduate school training. However, sometimes what is taught in graduate school and what is mandated by the American Psychological Association (APA) and the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) is a mismatch in practice. The standard of practice does not fit in with the current climate in schools, fueled by the economic crisis education continues to face, as well as politically- and legislatively-driven initiatives associated with NCLB. Often, school psychologists find

themselves in a tug-of-war, holding firm to mandate adherence while working within an intense work environment not bound by these mandates.

In 2010, the NASP professional ethics committee adopted professional standards that hold school psychologists accountable for the work they do serving others while maintaining a level of professionalism true to the organization (see NASP Standards Appendix A). An example of one of the mandates from the NASP professional ethics is that "School psychologists engage only in professional practices that maintain the dignity of all individuals" http://www.nasponline.org/standards/2010standards.aspx. However, these professional standards do not take into account the challenges school psychologists sometimes face. These challenges include trying to adhere to the professional standards while working in difficult work environments on a daily basis. School psychologists are not only responsible for themselves as professionals, but all persons who work to ensure quality educational supports for children. Such extensive pressure creates challenging work environments for school psychologists and potentially leads to a lack of job satisfaction and eventually burnout within the workplace (VanVoorhis & Levinson, 2006).

VanVoorhis and Levinson (2006) completed an intensive evaluation of school psychologists and their job satisfaction using data from 1982-1999. Data was collected and analyzed using 2,116 participants. The results indicated that greater than 80% of school psychologists were satisfied with their jobs. More specifically, they found that "School psychologists were most satisfied with their relationships with coworkers, the opportunity to stay busy on the job and work independently, and the opportunity to be of service to others in a way that reflects positive moral values" (VanVoorhis & Levinson, 2006, p. 87). They also found more displeasure (or the least amount of satisfaction) for school psychologists in the areas of (1)

salary; (2) school policies and practices; (3) professional advancement; (4) on the job

recognition; and (5) technical supervision (VanVoorhis & Levinson, 2006). These realities are

compounded with a lack of funding and resources due to ongoing budget cuts, high expectations

from NCLB, and professional mandates from APA and NASP. Accordingly, school

psychologists are spread thin within their work environments, and this study posited that this

creates even further disequilibrium when faced with decisions that were ethically correct and

aligned with their belief and value systems. Some school psychologists could question what

their overall purpose was in their schools and whether or not their role was still useful in their

schools.

Purpose

The roles of school psychologists have rapidly evolved over the years since the mid-1960

(Bardon, 1983). With every new regulation and changes in expenditures at every level of

government, political and legislative agendas have dictated how members within the education

field function daily. Sometimes, these political and legislative agendas are not aligned with what

actually occurs at the district and building levels, creating a level of unnecessary angst for those

affected most by these misalignments (teachers, school administrators, related service personnel,

classified workers) (Bradley-Johnson, Johnson, & Jacob-Timm, 1995). Unfortunately, for some

stakeholders in education, questions surrounding their purpose in education—specifically what

were they doing and whether their roles still useful in schools–arose. School psychologists are

no exception to these feelings, especially when what they were doing and their actual usefulness

in schools may not align with professional standards.

Bradley-Johnson, Johnson, and Jacob-Timm (1995) suggested that with every change to

special education policy and practice, the roles of school psychologists are reevaluated, since

simply being psychometrists was not cost effective for school districts. Yet, the primary role

school personnel perceived school psychologists to be the most useful was the evaluation/

classification processes for students who were not performing on grade level (Watkins, Crosby,

& Pearson, 2001). As school psychologists were encouraged to move beyond functioning in the

roles of psychometrists and doing more consultative and/or collaboration within schools, these

services were not always accepted by some faculty members, because they fall outside of these

comfortable assumptions. They have been deemed experts in assessment. Shriberg (2007)

found that school psychologists served as leaders in schools, largely because they understood

how the results of high stakes assessments impacted students' overall learning potential. He

wrote:

> As the school-based professionals who often have the greatest expertise in
>
> assessment and as representatives of a profession that has long since sought to
>
> escape the perception that school psychologists can and should only give IQ tests,
>
> this current emphasis on assessment provides an opportunity for the field of
>
> school psychology both to redefine its role as relates to assessment and to
>
> promote best practices in achieving the best possible outcomes for students. (p.
>
> 152)

However, if school personnel have different perceptions of role of school psychologists, it makes

it more challenging for school psychologists to provide supports to schools if they are unwanted.

This gives the perception that school psychologists' hands are tied by multiple sources,

leading to questions related to their roles and usefulness in schools. This investigation led to

many questions that remain unanswered in the extant literature. Would school psychologists still

be relevant if testing was no longer a part of their jobs? How should school psychologists

advocate for themselves in order to become change agents when other faculty members did not perceive this to be their role? How do school psychologists align their professional mandates with their daily work functions?

School psychologists are charged with ensuring that students receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) related to their roles as gatekeepers of special education. School psychologists provide collaborative supports to teachers and administrators in designing intervention solutions to existing problems rather than immediately reacting to problems without reviewing data from multiple sources over a period of time (Braden, DiMarino-Linnen & Good, 2001). This guarantees that students receive adequate educational supports to make progress within the general education setting prior to evaluating for special education services. By taking time to meet students' needs where they are, school psychologists and faculty members alike are able to determine if students' learning challenges are related to a learning disadvantage or educational disability (Dawson, Lehr, Reschly, Reynolds, Telzrow, & Ysseldyke, 1997).

Conclusion

The roles of school psychologists continue to change as tension between general and special education expectations arise due to budget cuts and regulations associated with NCLB. Pressures impact every level in education: to do what is in the best interest of children while making certain that students are making adequate growth in learning. More times than not, school psychologists are caught in the crossfire when students failed to make growth based on state standards, often triggering unnecessary requests for special education evaluations.

School Personnel's Perceptions of Roles of School Psychologists

Everyone has something to say regarding how school psychologists should function within schools. This is often based on prior experiences with school psychologists. As Ms. Horne, former urban school district employee said:

> Some individuals perceive the primary role of the school psychologists is to simply test students for special education. Some believe that school psychologists should provide counseling services to students in need. Some believe that school psychologists are individuals who hold up the testing process because they have no desire to test students. (T. Horne, personal communication, April 24, 2013)

With all of these viewpoints, the role of school psychologists is predominantly influenced by the needs of schools and how schools value the role of school psychologists.

Who are School Psychologists?

Many individuals including administrators, parents, and teachers, tend to define the role of school psychologists as the gatekeepers of special education or individuals who are itinerant in schools. Depending on individuals' past experiences with school psychologists, their current and future perceptions of school psychologists within their buildings differ over time. Some administrators and faculty embrace school psychologists as they found value in the work of school psychologists based on prior relationships (Watkins, Crosby, & Pearson, 2001). Other administrators and faculty, according to who Watkins et al., resist supports and services offered by school psychologists, as they solely valued school psychologists as testers. To better understand how administrators and faculty perceived the role of school psychologists, school psychologists need clarity as to how administrators and faculty define the role of school psychologists within schools. Through the acquisition of such knowledge, school psychologists

gained a better understanding as to how their services helped students, teachers, and administrators within the general education and special education settings (Watkins, Crosby, & Pearson, 2001).

Administration. Thomas et al. (1992) noted that administrative personnel preferred it when school psychologists spent more time actively engaged in supporting the needs of students and teachers, rather than engaging in administrative duties (Thomas, Levinson, Orf, & Pinciotti, 1992). Within this study, administrative personnel viewed the role of school psychologists positively when school psychologists provided supports and services to teachers using consultative techniques and provided instructional tools for teachers to assist in the remediation student learning and engagement. Administrative personnel also positively viewed the role of school psychologists who completed special education evaluations and assisted school-based personnel in understanding how students' learning patterns influenced their performance within the classroom setting (Thomas, Levinson, Orf, & Pinciotti, 1992).

Faculty. Other faculty resented the role of school psychologists in a different light since often times they were the recipients of the change suggested by school psychologists (Gilman & Medway, 2007). Depending on the working relationship of teachers and school psychologists, their perceptions of the usefulness and value of school psychologists within their classroom was positively or negatively affected by these relationships. This also influenced teachers' attitudes and behaviors towards school psychologists.

Gilman and Medway (2007) exhaustively interviewed 1533 special education and general education teachers in an effort to determine their level of satisfaction related to the services and supports offered by school psychologists in eight districts in four states. The results of their findings indicated that general education teachers utilized the services of school psychologists

less than teachers in special education. They found general education teachers (1) fail to understand the roles of school psychologists within general education, (2) find school psychologists less helpful in supporting teachers' needs and (3) overall satisfaction with school psychologists (Gilman & Medway, 2007).

More times than not, it appears that both general education and special education teachers found school psychologists to be more useful in conducting evaluations and providing academic and/or behavioral consultation rather than offering counseling based services and curriculum development (Gilman & Medway, 2007). Gilman and Medway's (2007) study explained why some teachers were resistant to receiving school-based consultative support from school psychologists. Similarly, Gonzalez, Nelson, Gutkin, and Shwery (2004) found that teachers were more resistant to consulting with the school psychologists based on the availability of the school psychologists. For those school psychologists who were readily at their school every day, teachers were more accepting of the consultation model based on better response times from the school psychologists than those shared between multiple buildings. These studies suggest that there is a consequence when school psychologists are shared among multiple schools, negatively impacting their working relationships with teachers. The level of disequilibrium this creates for school psychologists not only impacts their ability to work with students, teachers, and administrators but also influences how school psychologists perceive themselves within schools. In practice, schools may want more from school psychologists, but barriers such as limited time and funding negatively impact what supports and services school psychologists' offered.

Needing More from School Psychologists

According to Watkins, Crosby, and Pearson (2001), school staff members want school psychologists to provide more services while continuing to actively assess students for special

education services. This creates a level of disparity for school psychologists who desire less assessment and more opportunities to provide services. Often, in practice, their assignment schedules and caseload do not afford the opportunity to provide diverse services (Watkins, Crosby, & Pearson, 2001). Gilman and Gabriel (2004) indicated that what school psychologists want to offer schools may be different than the vision of school administrators and teachers. Gilman and Gabriel (2004) further found that school administrators wanted school psychologists to become more involved in parent trainings, providing professional development at schools, and consulting with teachers while retaining their levels of assessments, curriculum development, and working through the special education process. However, most teachers wanted school psychologists to provide more counseling (individual and group), parenting groups, while working collaboratively with teachers in the general education setting, and providing interventions during crises, in addition to retaining their same level of supports and services already offered (Gilman & Gabriel, 2004). Many teachers reported their desire to see school psychologists function in additional roles beyond testing (e.g. increasing level of mental health services), consistent with the desires of school psychologist in the study. Teachers indicated that increasing the scope of the school psychologists' role would be more useful to them than that of school administrators. Their study also showed that some school psychologists preferred to decrease the number of yearly assessments conducted (Gilman & Gabriel, 2004).

Unable to Acquire More from School Psychologists

The underlying findings of these studies are that both school administrators and faculty members wanted school psychologists to be present on a full-time basis. However, with limited time and financial resources, school psychologists cannot give their full commitment to one school in many districts, even if that would meet the documented needs of many children. For

example, with many students coming from broken homes and/or being in family crisis, many students found it hard to focus on learning (Harry, Sturges, & Klingner, 2005). Sometimes these students developed behavioral problems, often times making it challenging for teachers to effectively teach other students. Mental health services provided by the school psychologist was a valuable tool seen by teachers and school psychologists but not that of school administrators as noted by Meyers and Swerdlik (2003). The documented need versus the expectations of the various stakeholders can create barriers when what is needed to help students be more successful in school and what was affordable for schools to lose out on (e.g. increased assessments). If school psychologists were able to move away from testing, they would then have more time to engage in consultative/counseling based services (Reinke, Stormont, Herman, Puri, & Goel, 2011). Unfortunately in a broken educational system with ongoing political, legislative, and financial changes, faculty and administrators see the role of the school psychologists differently than school psychologists. School psychologists are forced to attempt to find balance as to who they should appease—teachers, school administrators, or themselves.

Conclusion

School personnel desired to see school psychologists continue to conduct assessments while offering more services to individual schools. However, this was often virtually impossible as many school psychologists have more than one setting and greater than 50% of their time was spent evaluating students for special education services. This great divide in what was wanted by school personnel and what was feasible often times created discourse and disharmony between school personnel and school psychologists. School psychologists were obligated to fulfill objectives set forth by their department heads while trying to appease teachers and school administrators. How school personnel perceived the roles of school psychologists could make it

harder for school psychologists to find equilibrium as they try to provide what is needed to their schools without over extending themselves to the point of burning out. School psychologists needed to find balance on the job and the first step was to create a clearer identity as to the role of school psychologists within special education.

School Psychologists' Perceptions of Roles in Special Education

School psychologists have formal training to assist schools in readily meeting the needs of students with and without disabilities. Unfortunately, behaviors, attitudes, and reactions of the past tend to shape how school psychologists work with students in the present and future. This in turn perpetuated the ongoing battle for many school psychologists to decide if they should or should not evaluate/identify students for special education services as "Past behavior dictates future behavior, and if your behavior is dictated to you by outside forces, you are in the proverbial and your hand is forced" (Dr. B. Bates Parsons, personal communication, December 20, 2012). Therefore, it was important that school psychologists found an identity for the profession so that they were able to assist school personnel in understanding the roles of school psychologists in special education (Smith, 1984; Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000). It was the hope that by sharing and showing all the multi-faceted roles school psychologists afforded schools then school psychologists would be less likely to receive unwarranted referrals for special education.

Struggling to find an Identity

The roles of school psychologists were continuously changing based on the ebb and flow of educational reform and policy changes. Throughout these times of change, the field of school psychology redefined their identity not only in the field of psychology but also in schools (Curtis, Hunley, & Baker, 1999). This created sources of internal conflict for many school

psychologists as they strove towards best practices for all children especially those with disabilities (Levinson, 1990).

Bardon (1968) indicated that since the institution of psychology began in schools, individuals questioned the role and functions of the psychologist. Most people associated the role of school psychologists as being conductors of assessments specifically intellectual quotient (IQ) evaluations. However, Bardon posited that school psychologists were more than just testers and had the ability to offer a variety of supports and services to schools. Some of these services included counseling, providing classroom management supports and recommendations to teachers, as well as connecting families with outside community based supports such as mental health (Bardon, 1968).

Unfortunately, the field of school psychology has afforded outside forces (e.g. politics) to dictate the roles of school psychologists within special education, which shaped how many school psychologists perceived their identities within schools. Instead Bardon (1983) reminded those within the field that "School psychology can be viewed as comprised of uneven layers of functions and roles, practiced by persons who differ greatly in background and training" (Bardon, 1983, p. 186). School psychologists have expertise knowledge and training in many areas that it was challenging to confine their roles into one category (e.g. testing). It was vital that the field of school psychology clearly identified their positions within schools as a collective discipline so that (1) school personnel understood their roles and responsibilities in schools and (2) school psychologists would be better educational advocates for children and families. If not, educational changes like NCLB, budget cuts, and other educational stakeholders perceptions of the roles of school psychologist in special education would continue guiding how school

psychologists viewed themselves as professionals within the field and perform their duties within schools.

Bramlett, Murphy, Johnson, Wallingsford, and Hall (2002) surveyed 800 school psychologists in 40 states in order to assess their roles, types of referrals made by school-based personnel for at-risk students, consultation practices, and crisis team involvement. Out of the 370 participants who returned the survey, 50% indicated that most of their time was spent completing assessments for special education. After assessments, the findings suggested that school psychologists were involved in consultative work, which made up 16% of the time spent within schools which represented a slight decrease (20%) in comparison to the late 1980s (Bramlett, et al., 2002). They also noted that schools sought guidance from school psychologists to participate in the crisis team; however only half of the respondents were actively involved in responding during crisis times. It was important that those in the field of school psychology collectively vocalize their positions at the federal, state, and district levels as to what additional supports and services they might provide schools in order to create a balance between their ability to be consultants, advocates, strategists, and spending less time being psychometricians.

Psychometricians

Throughout their training, school psychologists were taught to provide schools with a multi-delivery approach to improving students' learning beyond assessments. School psychologists were trained to be educational advocates, intervention strategists, counselors, and assistants with curriculum development for students within the general education setting. However, for many individuals, especially those in administrative roles, the primary duty of school psychologists were to assess students for special education services.

According to Greene (2010), many school administrators viewed the role of school psychologists as testers. The majority of school administrators desired to see their school psychologists perform other supports and services on a regular basis to parents and teachers, yet time constraints and financial budget restrictions restricted the level school psychologists could perform these other duties. Instead, school psychologists spent a significant amount of their time conducting assessments and less time engaging in other activities useful to schools.

Psychometric assessments have long assessed individuals who learn differently. The first assessments were designed by white Americans, based on values that were important to white Americans (Gay & Abrahams, 1973). Historically, many of the psychological instruments used by school psychologists (such as the Wechsler scales and Stanford-Binet scales) were culturally biased towards minority groups as they failed to understand others' cultures (Gay & Abrahams, 1973). In turn, this created problems of over identifying non-white students as being educationally disabled.

Although school psychologists and psychology programs are aware that these assessments were not culturally-friendly to minority groups, these instruments are still used to determine the "smartness" of children. Even with great attempts by assessment companies to correct this problem, many instruments are not culturally-friendly. For those school psychologists who were required to test students using these instruments, they were often uncomfortable stating whether or not the results were a true reflection of the child's ability or a reflection of a lack of cultural, environmental, or economical exposure. Many school psychologists overrode the fact that the latter contributed substantially to low performances saw by many at-risk groups on IQ tests and instead rationalized the identification (or over identification) of at-risk students with disabilities because they simply need a little help. Until

school psychologists come to terms that all IQ measures were not culturally fair to all children, more students continued to be identified for special education services due to learning disadvantages and not learning disabilities (Masner, 2007).

Intervention Strategists

Although school psychologists can spend a large portion of their time evaluating and identifying students for special education services (VanDerHeyden, Witt, & Gilbertson, 2007), the scope and sequence of what school psychologists are able to do within schools supersedes being psychometricians or testers. School psychologists have extensive training in developing and implementing intervention strategies for school and home. Yet these services were under utilized as some school cultures did not reward school psychologists and teachers for successfully implementing interventions (Lentz, Allen, & Ehrhardt, 1996). This poses a challenge for school psychologists required to review data based on students' responses to intervention to determine if a special education evaluation is needed (VanDerHeyden, Witt, & Gilbertson, 2007).

With NCLB and initiatives such as Response to Intervention (RtI), school psychologists should spend more time being proactive in student learning and engagement rather than reacting to unwarranted referrals for special education. Bradley, Danielson, and Doolittle shared (as cited in Fuchs, Mock, Morgan, and Young, 2003, p. 159):

> RTI has been broadly described as a process in which students are provided quality instruction, their progress is monitored, those who do not respond appropriately are provided additional instruction and their progress is monitored, and those who continue to not respond appropriately are considered for special education services. (Bradley, Danielson, & Doolittle, 2005, p. 486)

Although many school psychologists would prefer to spend their time conducting pre-referral interventions with teachers, the reality was that the amount of time required for teachers to monitor students progress with integrity and fidelity while completing their daily work was too time consuming (Cochrane & Laux, 2008). This turn placed teachers in a precarious position where they had to defend that a student had a problem that required an educational disability classification (Pugach & Johnson, 1989). Such pressures on teachers and school psychologists to "fix problems" in underachieving students only perpetuated the ideology that when students failed, a disability existed. School personnel tended to forget that there were a multitude of other exclusionary factors that could impact students' responses to intervention(s) (Cochrane & Laux, 2008). It was important that when evaluating the integrity and fidelity of intervention results that school psychologists took into account whether or not the intervention was implemented and monitored appropriately.

As advocates for student learning, school psychologists must be vigilant in reviewing this information to ensure that all data was collected with integrity and fidelity. One way to ensure that the documentation was done with integrity and fidelity was to assist school teams in developing intervention strategies at the students' independent level and not their instructional level. This required school psychologists to (1) understand the curriculum used in schools and (2) align students' needs with the curriculum used in schools when developing these strategies. (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000). The literature suggests the best way to gain such knowledge was to consult with those individuals who worked with students on a daily basis—teachers, school administrators, and/or parents.

Consultant for Curriculum Development

A critical component to improving students' learning and engagement academically, behaviorally, and emotionally was the encapsulation of supports and services at home and school. Christenson (1995) suggested that the home-school collaboration fostered the establishment of mutual goals between educators and parents in order to enhance the overall educational experiences of students. As consultants, school psychologists often served as a neutral party in an effort to bridge the gap between educators and parents (Christenson, 1995). Snyder, Quirk, and Dematteo (2011) indicated that the skills developed by school psychologists in the areas of collaboration and interpersonal skills helped in establishing communication lines between parents and teachers so that all parties felt heard when problem-solving students' needs. Therefore, it was important to understand the value of school psychologists serving in the role of consultant to assist in the academic, behavioral and mental health development of students prior to the recommendation of evaluating and identifying students as educationally disabled.

Academics. Poncy, McCallum, & Skinner (2011) found that:

Given the training experiences of school psychologists, we could be a valuable resource to use our skills of assessment, instruction, program evaluation, and systems to help schools collect and analyze data that directly link to recommendations for instructional practices and materials targeting identified problems. (p. 158)

This was never more evident than in high risk educational areas where families tended to experience both social and economical hardships. For example, Elias and Haynes (2008) suggested that students who resided in impoverished neighborhoods were at a higher risk of lacking academic success and developing social competencies due to their family life,

environmental settings, and a lack of appropriate school resources to help these students excel educationally. Therefore, when serving in the capacity of consultants, school psychologists could help faculty and school administrators understand how students perceived information at their level of independence in comparison to grade level materials (instructional level). In turn as a collective group, these individuals could develop intervention strategies that helped students experience academic success at their level using available curriculum within schools.

When school psychologists took a proactive approach in collaborating with educators to assist in developing students' academic success, it helped teachers improve how they disseminated information using differentiated instruction for students with different learning styles. School psychologists could help throughout this process by assessing if strategies were working or needed to be modified at home and at school. Such a triangulation approach could only help enhance the quality of services within the general education setting.

School psychologists have educational training which prepared them to be instructional leaders in helping teachers and school administrators in the development of academic curriculum for struggling students. School psychologists were able to utilize the limited resources available in schools to collect substantial data to assess students' learning profiles based on their instructional, independent, and/or frustration levels in reading and mathematics (Elias & Haynes, 2008). Such knowledge was often underutilized in schools as it was often time consuming and did not yield immediate results as quickly as that of evaluating students for special education services. Structured collaboration between school psychologists and staff personnel was needed to ensure that students were on target academically and behaviorally prior to evaluating for special education services.

Classroom behavior management. Tillery, Varjas, Meyers, and Collins (2010) suggested that in order for teachers to experience success in the area of classroom behavior management it was important that other school based personnel realized that "Understanding teachers' perspectives about behavior is an essential element of implementing prevention focused initiatives because their perspectives likely influence their choice of behavior management strategy" (Tillery, Varjas, Meyers, & Collins, 2010, p.87). Many times with a plate that was already filled with high stakes testing, grading papers and curriculum that were always changing, some teachers simply have limited exposure in interacting with students in an educational manner in terms of early prevention/intervention strategies. Many of these teachers also did not receive this training during their educational coursework and/or on the job training (Wong & Wong, 2009). Within many schools, behavioral issues were common and many teachers struggled to develop appropriate classroom behavioral management programs. School psychologists could provide struggling teachers with supports and services in identifying target behaviors in the classroom setting and provide teachers with strategies on changing their behaviors and attitudes while changing the behaviors of their students (Noell, Duhon, Gatti, & Connell, 2002).

School psychologists have extensive training in identifying behaviors within classroom settings and developing supportive plans to help students experience more success (Natasi, 2000). For example, a school psychologist might come into the classroom to conduct both structured and unstructured observations to gain an idea as to what preceded a child's behaviors (e.g. the teacher failed to acknowledge a raised hand), the behavior the child displayed (e.g. throws books on the floor) and the selected consequence the teacher invoked on the student (e.g. tells the child to leave the room). Such information is pivotal in changing not only the child's

behaviors but also the perceptions of how other students viewed the teacher's ability to maintain control of the classroom. When students see their teachers lose control some students would perceive that the only way to be acknowledged would be to act out or simply shut down.

By taking the information learned through such observations, school psychologist and teachers might create a classroom based check system that not only decreased disruptive classroom behaviors but also improved how teachers selected their methods of disciplining students. Reinke, Lewis-Palmer, and Merrell (2008) determined in their research that when teachers were provided with visual performance feedback and a check system teachers were more apt to implement classroom behavior management strategies, which improved their willingness to engage in more positive praise. Teachers were more willing to identify praise for specific behaviors while decreasing their use of negative reprimands (Reinke, Lewis-Palmer, & Merrell, 2008). This led to more desired behaviors from students by their teachers and helped improve the mental health of students.

Mental health. Many children have experienced significant emotional trauma at one point in time in their lives. Mental health issues were serious and should be addressed. However, personal and system-level factors limit how much school based mental health services were provided (Suldo, Friedrich, & Michalowski, 2010). Hoagwood and Erwin (1997) suggested that schools were the main mental health support systems for children in schools because children were required to attend schools regularly (Hoagwood & Erwin, 1997). Often the emotional needs of students go unmet since they were required to spend a certain amount of minutes in the classroom participating in academia. To combat this issue, Nastasi (2000) suggested that school psychologists begin functioning in the roles of health care providers where they work collaboratively with other related service personnel both inside and outside of schools

(Nastasi, 2000). To do so would foster school psychologists the opportunity to use more of their counseling expertise and provide counseling based services to assist students who were in crisis.

According to Black and Krishnakumar (1998), the childhood poverty rate in America doubled in 1989 in comparison to those living in suburban areas. Specifically, the pair found:

> More children born in the inner cities of the United States were born underweight
>
> at birth (9% compared to 7% nationwide), lived in homes where their parents
>
> were on public assistance (15% compared with 12% nationally), and dropped out
>
> of high school (14% compared with 11% nationwide). (p. 636)

These factors unfortunately have increased a lot of the mental health issues seen to date. Families on public assistance have greater than 40% or more chance of being prone to domestic violence, substance abuse, incarceration, unemployment, and homelessness, which was why the incidence of mental health issues was so high (Bassuk, Buckner, Perloff, & Bassuk, 1998; James & Glaze, 2006; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2003).

For schools trying to improve home-school collaborations, it might prove challenging to acquire the supports teachers need from parents when parents themselves might be depressed, have anxiety issues, or might be suicidal. This ongoing epidemic proved that school psychologists expand their roles as mental health consultants since they were able to connect families and students to outside agencies while supporting students with school related issues. School psychologists must advocate for themselves in establishing their identities in schools so that they can advocate for the needs of the students whom they serve.

Advocates

School psychologists should serve in the role of change agents. The primary role of the school psychologist was not to serve as the gatekeeper to special education but as educational

advocates for the needs of all children. For example, Masner (2007) conducted a mixed methods study investigating how school psychologists perceived their roles as educational advocates for children with disabilities. Within his study, Masner determined that 100% of all school psychologists surveyed believed that school psychologists had an ethical obligation to advocate for the needs of students (Masner, 2007). One way to serve in the role of advocate was to see the needs of one's school and ask how one's services might be utilized to meet those needs. Love (2009) suggested that school psychologists assist schools through curriculum development, supporting teachers, and supporting parents. By taking a 'hands on approach', school psychologists were less likely to evaluate students unnecessarily for special education services and would be more likely to see students' progress improve over time when using a triangulation approach to inform student's learning (Sullivan & Long, 2010).

Secondly, as advocates in the area of curriculum development, school psychologists should work with teachers in understanding the root causes behind a child's learning and behavior problems rather than a practical solution of testing to fix a problem (Love, 2009). School psychologists could also support teachers by working directly within the classroom setting, Love (2009) suggests, in order to promote and advance overall student learning. School psychologists could also support parents by helping them understand their child's learning styles and/or disabilities while providing additional supports and services to parents to help them assist their children at home academically and behaviorally (Love, 2009). These key areas would help in the advancement of student's learning while affording school psychologists to advocate for the needs of students.

Unfortunately, low performing schools face an even larger challenge. For school psychologists who work in these schools, they often found themselves less in the role of

advocate and spent more time advocating for their jobs. Many school psychologists were required to fix students who failed to meet standards and for those school psychologists who failed to comply, many school administrators requested that these individuals be removed from their schools. The level of disharmony between fixing problems and keeping one's job created a state of disequilibrium for many school psychologists. This state of disequilibrium occurred because for many years school psychologists had been the primary effectors in providing uneducable children with educational opportunities to succeed in the classroom (Lambert, 1973). Eventually school psychologists were required to compromise doing what was right in order to appease the needs of educational leaders at the school and district levels. For those school psychologists who had the opportunity to serve in the role of advocate, they had a better opportunity to effectively execute positive change for the students whom they served. Yet, it was challenging for school psychologists to serve as advocates for students since the identity of school psychologists were defined by the continuous shifts in education.

Conclusion

The roles of school psychologists in special education continue to evolve as changes within education were made. The current body of literature suggests that defining the identity of school psychologists was challenging because while school psychologists have formal training in multiple areas including counseling, assessment testing, writing reports, and consulting, research showed they often spent more of their time testing students for special education services. Being "stuck" in the role of psychometrician makes it difficult for many school psychologists to provide additional supports and services to schools especially in at-risk schools with high referral rates for special education.

Chapter III: RESEARCH DESIGN

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how recent socio-political-economic changes impacted the perceived roles of schools psychologists in education. Accordingly, the overarching research question for this interpretive phenomenological analysis explored "How have recent socio-political-economic changes impacted the perceived roles of school psychologists?" This question was further investigated using the following sub-questions:

- How do school psychologists perceive their usefulness in their schools based on their service delivery practices?

- How do school psychologists report their experiences regarding their ability to work based on imposed tensions associated with socio-political-economic changes in education?

- How do school psychologists perceive their ethical commitment as special educators in the wider field of special education based on imposed tensions associated with socio-political-economic changes in education?

An interpretivist framework guided the methodology and research design of this study. According to Grbich (2007), interpretivism assumes that knowledge is subjective and consists of members within a culture or group constructing shared symbols and signs that are recognized by members within the group.

Interpretivists specifically investigate three areas when learning how individuals view reality. First, the research focuses on "the way people interpret and make sense of experiences in the worlds in which they live, and how the contexts of events and situations and the placement of these within wider social environments have within wider social environments have impacted on constructed understandings" (Grbich, 2007, p. 8). Second, in Grbich's model, the researcher

comprehends how participants make sense of their experiences based on how the researcher comprehends the experiences based on their own experiences. Finally, the researcher engages in a level of subjectivity and intersubjectivity of personal interest to the researcher. More concretely, Grbich (2007) suggested that the researcher's own perceptions and how they are constructed are just as important as how the researcher reconstructs the views of the participants, based on their oral and written communication. In short, the researcher is intrinsically tied to the study based on their own construction of knowledge. Based on the personal experiences of the researcher as a practitioner, an interpretivist approach was deemed the best approach for this study (Butin, 2010).

Role of the Researcher

Because of this interpretivist construction, the investigator, April Lisbon-Peoples, was the primary instrument for data collection, verification, and analysis (Creswell, 2007). The researcher is a member of the profession of school psychology, and has experienced the effects of the recent socio-political-economic changes in education as a practitioner. As reflected in the earlier positionality statement, the research begins with a personal awareness of the positive and negative effects associated with the implementation of these changes, specifically as related to the roles of school psychologists. These personal perspectives allowed the researcher to further probe for information shared by participants in an effort to acquire the richest content from each participant, with the hopes of effectively and efficiently answering the overarching research question.

The goal of the research was to accurately and thoroughly document the stories of how school psychologists' roles and responsibilities have changed since the implementation of recent socio-political-economic changes and their perceived roles in the wider field of special

education. The study designed sought to understand and document how changes influenced how school psychologists handled the demands from teachers, parents, students, and other educational stakeholders regarding the issue of accountability when it came to students' academic and behavioral performances, in accordance with best practices in qualitative research (Creswell, 2007). This in turn told the stories of how each participant experienced these issues (Butin, 2010).

Research Design

Based on the problem of practice and research questions, an exploratory qualitative study was selected for this topic. Qualitative studies lend themselves to investigating "the quality of relationships, activities, situations, or materials" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). Polkinghorne (2005) stated that the "primary purpose of qualitative research is to describe and clarify experience as it is lived and constituted in awareness" (Polkinghorne, 2005, p.138). Butin (2010) further added, "Qualitative research methods, by their very nature of attention to nuance and detail, allow for data gathering that can be extremely deep and take into consideration opinions and perspectives that may not initially be visible or obvious" (Butin, 2010, p. 76). Qualitative research afforded the researcher opportunities to create description that was narrative in nature (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009).

For this study, the researcher believed that although educational stakeholders were aware of the impact of recent changes in education, limited research had been conducted using a qualitative method to gather data from school psychologists regarding their perceptions of how these socio-political-economic changes in education had defined their roles within schools as well as the wider field of special education. There was a gap in the literature. A qualitative approach allowed for the development of an understanding of the central phenomenon through

exploration of the identified problem of practice (Creswell, 2012) while collecting data that was based on words or pictures rather than numbers (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009).

Again, the purpose of this study was to provide a description of how school psychologists experienced a phenomenon using a holistic approach to understanding complex issues associated with the phenomenon under investigation as the current literature was very limited (Creswell, 2012). Creswell (2012) stated that qualitative research was optimally used when the researcher needs to explore unknown variables that may not be addressed sufficiently within the literature. Additionally, a deep contextual analysis, exploring the how and the why, require data gathered using individuals' words, rather than using numbers as associated with quantitative research, since the information obtained was based on participants' views (Creswell, 2012).

Research Tradition

An interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used for this study to acquire knowledge from the perspective of participants within the study as they shared their thoughts and ideas as to how the central phenomenon impacted their roles and responsibilities within schools based on recent socio-political-economic changes in education. John A. Smith, a professor of psychology and helped develop this theory (Larkin, 2013). This approach is an experiential form of qualitative research, typically used in psychology as well as human, health, and social sciences (Larkin, 2013). IPA is narrative in nature, in that a coherent story emerges based on the data (Smith & Osborn, 2007). Specifically, IPA studies focus on examining the experiences of individuals in a particular case using in-depth detail. Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) stated, "It wants to know in detail what the experience for *this* person is like, what sense *this* particular person is making of what is happening to them" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 3). An IPA afforded the opportunity to identify similarities and differences experienced by

participants through the creation of these themes based on shared stories (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin 2009).

Smith's approach to studying phenomenology through the eyes of the participants came from two theoretical approaches- phenomenology and hermeneutics (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin 2009). Theorists who studied the lives and events of people from the phenomenological perspective focused on the commonality of an experience shared by individuals rather than the individual himself (Creswell, 2007). Key theorists influential in IPA included Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Satre from the phenomenological perspective (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Hermeneutical theorists on the other hand focused on how individuals communicated through writings, oral narration, performances etc. of shared experiences (Grbich, 2007). Key theorists influential to IPA from the hermeneutical perspective included Schleiermacher, Heidegger, and Gadamer (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). When combining both approaches, IPA first focuses on how participants use various forms of communication to share their experiences through their eyes. Then, the researcher makes sense of how participants experience these events, considering the similarities and differences of each participant based on how participants communicate their shared event.

IPA is a specific subset of this phenomenological approach, used as a qualitative research approach wherein the research explores a phenomenon of interests to the researcher and interprets the meaning of the lived experiences (Creswell, 2007). IPA was built on the premises of phenomenology, as described above, which focused on interpretation of lived stories (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Unlike traditional phenomenology where the investigator sets asides his/her personal experiences in an effort to take a fresh perspective, IPA allows the researcher to take an active role in understanding the phenomenon by getting close to the participants' world

from the insider's perspective, maintaining one's conception of the phenomenon (Smith & Osborn, 2007). Building from the problem of practice and the researcher's interests, IPA was a better approach than traditional phenomenology as IPA afforded flexibility to (1) understand how participants make sense of the phenomenon and (2) grasp how the participants make sense of the phenomenon they (participants) are trying to make sense of (Smith & Osborn, 2007).

Even with firsthand knowledge of the subject matter, it was understood that the researcher's experiences were not necessarily the same as others and it was vital to view the issues through the eyes of other professionals. Therefore, greater emphasis was placed on describing individuals' experiences rather than solely interpreting their experiences (Creswell, 2007). While Smith recommended that individuals new to IPA select a maximum of three participants, this study planned for a maximum of six participants in order to gain rich data from a range of sources while ensuring that the minimum of three participants completed the interview process (Smith & Osborn, 2007).

Site and Participant Selection

Fraenkel and Wallen (2009) indicated that the most important step in the research process is selecting the individuals who would be observed or questioned within the study. Individuals selected were practicing school psychologists, in the hope that the results obtained could be generalized to the entire field of school psychology (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). Participants included in the study (a maximum of six) had a minimum of five consecutive years of work-related experience practicing within school settings only. Ten or more years of experiences was preferable, as school psychologists are considered vested within the field after five years. More importantly, many actively practicing school psychologists with this level of experience would have been a part of the field when these educational changes were initially implemented. Of the

six individuals selected, five individuals participated in the study. Three out of the five

participants had ten or more years of experience.

In order to select individuals as participants for this study, purposeful sampling

procedures were used (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Purposeful sampling is "a qualitative

sampling procedure in which researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or

understand the central phenomenon" (Creswell, 2012, p. 626). The possibility that some

participants might withdraw from the study was included in the research design, leading to the

selection of six possible participants, with the awareness that a small sample may not be

generalizeable to other settings. However, despite these concerns, the rich content collected

illuminated the need for further research, using a larger population and quantitative methods

and/or additional qualitative methods which lend themselves to larger sampling sizes.

Purposeful sampling was appropriate for this study because the researcher "…can

purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon of the

study" by carefully choosing the best fit based on the researcher's working relationships and

work experiences within the selected school districts (Creswell, 2007, p. 125). There was one

major disadvantage identified with purposeful sampling. Fraenkel and Wallen (2009) found that

the researcher could misjudge the sample representation or their level of expertise regarding

information needed, though attempts to correct for this possibility were included.

Recruiting took place via email, and six participants were contacted with the purpose of

the study to determine their willingness to participate. Because of the nature of the study,

centering on the individual perceptions of school psychologists, the participants' current or

previous employers were not contacted as a part of the institutional review board process, per

Northeastern University IRB recommendation (N. Regina, personal communication, January 7,

2013). Incentives were not offered, as the participants willingly shared their time and knowledge to help with the study.

Information collected was safeguarded throughout the process to assure it did not cause any harm to any participants. Names of individuals and school district locations were altered in order to protect individuals' identities. Participants were appropriately notified that all information would be kept confidential unless information shared caused harm to the participant or someone else (see informed consent, Appendix D). Informed consent was obtained prior to working with any individuals and all participants were notified that their participation was voluntary and they could withdraw at any time during the study. Permission was secured from the human subjects review board (IRB) as well. See Appendices B through D for the informed consents and materials distributed to participants.

Data Collection

Creswell (2007) described seven key ways to prepare to collect data: (1) location site/individual, (2) gaining access and making rapport, (3) purposefully sampling, (4) collecting data, (5) recording information, (6) resolving field issues, and (7) storing data. Each step was required in order to successfully gain access to participants in this study.

To begin data collection, the researcher selected three previous school districts where she had been employed, making the assumption that a familiarity with the location would allow for additional insights in the analysis process. The researcher then contacted eleven former colleagues, inviting them to participate in the study. Of the eleven contacted, five participated. The other six were not included, as they either did not respond or failed to meet all of the study's criteria.

Since the researcher focused on the individuals, not a specific site location, individuals in charge of research and planning at the institutions were not contacted to determine the necessary steps to complete the study within each respective school district. The focus was not on the districts. The districts chosen for inclusion criteria were a convenience sample base only on the researcher's work history. Participants were directly contact through their work e-mail accounts. All participants willingly provided their contact information and rapport was easily established and maintained throughout this process.

Within this study, purposeful sampling ensured that individuals were an accessible representation of the greater population, specifically the population to which the researcher sought to apply the final results (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). As previously discussed, purposeful rather than random sampling was the best choice based on the prescribed sample size identified by the researcher and the fact that random sampling might produce biased information unrelated to the final results or greater population (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Six participants were selected, ensuring that a minimum of three participants would complete the study.

There are many ways to collect information from respondents regarding the phenomenon under study. Smith and Osborn (2007) suggested that semi-structured interviews were the preferred method for collecting data in IPA as "It facilitates rapport/empathy, allows a greater flexibility of coverage and allows the interview to go into novel areas, and it tends to produce richer data" (Smith & Osborn, 2007, p. 59). Therefore semi-structured interviews were used to allow the participants the ability/option to delve deeper into their ideas and thought patterns, sharing information that the researcher may not have considered when initially designing the research questions. Each interview session typically lasted between forty to sixty minutes, with one interview session lasting only twenty minutes. This shorter session was due to the

participant's work constraints and although below the expected time limit set forth by the researcher, the respondent answered all questions posed by the researcher and did not have any additional information to add when approached via e-mail for follow-up.

Creswell (2007) suggested that collecting data from multiple sources was a significant tactic when conducting qualitative research. Acquiring data from multiple sources helps support participants' responses to interview questions, assuring trustworthiness. Copies of weekly and/or monthly logs from three of the five participants (Appendices F through H) were collected. One respondent did not provide this level of documentation and another respondent indicated that she was no longer required to track her work progress.

Semi-structured interviews, the primary method for collecting data, took place via telephone, using an online free conference call line and Google+ Hangout. All calls were recorded using these systems. The limitations of conducting telephone interviews were reviewed, noting that the researcher and participant would be unable to read nonverbal cues. Although the researcher was unable to read nonverbal cues presented during telephone interviews, all of the participants provided quality vocal intonations that suggested times of happiness, anger, frustration, and indifference when posed and/or probed with certain interview questions. The researcher also considered that there may be some individuals who were not technologically savvy in using video conferencing tools like Google+ Hangout. Participant preferences were considered in the implementation process, and both techniques were found to be appropriate fits for this study considering the geographic distribution of the sample.

All recording procedures were followed, conducting interviews in a quiet location for all parties involved within the study and care was given to the fact that distractions might occur during recordings. The researcher documented within her field notes the one distraction for one

of the participants (i.e. dog barking in the background). However, this was not a significant interruption or distraction.

Aware that unexpected issues might arise, plans included scheduling flexibility. However, all participants adhered to their interview times and there was no need to reschedule any of the interviews. All interviews and data were collected by the primary researcher, April Lisbon-Peoples. The interview protocol is included as Appendix E.

Data Storage. Although Creswell (2007) indicated that little attention had been focused on data storage in qualitative research, care was taken to understand the value and importance of securing such data for future reference or studies. Storing data is useful for further research as well as affording participants the opportunity to receive feedback regarding the information shared during interviews (Mottier, 2005). Such opportunities proved empowering for participants. The researcher secured multiple means to secure the data in order to protect the confidentiality of participants as well as preserve the integrity of the study for future studies.

Confidentiality. In order to retain the confidentially of each participant and their responses shared, only the researcher and a transcription service (www.rev.com) had access to the data collected. The transcription company has a confidentiality statement on their website, and a representative consulted confirmed that the need for a confidentiality form was unwarranted. Once the data information was transcribed, all information was stored on the researcher's personal laptop hard drive. Transcripts were also sent to multiple personal e-mail accounts, which are password protected for further storage, as well as saved on an external storage device and cloud-based data storage systems with password protected access.

Because of the constraints of doctoral research, the researcher will maintain the audio files for one year after the completion of the thesis, unless there is potential harm to a participant

by doing so. If the latter is the case, both the researcher and principal investigator would review all of the information for accuracy and will destroy all materials if feedback suggests the accuracy of participant's responses. Because this information might be used for future studies, or should the IRB require additional information from this study, the researcher will retain all transcribed information for an indefinite period of time.

Data Analysis

Smith described four key steps to the data analysis process for IPA (Smith & Osborn, 2007). The first step is to look for themes within the case. This step affords the researcher the opportunity to become familiar with the content of the transcript by reading and re-reading information (Smith & Osborn, 2007). Specifically, IPS relies on a thematic analysis once all of the data had been collected. Smith et al. (2007) stated that "[IPA] is a process of segmentation, categorisation, and relinking of aspects of the database prior to the final interpretation" (Smith & Osborn, 2007, p. 16). The researcher used themes to help organize what was seen and heard throughout the data collection process in an effort to ascribe the most meaningful and richest text offered by participants within the study, using their voices. The researcher used both textural and structural description to understand the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2007).

Following Smith and Osborn's (2007) second step, the researcher connected themes, creating a preliminary list or cluster of themes that emerged from the data, gleaned from the first step. This required the researcher to become familiar with the text read as she made sense of what participants were stating. The next stage within this step was to create a chart, made up of coherent themes using codes. Codes were provided where certain identifiers were used for themes. According to Saldaña (2009), "A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative

attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 3). The researcher used NVivo10 to organize and prepare data as well as create codes. It is a common computer program used in qualitative research (Creswell, 2007). The researcher coded relevant data which answered the research question and sub-questions in order to identify relevant themes (Smith & Osborn, 2007).

Saldaña (2009) identified various ways to code information during the first and second cycle of the coding process. For the purposes of this study, this researcher used holistic coding for the first cycle and pattern coding for the second as these coding processes offered the richest format for analyzing data. Holistic coding for the first cycle afforded the researcher to code larger segments of participants' reflections of the phenomenon as a whole rather than analyzing the data line by line (Saldaña, 2009). This was useful as (1) the researcher had great familiarity with the topic affording the researcher to have a general knowledge base of what to explore within the data and (2) it afforded the researcher to see the "big picture" as to how the participants experienced the central phenomenon (Saldaña, 2009). The second cycle used pattern coding to identify emerging themes, explanations, and configurations to create a more meaningful unit analysis of a lot of material that was shared by each participant. This approach worked well for this study as it was the desire of the researcher to develop major themes from the data based on participants' ascribed values, beliefs, and attitudes as related to the central phenomenon under study (Saldaña, 2009).

Once each theme was coded, a final thematic chart was created. This was the most challenging phase of the process as it required prioritization of the most important data and required potentially discarding the themes that may be rich in content but failed to answer the research questions (Smith & Osborn, 2007). Once the chart was complete, a written document

was created to "outline the meanings inherent in the participants' experiences" (Smith & Osborn, 2007, p. 76). This process created the narrative account of the themes noted within the final thematic chart.

Validation of findings was a process undertaken to ensure the accuracy of data collected and analyzed (Creswell, 2012). In qualitative studies, concerns often relate to the appropriateness, usefulness, and meaningfulness of the data collected due to researcher bias, generalizability, sample selection, and diversification of subjects including ethnicity and gender (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009; Miles and Huberman, 1994). Care was taken in advance, considering the selection of participants and if they met the requirements previously established by the researcher to ensure that the overall outcomes were reliable. Failure to ensure that all requirements were met would have led to possible threats to the external and internal validity of the study (Creswell, 2012).

To minimize the potential threats related to internal and external validity, issues related to subject characteristics, mortality, location, instrumentation, testing, history, maturation, attitude of subjects, implementation, researcher bias and regression were carefully considered. Fraenkel and Wallen (2009) identified four potential techniques to control for threats to internal validity including standardizing conditions, obtaining more information on subjects, obtaining more information on details, and choosing an appropriate design.

The most important technique to control for threats to internal validity was to choose the appropriate design. The researcher selected qualitative research because the goal of the study was to explore how the phenomenon under study and was influenced by how the participants do their jobs based on their stories. The goal of this study was not to find a probable cause to the relationship between two variables, as is in quantitative research, but to understand the stories

(Creswell, 2012). A visual model of the most common validity procedures guided the researcher in determining which procedures to use, shared in Table 1. Creswell and Miller (2000) provided this visual model that lists procedures needed to check for validity.

Table 1

Validity Procedures Within Qualitative Lens and Paradigm Assumptions

Paradigm Assumption/Lens	Postpositivist or Systematic Paradigm	Constructivist Paradigm	Critical Paradigm
Lens of the researcher	Triangulation	Disconfirming evidence	Researcher reflexivity
Lens of the study participants	Member checking	Prolonged engagement in the field	Collaboration
Lens of people external to the study (Reviewers, Readers)	The audit trail	Thick, rich description	Peer debriefing

Accordingly, to prevent the potential threats of internal validity, reflexivity, member checking, and thick, rich description were used.

Reflexivity. During the data collection and analysis, the researcher implored validity strategies from three of the most common paradigms within qualitative research including constructivist (interpretivism), post positivist, and critical theory. From the critical theorist perspective, the researcher used researcher reflexivity in order to look through the lens of the researcher (Creswell & Miller, 2000).   First, the researcher used researcher reflexivity as personal biases, values, and beliefs may shape inquiry (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Since the researcher was highly familiar with the central phenomenon, there were times when the researcher felt like the participants were holding back their feelings in order to be politically correct in their responses. However, the researcher realized this was based on her perceptions of

how she felt the respondents should have answered the questions based on her own personal experiences. When the researcher reminded herself that the information learned from the participants were less of her lived experiences and more of the participants, the researcher was able to make peace with the data provided in order not to skew the results to fit her perceptions but simply give voice to what was shared. Therefore, using coding software such as NVivo10 helped the researcher create types of memos for reflection.

      Member checking. The researcher also used member checking to gather data through the lens of the participants within the study. Member checking is typically associated with the post positivist paradigm. Creswell and Miller (2000) suggested that through member checking, the participant is able to provide the researcher with feedback as to whether the information within the narrative account is credible. A strategy used had each participant review the raw data to ensure that what the researcher heard and saw throughout the data collection phase accurately reflected the voice of each participant. Throughout the process, the researcher ensured that all participants were given a maximum of one week to review the transcripts and either ask questions, clarify, and/or add to their responses. Some participants added and clarified to their responses whereas others did not.

      Thick, rich description. Finally, from the constructivist paradigm, the researcher used thick, rich description through the lens of external readers and reviewers (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The researcher conducted several cross analyses where she read the transcripts simultaneously as she listened to the live recordings of each participant. Once the researcher deemed she clearly heard each participant's voice, then she quoted each participant based on the assigned themes. To further ensure that the voices of each participant was clearly heard in written format, the researcher recruited three doctoral students and one doctor who conducted an

IPA research study, to review the information and provide constructive feedback. Shenton (2004) suggested that providing a detailed description of the study under investigation helps to not only establish credibility of the study but helps the reader determine if the final outcomes hold true based on the narrative foundation provided by the researcher.

Protection of Human Subjects

The researcher's duty was to ensure that the information shared by participants was based on their views and not that of the researcher. The effects the study would have on those involved were carefully considered to protect the human subjects. Fraenkel and Wallen (2009) indicated that the human subject's protection process ensures that participants are protected from any type of physical or psychological harm, discomfort, and/or potential danger that might arise within the study. One such way for the researcher to ensure that participants were protected from unnecessary harm was to thoroughly consider (1) if the study was worth doing and (2) the benefits, costs, and reciprocity for both the researcher and participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994). By considering these factors in great length prior to securing IRB permission, the researcher anticipated potential ethical issues which might arise within the study in advance and worked through potential flaws prior to working with human subjects (Creswell, 2012). This in turn helped the researcher during the data collection and written portions of the study.

Throughout the data collection process, the researcher ensured that a mutual level of respect was given to all participants and all participants perceived that what they had to contribute to the study was fair and without risk to them. Participation was optional and voluntary. No subject was forced into participation. The researcher all ensured that each participant felt comfortable before, during, and after the data collection profess and was afforded opportunities to ask, clarify, or refute any items posed of them during the interview process.

Permission from the human subjects review board (IRB) was received prior to conducting any interviews with any participants. A written proposal outline detailing the procedures for the project was submitted during this process. Once permission from the IRB was obtained the researcher then explained to participants the purpose of the study and their role within the study. The researcher notified all participants that their participation was completely voluntary and all information provided would be kept confidential unless the researcher determined that the information shared would cause harm to the participant or someone else. The researcher indicated that at any point in time if the project appeared to cause any type of physical, mental, or emotional harm to the participant, the participant may withdraw from the study without recourse. If the participant agreed, the researcher provided a participant consent form.

Chapter IV: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Education has evolved due to ongoing social, political, and economic changes within society. As laws and regulations concerning both general and special education change, so too do the expectations of the roles of school psychologists. This study endeavored to fill a void in the literature, examining how these educational changes impact the perceived roles of school psychologists within the wider field of special education. Additionally, this study sought to bring to light how these educational changes impact school psychologists' perceptions of their roles and how they make sense of their experiences in special education. This study also revealed school psychologists' perceptions of their ability or inability to handle tensions associated with socio-political-economic changes in light of professional and ethical mandates as governed by IDEIA.

The five participants of the study currently work as school psychologists. Three of the participants work on the east coast of the United States and two of the participants work on the west coast of the United States. The participants' work experience in the field of school psychology ranged from eight to twenty-eight years. All participants have at least a Masters degree and one of them has a Ph.D. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym name in order to protect their identity. Throughout the findings and discussion, the participants will be referred to as "Tina Rheinhart," "Sharon Zovac," "Candace VanDiesel," "Jonathan Chapman," and "Dr. Sherri Pemberton."

The participants were asked three background questions to open the interview. Although not directly related to the research questions of the study, these introductory and biographical questions were deemed essential and provided critical information regarding the participants' educational backgrounds and actual work experiences. Participants were asked to provide

background information about themselves (related to their length of service) and asked what made them interested in becoming a school psychologist. Additionally, the participants were asked about their educational training as school psychologists, and any other professional information they wanted to volunteer. The following is an in-depth summary of how the participants shared their perceptions of their own experiences and how they made sense of these experiences.

The Participants

Tina Rheinhart

Tina Rheinhart indicated that she was starting her ninth school year as a school psychologist. According to Tina, the field of school psychology was never on her radar. In fact, she noted that she had no idea what a school psychologist was or what their roles were in education. Instead, Tina earned a degree in elementary education, but after graduation she realized she had no desire to teach. As Tina pointed out, "...I just knew that I liked working with kids and wanted to work with them and just applied and went to school. I really had no idea what I was getting into." Her passion and dedication to serving in education was centered on working with students, which led her to school psychology.

Tina shared that her school psychology program was located in upstate New York and was approved by the National Association of School Psychology (NASP). For Tina, she found out quickly that her program really stressed the value and importance of ensuring that students had a strong counseling foundation which she thoroughly enjoyed. Specifically, Tina indicated she enjoyed the program's emphasis on counseling as it really afforded her the opportunity to work with students. Tina found herself working in one school setting with no more than 300-400 students. As Tina put it, "You were able to, I just felt, do more with kids." This appeared to be

of high importance to Tina as a practitioner in the field. Classes were the only downside to the program. Tina felt like some of the classes were irrelevant and/or inapplicable to what she would be doing on a daily basis as a school psychologist.

Considering her program of study, Tina realized that her program left her ill prepared for the field of school psychology until she actually started her first job. Throughout the course of her program the terms "special education" and "IEPs" were never mentioned nor were the topics of federal and state regulations. She felt ill equipped going into her first job while trying to figure out the "lay of the land". Tina reported that, luckily, the first school district she worked for had a very good psychological services department and strong leaders and supervisors that helped fill the tremendous gaps in her knowledge.

As Tina further reflected on her career, she stated she felt like she had great training on behavior, mental health, counseling, assessment and learning and no training on special education, IEPs, federal regulations and state regulations, she stated she felt like she had great training on behavior, mental health, counseling, assessment and learning, but no training on special education, IEPs, federal regulations, or state regulations. Not only did she express harsh disappointment that she has not been utilizing skills learned throughout her coursework, but she was highly disappointed that her program failed to train her with the tools necessary to succeed as a school psychologist. Specifically, Tina expounded:

> It scares me to think that there are school psychologists out there that did not have such a good first jobs and get the training that we did at CCSD. What sort of decisions are they making? I think we all got into this profession to help kids and it just seems that it is getting harder and harder to do that!

She further went on to say:

I actually had a teacher today complain to me that she swore a kid in her class had

ADHD and was a huge behavior problem. I asked her if I could come in and help

her come up with ways to help him be successful and some sort of positive

behavior plan. She told me that she did not want to do "anything" if it wasn't

"going to go anywhere" (i.e. if we weren't going to test him right away for special

education she wasn't going to help him).

Tina felt cheated that her program of study and her current workplace failed to equip her with

tools necessary to deal with the increased pressures associated with socio-political-economic

changes in education. As previously discussed, behavior issues such as those teachers wanted

"fixed" are not always rooted in special education needs, but often are brought on by larger

issues impacting communities and families. Tina professed that she believed there will continue

to be pressure to identify more and more kids for special education in order to have them

removed from the general education setting. According to Tina, she feared this would make it

more and more difficult for school psychologists to request that teachers try interventions in an

effort to help students. Tina reported she is simply frustrated with the demands of the job and

feels trapped at this point in her career.

Sharon Zovac

Sharon Zovac is a well-respected school psychologist with twenty-eight years experience

in the field. Even after a brief stint at retirement, Sharon's love and passion for working with

students convinced her to leave retirement and reengage in the field in 2007. According to

Sharon, she had been an educator since her undergraduate career. Her first initial job was that of

a classroom teacher. However, with time, the profession of teaching became exhausting and

Sharon wanted something new. In her own words, Sharon shared:

Well, I was a teacher and at that time I just decided I wasn't going to be a teacher

any longer and didn't really know what to do with all the schooling that I had.

Somebody said to me, "Why not become a school psychologist?" and I said,

"What is that?" I looked into it and I thought it was something I would really

enjoy doing and that's how I got here.

For Sharon, the field of school psychology afforded her the opportunity to continue working with students without being in the classroom.

When describing her educational training as a school psychologist, Sharon stated that her program was a doctoral level program approved by the American Psychological Association (APA). She enjoyed the program because it afforded her the flexibility to pursue a doctorate in school psychology or earn a specialist in education degree (Ed.S.) in school psychology. After spending time within the program and working with several individuals throughout the program, Sharon chose the Ed.S. track.

Sharon mentioned that she enjoyed her program because it was very hands-on. Since the university had a school on campus, Sharon reported that she had the opportunity to work in the classroom setting prior to ever starting her internship. She shared the following:

One of the things that I really liked about the uh, school also was it was very

hands-on. It was uh, they had uh, a primary school within the university.

Even before we did our internship, we were in the classroom, in the school setting

a lot. So I thought it was a pretty good program. The year that I was in the

program it was APA approved. And so that was nice too.

In Sharon's eyes, her program was pretty good. One of the drawbacks to the program however, was that it was not NASP approved. Sharon mentioned this as in order for her to become

recognized as a National Certified School Psychologists (NCSP), she would had to graduate from a NASP approved program or provide substantial evidence that all of the coursework she took over the years fulfilled NASP's requirements to be NCSP approved. At that point, Sharon decided not to pursue her NCSP as in her own words it "is just ridiculous" based on where was in her career.

Candace VanDiesel

Candace VanDiesel has been a full-time practicing school psychologist for eight years. She described herself as an individual who loves working with children in order to help them improve educationally. According to Candace, she chose to work in the field of education because "I felt like it was really important to help them feel safe and secure, but also confident at school." Candace noted that she become a school psychologist because she enjoyed various aspects of assessments, including personality assessments, while in college. Candace reported that her interest in assessments propelled her desires to become a school psychologist.

Candace was no stranger to the field of psychology. Reflecting on her training as a school psychologist, Candace noted that her undergraduate degree was in psychology. She stated that immediately after graduation, she began a three year dual-degree program in school psychology where she earned both a Master of Arts and a Specialist degree in School Psychology.

While describing her graduate program, Candace shared that she really enjoyed conducting various types of assessments including cognitive, academic, and behavioral/social-emotional. Candace's program offered her a plethora of educational opportunities both at the clinical and school levels. When describing some of her experiences, Candace emphasized that a major component of her program of study centered on counseling and reading. Candace stressed

in hindsight that having the opportunity to conduct reading assessments during her graduate career was critical to her work as a school psychologist since many of her referrals focus on reading. Candace said:

> I loved the reading aspect of my training, because that is what we hear constantly, being a school psychologist. And, I didn't have that, um, because I was a psych major in undergrad, so I didn't have any training, like educationally. I wasn't an educational major, so, it, it was really, really awesome for me to be able to learn how to do that and learn about the process of reading, et cetera.

Yet, there were aspects of the program that Candace was less enthusiastic about. She reported that although she loved statistics, the type of statistics required within her program were more geared towards individuals in a Ph.D. program and would not be useful in her career as a school psychologist. Candace also did not like the psychotherapy classes, since some of the activities involved were geared toward clinical settings. She found herself a little disdained that some of the evaluation and treatment activities within her program of study were not governed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act as she subsequently learned later on after applying to her program. Unfortunately, in Candace's eyes, this meant that activities learned within these classes were irrelevant to what she would be doing in schools.

Jonathan Chapman

Jonathan Chatman described himself as a fourteen-year veteran in the field of school psychology. He stated that he came from a family of educators, which was instrumental in his desire to work with students. Jonathan indicated that he started his collegiate career as an education major but quickly changed to psychology after realizing that he did not want to stay within his education program.

Jonathan emphasized that his graduate program in school psychology was a combination of assessments, counseling, and consultation. As Jonathan reflected on his educational training, his preference throughout his graduate training was that of counseling and consultation. Specifically, Jonathan said "Well I'd say my training uh, generally was mixed between assessment, consultation, and counseling. I think I enjoyed the counseling/consultation piece of it." However, Jonathan noted that more times than not, the assessment component of his graduate training is what he primarily used in his job. Although the question was asked both during the initial interview as well as after receiving information regarding the results of the transcribed interview, Jonathan did not provide input as to areas of his program of study that were least interesting to him.

Dr. Sherri Pemberton

Dr. Sherri Pemberton has served in the capacity of a full-time school psychologist for twenty-three years. Dr. Pemberton indicated that her primary reason for becoming a school psychologist was her love for children and her desire to help them. She stated that the best place to support children would be in the school setting affording her the opportunity to work with many children.

Dr. Pemberton indicated that she earned her Bachelor's degree from The Florida State University in psychology after transferring from a liberal arts school in Alabama. During her time at FSU, Dr. Pemberton had the distinct opportunity to conduct some honors projects with an esteemed faculty member in the department of psychology. As Dr. Pemberton reflected:

> I worked with one professor for my honors undergraduate thesis and masters'
>
> thesis. I then switched to another professor who was a leader in applied
>
> behavioral psychology (and past editor of Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis)

for my Ph.D. program and research. My Master's thesis and Ph.D. level

dissertation research helped me to develop my analytical/critical thinking skills.

The ABA training turned me into a data collection queen; I have probably been

considered more of a data "dragon" queen to some of the teachers with whom I

have worked!

It was through this partnership that Dr. Pemberton decided to work in schools as a psychologist.

While remembering her graduate educational experiences, Dr. Pemberton reported that

her appreciation for working with children as a psychologist stemmed from her ability to apply

practical aspects of skills learned in her program of study into the school setting. She noted that

since her program of study consisted of applied behavior analysis (ABA) training, she was able

to develop her skill sets in providing behavioral management supports and services in school

settings.

Dr. Pemberton shared that her least favorite aspects of her program of study were the

statistics classes and education classes. She stated that the statistics classes were of no interest to

her. Additionally, although Dr. Pemberton did not like her education classes, she did earn her

minor in education.

The Themes

When starting this research, the researcher sought to understand the experiences of school

psychologists who were impacted by the socio-political-economic changes associated with

education as related to their roles in education. Consistent with the characteristics of a

qualitative, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, the interviews expanded the focus of the

research. The themes that were identified within the data analysis offered insights into how

school psychologists perceived their roles in education based on ongoing socio-political-

economic changes. Each participant had their own reasons for becoming school psychologists,

and over the years each person experienced challenges related to the impact of these changes on

their abilities to do their jobs. As they journeyed through their professional experiences, each

person faced challenges that were similar and yet unique to their own experiences. As Kay and

Kingston (2002) pointed out, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis views each participant's

thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors as a complex issue or process that is personal and seeks to

understand these processes or issues in a deeper way (Kay & Kingston, 2002). The focus was on

exploration, analysis, and explanation of their perceptions and views of the perceived roles of

school psychologists as the single phenomenon. While the school psychologists' experiences

represented the phenomenon as they made sense of their lived experiences within their own

voices (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009), there were particular aspects unique to each

participant. The stories of these school psychologists are not meant to be generalizations but

instead highlight the uniqueness of each person's experiences. As the themes that emerged from

the research were identified, the goal was to protect the coherence of the identities and the lives

of the school psychologists who shared their experiences. Themes identified were expressed as

similarities and differences as to how school psychologists faced the tensions and demands

associated with socio-political-economic changes in education, and this was based on how others

perceived their roles in education, and how school psychologists perceived their roles in

education. The themes and associated essences include:

- Theme #1: The lost identity: 'I am whatever you say I am'
    a. Essence #1: Assessment Evaluator
    b. Essence #2: Gatekeeper of Special Education
    c. Essence #3: Facilitator

- Theme #2: Reframing the identity of school psychologists

    a. Essence #1: Advocate

    b. Essence #2: Consultant

    c. Essence #3: Counselor

    d. Essence #4: Data Collector

    e. Essence #5: Program Developer

- Theme #3: In the trenches: Dealing with tension

    a. Essence # 1: Finding peace within the tension

    b. Essence #2: Simply the nature of the job

    c. Essence #3: Frustrated with the tension

- Theme #4: The road less taken: Dealing with ethical dilemmas

    a. Essence #1: The voice of frustration

    b. Essence #2: Empowered to push back

The participants' reflections and sense making process represent a specific point in time. But it is important to note that their lives continue, and they continue to navigate the current environment, including the ongoing changes taking place in education.

Theme #1: The lost identity: 'I am whatever you say I am'

"Um, as far as now, it's, uh, it's certainly been discouraging that, um, in the number of years that I've been a school psychologist, that my main job has been as a diagnostician and writing report as oppose to doing, um, again more behavioral consultation and direct services with students".-
Dr. S. Pemberton

  Essence #1: Assessment evaluator. The primary role and function of a school psychologist, described by all participants, centered on testing students for special education services. Specifically, it seemed as though all five participants felt like a majority of their time was spent conducting evaluations for special education services. Additionally, all participants

perceived that most educational stakeholders, including parents, saw their roles as assessment evaluators or testers.

Candace stated that during her graduate training, she enjoyed the diagnostic portion of her internship experience because it gave her an opportunity to understand through multiple means of information what caused a student's lack of academic and/or behavioral progress. However, after her internship experience, Candace learned that the majority of her time as a professional in the field would be spent in meetings and conducting assessments, sharing that on non-meeting days, "I test." Often this left little time for her to do the other activities she was trained to do in her graduate program.

Candace also learned that many educational stakeholders perceive her primary role as an evaluator. Although Candace reported that many of her general education teachers saw her as an individual who provides classroom supports, more times than not, she said, "I think they also see me as the tester." ... These perceptions also hold true for many parents who are unaware of the full scope of what Candace offers her schools. Candace stated that many of her parents view her as a tester who determines if their child is given special education support. She said:

> I think that most parents would describe the job that I do as somebody who sits in
> meetings, tests, and decides whether or not their child can have an IEP. Um, I
> think there's a few parents that really, you know, work closely with me that would
> know that we do things other than that and would say that I'm someone who
> works with the teachers and the students. Um, but I think the majority would just
> say, "Oh yeah, she's that girl that's in meetings. Yeah, she decides if they can be
> … have an IEP. She tests."

This may explain why Candace has worked so hard to redefine her role as a school psychologist so that people will recognize that she has the ability to offer more services within her schools than simply testing children for special education.

Jonathan indicated that his primary role in his county is to assess. Jonathan stated, "In this county our role is clearly as an assessor."… His voice's tone elevated slightly when he shared, "Our main role is assessment." Based on Jonathan's statements, it appears that Jonathan continues to feel trapped in his role as an assessor, as it has left him with little room to use other skills learned while in school. Jonathan further explained that although he wants to give more to his schools, he simply is unable to do so, based upon his perceptions of how his current school district has defined his role. As he pointed out speaking in a matter-of-fact way, with slight elevation in voice noted:

> Ideally you wanted to be a part of counseling and groups and those things. But in order to do what your role is you really can't do that. So kind of having to let some of those things go, and just stick with what I'm supposed to do, my own, own unique role in the county is, is assessment. And that's what I have to do (spoke in a matter of fact kind of way with slight elevation in voice noted).

In Jonathan's last statement, he realized that the only way he would be able to do his job comfortably was to accept that his only role in his county was conducting assessments.

Sharon explained that throughout her twenty eight years as a school psychologist, she primarily tested. For example, in one school district she stated that, "Each morning, we go to a school, basically did testing, came back to the district office and wrote reports." She expanded on this theme, noting that, primarily, the demand for testing was greater in elementary schools than secondary schools as "they're more concerned about getting the kids tested and getting them

placed in the lower grades." With the demands of testing so heavy, Sharon appeared to struggle to engage in any other activities at her schools, due to too much time spent doing evaluations.

Sharon also mentioned that the only time she had the opportunity to interact with students was when she was conducting evaluations. Specifically, she said "I mean, the only time I get to work with a kid is when, I mean really work with them, when I'm testing them." Having the knowledge that one's sole purpose in a district was measured by the number of assessments completed Sharon perceived this to be her primary- the role of simply being an evaluator.

Sherri acknowledged that although she may have time at the beginning of the school year to provide counseling, do in-services, and consult with teachers; the reality for her was that the majority of her time was spent in meetings and testing students. Unfortunately, this time led administrators, teachers, and parents to assume that Sherri's primary role was to evaluate students for special education. For example, although Sherri mentioned she consults with teachers on collecting data based on their interventions, she clearly confided "…I think they see me primarily as an evaluator, um, and, you know." Even when considering how Sherri believed she fits in the overall school community, she reported her main purpose within schools was that of an evaluator.

Just like teachers and administrators, Sherri stated that many of the parents she works with viewed her as the individual who sat in meetings and eventually tested children for special education services. Sherri captured this sentiment by sharing "…ultimately, I may be the one who will be evaluating, um, their students in order to determine if they might qualify for special education."… Reflecting on Sherri's story, it appeared that no matter how many ways she attempted to offer different types of supports to her schools, her only noticeable role was that of an evaluator.

Tina mentioned the exact sentiments of the other four participants: all she does is testing. As Tina shared, she currently has three large school settings where she may spend at least one to one and one-half days at each. She elaborated:

> School A has about 550 children. School B has about 550 children with 2 early childhood special education programs and 2 self contained classes for children with intellectual disabilities. School C has 760 kids with 1 self-contained autism program and 1 early childhood special education program. I am at School A 1 day a week, School B 1 ½ days a week and School C 1 ½ days a week.

Having so many schools with a variety of needs on a limited time schedule simply added to the pressures Tina seemed to experience in her role as a tester.

Tina also indicated that because of the manner in which her role was pre-defined based on the needs of her schools; her primary role was evaluating students for special education services. For example, when asked how administrators viewed her role as a school psychologist, Tina paused for a long time, eventually revealing that she found it difficult to answer the question based on the variability of her schools' needs. When she regained her composure, Tina said, "At my smaller school, I (pause) would say (pause) they would see me as just an assessment evaluator and that's it." Tina found this to be quite disheartening, as she knew that she had more to offer her schools than simply evaluating students for special education. Yet the only time she appeared to be noticed by administrators was when she was sitting at her desk typing up results from the mounds of evaluations she had completed.

In another example, Tina noted the difference in how students at her school viewed her role. Although Tina reported that she does not formally introduce herself as a school psychologist to students, she learned over time that the younger children perceived her as a

person who was fun to work with though the students in fifth and sixth grade saw her as a tester. In Tina's own words, "Then, kind of the older kids that I usually only assess, like the fifth and sixth graders, they see me as someone that does testing with them." Based on Tina's accounts of her own lived experiences, it appeared that she perceived the predominant role ascribed to her was that of an evaluator.

Along with conducting assessments, school psychologists are required to complete a lot of paperwork to assist educational stakeholders in understanding the strengths and weaknesses of students, as well as aiding in the determination of the appropriateness of support through special education. For some individuals, the process of report writing and responding to parent, teacher, administrator, and others e-mails was time consuming and almost clerical in nature. Within the study, several school psychologists shared their stories as to how this process was just as daunting of a task as serving primarily as an assessment evaluator.

Candace, Sharon, Sherri, and Tina all talked about how a large part of their job was focused on clerical work or being paper pushers. Whether it was checking or writing emails, sending notices home to parents, or writing reports, each of these four participants agreed that their clerical duties took up a lot time in their daily schedules. For example, Candace said that with her current workload, she found that when she was not in meetings she was either responding to e-mails or writing reports. Describing a typical workday, Candace said, "Um, so, I pretty much have one of two days. Um, one day is mostly meetings where I come in. I check email. I return phone calls, check my box, you know, kind of clerical things." Candace reported that even when she tried to make the effort to do other activities with students (i.e. social groups or observations), she discovered that the majority of her time was spent doing clerical tasks, when she was not in meetings. This appeared to frustrate Candace somewhat, and she further

shared that because of the needs of the county had changed, the level of paperwork that school psychologists completed had increased. Candace believed that because individuals at the district level were unaware of everything school psychologists did within their buildings, they simply assumed that school psychologists would be willing to complete more work.

Sharon revealed that when she was not in meetings or testing students, she spent most of her afternoons and time at home working on reports. However, Sharon said that over her twenty-eight years, report writing has always been the nature of the job. With over one hundred and fifty evaluations/reports per year, depending on the school district, Sharon often struggled to keep up with the paperwork. The level of strain this caused became a letdown for Sharon, as individuals with whom she worked with failed to understand that there was more work to special education than simply testing. She remarked:

> I think that they think that the job that most people, I mean, they I test and that's
>
> the biggest demand. But other than that, they have no concept in what I'm doing
>
> in that room. I mean, they don't have any concept after I do the test, how I do the
>
> diagnostic part, you know--what is the framework for eligibility, what's the
>
> district, the LEA guidelines for placement, what's the state placement, what's the
>
> Fed and those every day. They have no concept of that.

She also said that while she worked hard to be in compliance and meet deadlines, the sheer number of reports was overwhelming. This left her in a position where her worth in relation to her job was evaluated by how timely she was completing her reports. As Sharon saw it, "We were still always in the hole. We were still always out of compliance. That's what they look at you." This appeared to make Sharon's job more difficult for her over the years.

Tina indicated that when she was not in meetings or completing assessments her time was expended writing reports. Tina shared, specifically, that a regular work day has her writing and doing paperwork when she was not busy with other activities "…I will usually write up my reports with talking to teachers in and out of there and then followed up by an eligibility meeting in the afternoon. There's not time to do anything to do really besides test, write reports and do paperwork." The inability to keep up with all of the deadlines and paperwork left Tina feeling "spread thin" between her schools. As she pointed out, "…I don't have time to do any of that stuff because I feel like we're kind of spread thin her."… This appeared to have left Tina in a position where she is exhausted and has to find time within her busy schedule to complete her work.

Tina also expressed a level of discontent with all of the paperwork she is required to complete, especially since she felt like this was the only time some of her administrators noticed her working. Tina described it as "kind of sad," when noting her perceptions of how her administrators viewed her. Tina presented as being frustrated.

In Sherri's case, the time used doing clerical work included report writing and checking/writing e-mails. Sherri mentioned that she pre-planned her workload based on her upcoming three-year evaluations for students already in special education. Sherri reported that she starts off every school year determining which students needed evaluations. "And, uh, so typically, I'm doing a lot of, uh, record reviews right now to determine which kids may need reevaluations that are coming up."… For Sherri, this early preparation made things easier for her, as often the second half of the school year consisted of more evaluations and report writing. The amount of testing and report writing left less room, in Sherri's eyes, for her to provide other supports and services to her schools.

Essence #2: Gatekeeper of Special Education. Sharon, Tina, and Candace all agreed that many individuals, including administrators and parents, deemed school psychologists the gatekeepers of special education. These individuals reported that this gatekeeper role was viewed in two ways. The first way school psychologists were viewed was as individuals who made it challenging for students to get into special education. The second view of this gatekeeper role was the perception that school psychologists prevented school-level personnel from overlooking the relationship between a students' disability and students' behavioral choices, manifested during determination meetings.

Participants believed that this role was assigned to them based on their knowledge of policy and procedures that govern special education, as well as individuals' misperceptions that the assessments school psychologists conducted were the sole determination of eligibility. According to Sharon, teachers and parents primarily viewed her as the gatekeeper of special education. Sharon told of stories where she exhaustively explained to teachers why students were found ineligible for special education services. More times than not, teachers appeared not to understand why students were not eligible if they were failing in class. Sharon found herself in positions were she had to provide laborious explanations to teachers. For example Sharon said:

> It's really, really difficult for them to understand when a student does not meet
>
> eligibility particularly when the kid is not doing well in school. It's very difficult
>
> for them to understand that 50% of the variance of intelligence has to do with
>
> non-measurable things that impact their success or lack thereof in the classroom,
>
> whether they're willing to do the test, to stay with the test, to try trial and error,
>
> what's the level of self motivation and on and on and on.

She further shared that there were times in her career where no matter how much she clarified for teachers why students were ineligible for services, teachers would either ask her to "fix" the problem or would complain to individuals in leadership until she was overridden and the students were eventually found eligible for services. Sharon elaborated:

> They're well, "What are you gonna do?" [chuckles] "I'm not gonna do anything.
> I've already done this". "You know, maybe we can look at, uh, after school
> programs or before school programs or something like that". But it's very
> difficult for them and they look at the psychologist basically as the gatekeeper.
> You can put a kid in if they cry long enough or whine a little long enough.

In reviewing Sharon's spoken words in comparison to her laughter while sharing this last statement, it appeared that Sharon realized that although school psychologists do all they can to provide data to show the strengths and weaknesses of students based on standardized measures, it becomes irrelevant when people simply want students in special education.

Sharon also communicated that she perceived that parents viewed her in the same light as teachers, as the gatekeeper of special education. As she pointed out "Uh I think parents are basically the teacher looking at you as a gatekeeper." Sharon said that many of her students' parents came to her over the years wanting their children evaluated for special education services as it would make school work easier for their child. However, Sharon noted that often this was not the case and children worked just as hard when identified with an educational disability. Just like teachers did not understand the realities of special education, Sharon found it was challenging for parents to grasp this concept. Sharon recounted the expectations of parents as:

> "Oh, I think it's gonna be so good because right now he has to work so hard in
> order to do this, you know, he has to do homework for an hour and a half and

that's just too much for him. And if he gets in special ed, he's not gonna have to

do it that long."

Their perception of what special education services would mean for their child seems to be in

conflict with the school psychologists' knowledge of the process.

Tina also found that within her school district, she was seen as the gatekeeper of special

education. In Tina's case, she perceived that administrators primarily viewed her as the

gatekeeper of special education based on how her school district pre-defined her role. Tina said:

We're kind of tagged at least in our district as kind of the gate keeper to special ed

and then also the pushers of RTI and response intervention umm because in our

district, the school psychologists are the ones that roll that out, so I think we're

still perceived as that, which I think is perceived as gate keeping for special ed.

For Tina it appeared that this role was a part of what she was required to do as it was a district

mandate and it was automatically assumed by those in leadership positions that this was one of

her primary functions within her school communities.

Candace's perception was that educational stakeholders viewed her as the gatekeeper of

special education based on her knowledge of policy and procedures. Candace stated that she

found herself educating teachers and other school personnel on best practices for identifying

students for special education and providing them with appropriate educational resources. "Um, I

also think they see me as a resource for special education teachers, in case there's questions

about law or procedure in the county." In turn, Candace, too, believed that she was a gatekeeper

of special education when she stated "I feel like we have a big hand in um following process,

following procedure, educating [emphasized] people about the law." Based on the participants'

statements, it appeared that the role of gatekeeper was simply a part of a school psychologist's job.

Essence #3: Facilitator. There are times when school psychologists are called upon to facilitate or "manage" school related issues, whether it is meetings or handling administrative issues related to discipline. Candace reported that she takes on multiple hats in her role as facilitator or trainer. She shared "I think special ed, um, teachers would view me as a person to go to, to schedule meetings, to ask about procedure and to help them get information that they need, um, to support their kids." For Candace, she never dreamed that she would be facilitating eligibility meetings or training special education teachers regarding the legalities of eligibility as this was not a part of her graduate training or internship experience. However over the years, she has found herself serving in this role continuously. Candace asserted:

> I wasn't expecting to be the person that everybody in the school would come to
>
> …to explain the law to them. I expected [laughing] the special ed teachers to
>
> know the definition of a specific learning disability or to have someone to go to if
>
> they didn't understand why, you know, you did X, Y, and Z, or what the timelines
>
> were for state, you know, law. And I didn't, I didn't know we were going to be
>
> the ones, you know, kind of walking everyone through the legality aspect when
>
> we talked about eligibility or, um, you know, doing or not doing an evaluation.

Candace appeared to see this as an overwhelming role when she is not testing or serving in the role as the gatekeeper of special education, as this too, often times, limited her ability to work directly with students, parents, and teachers.

Both Jonathan and Sharon referenced their administrators' tendency to request their presence to understand how to handle the procedural and policy issues related to disciplinary

infractions and students with disabilities. Jonathan shared that he believed he was called in to facilitate these cases because he is "more accessible than most of the administrative staff throughout special education." He noted that administrators will "catch me and ask me questions. I even get pulled into larger, more serious behavioral infractions, [for] students that are up for expulsion, suspension, those type of things. I generally get called in to assist with that." Similarly, Sharon also indicated that administrators have asked her to facilitate discipline-related issues for students with disabilities. Depending on the school, Sharon noted that she might find herself in a position where she led parent meetings at the request of an administrator. Upon reflection, Sharon believed that some of her administrators sought her level of expertise due to their own a lack of knowledge or outright fear.

> I can honestly say that most of the administrators I've worked with have just been afraid of special ed. They don't want to make a mistake *especially* [emphasis] high school principals. They are the worst. They are scared to death of doing something wrong. They're *constantly* [expressed with great emphasis] asking me what should I do, whether it's behavioral, uh whether it has to do with a kid and a grade, or flunking a course or something like that.

Jonathan also described finding himself facilitating how other staff members did their jobs, and believed this was simply based on "How I'm deployed right now." He provided an example of how he spends his time when not engulfed in conducting evaluations or dealing with disciplinary issues. Jonathan indicated:

> Well, I guess it means that I'm, I'm, I have a very specific role amongst my four locations. That I'm here to help special education teachers and general education

teachers. To help the counselors in conducting their meetings, staying within

procedures, um, identifying students for special education and 504 disabilities.

For Jonathan and Sharon, it appeared that they were frequently called upon to serve as

facilitators within their schools due to their level of expertise in special education. Although

neither participant seemed overwhelmed with serving in this role during the conversation,

there appeared to be an air of discontent as depending on their schools, it seemed like

their administrators sought them more so out of convenience.

Theme #2: Reframing the identity of school psychologists

"...I've learned that if I don't sell myself and if I don't put myself out there to do the other things that I want to do, I'm not going to be ... no one is going to ask me to do them, because they're not going to know me. They're not going to trust me... You know, you kind of have to advocate for yourself."- C. Van Diesel

Essence #1: Advocate. Jonathan conveyed his belief that one role school psychologists

should be more involved with is advocacy. He remarked that those school psychologists who are

able to serve in the role of advocate have more flexibility working with teams to ensure that

students get the services need, even when other educational stakeholders disagree. Jonathan

stated:

Uh, a lot times at the high school level it's really a discipline thing where they

don't want to open up a can of worms to all the things all the rights that students

with disabilities have. They'd rather see the child as just being a behavioral

problem and then deal it that way, having the options of suspension and expulsion

and those types of things…   And also, the same thing happens at manifestation

determination meetings where, you know a lot of people always want to chock it

up to, not the students' disability so they can have a different disciplinary course

and sometimes where I have to remind them of the many ways a disability can

impact a student behaviors [Voice seemed a little shaky and frustrated at this

point].

Jonathan communicated that serving in an advocacy role requires him to be less of a gatekeeper of special education and less rigid with criteria, instead allowing him to focus more on what students need to be successful. He pointed out:

And, and trying to, keep kids out of services really trying to act more as an

advocate for students. Trying to see if there's any way we can give them more

services, any way we can help them out whether than kind of that … The

negative role I think a lot of people is just trying to it's us against them. We got to

keep these kids out of special education.

Based on Jonathan's statement, it would appear that if school psychologists were able to operate in the role of advocate, stakeholders' preconceived notions regarding the roles of school psychologists would be more positive.

Based on these comments, it seems that school psychologists have the potential to serve more in the role as advocates by intervening before, during, and after a child has been referred to the school-based prevention/intervention by educational stakeholders based on academic and/or behavior concerns. As intervention strategists, this expanded role ensures that school psychologists provide teachers with the best information to target the specific area(s) of concern, while assisting teachers to identify and monitor progress of the interventions with fidelity and integrity. Although many school psychologists in this study would like to advocate more strongly to implement appropriate interventions for children, financial constraints and overextended teachers often get in the way of successful advocacy for the needs of students.

Tina believed that if school psychologists spent less time conducting assessments and sitting in meetings, it would open more doors to provide teachers with academic and behavior strategies to help all children, and not only those that are currently concerns. She noted that it was a lot easier for her to provide intervention supports and services at the elementary school level than at the middle school level because of RtI. Having time to assist teachers with interventions, in her experience, led to more opportunities to work directly with students, which was important to Tina. "I feel like in an elementary school, at least you can have more of a connection with kids, and it seems that the teachers are still more motivated to try things to help kids." The idea of helping kids through the process of intervention appeared to be of high importance for Tina based on her training with all types of interventions, especially behavioral.

Tina also identified a time in her career when she worked in one school setting and had the opportunity to work with a twelve year old student with significant behavior difficulties. She described the child as one who was in special education and struggled to connect with teachers and peers. Tina explained:

> And I met with him, and we made a behavior plan just him and I, and I'd reward
> him, and he stopped pooping in his pants. And it's the stupidest story, but to me,
> it made such a big difference because I feel like it made a big difference to him.
> And he went on, and he was successful. He was still in special ed, and he had a
> learning disability, but he was no longer seeking out that negative type behavior.

Tina appears to have seen the value of school psychologists serving in the role of interventionists. Her intervention extinguished the undesirable behavior of the student, reaffirmed that he could be successful without seeking negative behavior, and served as a

reminder that she had more to offer students when given an opportunity to utilize all her

intervention skill sets.

  Essence #2: Consultant. In Tina's case, she felt that school psychologists should

incorporate more consulting opportunities into their school-based practices. Tina shared these

sentiments, perceiving that most individuals she works with mainly see her as a tester and

gatekeeper of special education, as previously discussed. The only individuals, in Tina's

estimation, that appreciated her consultative skills are special education teachers, revealing that

"…I feel the majority of consulting I do is usually with our Special Ed teachers." When

considering Tina's story, it would appear that her preference would be to use her consulting

skills with general education teachers more often than special education teachers, because the

bulk of her referrals for evaluations are from general education teachers.

  With enthusiasm in her voice, Tina said that providing consultative supports to her

special education teachers opened up opportunities to come up with creative ways to help

students as well as build positive team relationships. Her voice rose enthusiastically as she

described the process:

> For the special ed teachers, I think that the ones that I have good relationships
>
> with, I have good relationships with the majority of my special ed teachers, and
>
> we talk about different ways to help kids and different ideas.

Based on these exchanges, affording school psychologists opportunities to be seen in a more

positive light by all educational stakeholders through the role of consultant may improve how

Tina's colleagues view her role as a school psychologist.

  Sherri, too, agreed that if she had more time to consult with teachers, she would as this

may improve students' educational outcomes. Specifically, Sherri said, "You know, if we could

do more, you know, and ser--, in-servicing with teachers and consultation with teachers, um, I

think that, um, you know, we would have more impact on children in the schools." It appeared

that Sherri believed that the more opportunities teachers and school psychologists have to

collaborate on ways to best remediate the needs of students, it would potentially yield better

learning opportunities for students to be academically and behaviorally successful.

Sherri also implied that she believed that were she to engage in more consultation

activities rather than just testing, people would see her as an individual indirectly intervening on

behalf of students. Sherri noted:

Also, I guess as somebody to get suggestions on how to intervene with the

students since I sat in many child-study meetings with them to kind of problem

solve how to, you know, work with the students and improve their academic or

behavioral, you know, issues. Um, so I guess they see me more as a consultant,

um, and, you know, person who intervenes with the kids, at least through them

more so than with me directly, intervening with the kids.

By creating open venues of opportunities to assist students in learning, Sherri appeared to realize

that better problem solving strategies can be designed to help students learn. Additionally, she

felt it also promoted a sense of team membership, in that the goal to work on behalf of students,

ensuring their academic and behavioral success rates together, rather than an 'us against them'

mentality.

Essence #3: Counselor. Sharon, Tina, Sherri, and Candace believed that although they

were not afforded the opportunity to serve in the role of a counselor themselves, school

psychologists were also useful when providing counseling supports to students. All four women

were aware that there schools have individuals who serve as school counselors. However, with

changes within the home environments of some students due to mental health issues and/or unexpected financial changes with parents, some students required more services than what school counselors may be able to offer. For these four participants, school psychologists could serve as co-supporters for school counselors in providing individual and group services to students.

Sharon disclosed one of the greatest moments in her career: when students who had no idea what a school psychologist was wanted to learn more about her. When she described that she offered counseling supports to students who needed it, as she recalled, many of the students were pleased to know that there was a "go-to person" in the building. Sharon recalled one young lady who stood out to her and who relied on her counseling services. With joy and laughter in her voice she revealed:

> I think that most, I remember one time, a high school kid said to me. She goes,
> "I didn't even know we had a school psychologist," and I said, "Yes, we do," and
> she said, "Well, you know does that mean I could come and see you?" and I said,
> "Sure, of course." And then so she wanted to come and see me daily, just to gab
> [chuckles].

However, Sharon's voice quickly changed, as she knew this was not one of the roles that would ensure she would be in compliance with testing and report writing. As Sharon pointed out, "although I enjoyed it immensely, uh you know it's just not the role that is uh rewarded." It appeared that when she tried to step outside of the traditional, pre-defined roles of the school psychologist, it became clear to Sharon that her school district did not accept or appreciate work outside of her ascribed roles, since she might fail to meet compliance deadlines for evaluations.

Tina talked about how much she enjoyed the counseling component of school psychology, since this was a strong component of her graduate program. For Tina, this strong counseling background gave her the opportunity to work hands on with children. According to Tina, "My graduate program had a counseling focus, so when I was doing my internship and practicum, I got to do counseling groups with kids. That was a lot of fun." Having the opportunity to do more than simply conduct assessments gave Tina the opportunity to run social skills and anger management groups for students. Tina felt like these groups were productive in changing the behaviors of several of the students she worked with during her internship experience.

However just like Sharon, Tina's counseling opportunities were limited in the school setting, appearing not to be a part of the expected role of a school psychologist. Tina professed the joy she found in one school district that gave her a chance to practice counseling students:

I was like his check-in/check-out person. He'd come in, in the morning and check

in with me. I'd give him his behavior note, and then he'd come in, in the

afternoon, and then sometimes, he would even stop by at lunch.

This experience served as a reminder for Tina that school psychologists have the capability to make a difference in children's lives using counseling supports. Yet, with great frustration in her voice, it appeared that Tina recognized based on her experiences that counseling supports from school psychologists are undervalued in many school districts.

With a strong behavioral background, Sherri knew the value of providing counseling services to students with social-emotional difficulties. Sherri indicated that she believed if more counseling opportunities were made available for students less students would have needs for

more restrictive educational placements. She mentioned the link between providing counseling and intervention services and preventing larger behavioral problems:

> Uh, I think that if we were able to do more counseling and more, you know, interventions, we might not have as many kids who are having a severe problem, who are, um, having to be placed into treatment or residential programs.

Sherri specified that every school year she attempts to schedule some form of counseling supports at one or more of her schools. For example, Sherri revealed that at the beginning of the school year, she planned to do some counseling groups at her lowest referring school. She believed this would open the door for her to utilize more of her behavioral management training and spend less time focusing on testing. But it would appear that the lack of time and flexibility at her other schools has prevented Sherri from providing counseling supports equitably across her schools.

Candace has actively sought opportunities to provide counseling services to students. She found that offering such services gave her an opportunity to work with students outside of a testing relationship while gaining a better understanding of meeting the social-emotional needs of students who otherwise may not work with the school counselor. For example, Candace noted how much she enjoyed providing counseling services to middle school students, as their level of excitement for school is evident, even with their fears of moving from elementary to middle school. With excitement in her voice, Candace reported:

> I *really love* [emphasis] middle schoolers. I'm just coming off working with middle school. I really enjoy them, because I think that, as a sixth grader coming in, like a 12 year-old, they're still young enough, um, that they're excited about school. They're still willing to learn, but they're also developing this higher-level

thinking skills, and they're starting to show, you know, um, the anxiety, the

depression, the more, um, emotional behaviors that are just fun to work with and

do counseling for and try to support.

Candace's statement presented the value and usefulness of providing counseling services to

students. When offered by school psychologists, these programs can create additional support

networks for students transitioning from one educational level to another. Such supports might

offer students another outlet to share their thoughts and ideas with other school personnel aside

from teachers, administrators, and the school counselor(s).

Although Jonathan did not mention counseling as a part of the services he regularly

provides, Jonathan acknowledged that the more society undergoes changes, the greater the

demands placed on educators will be to support the needs of students. He conceded that limited

personnel and funding poses severe challenges in meeting the needs of students. Jonathan

suggested:

No amount of counselors, no amount of school psychologists, really can deal with

those things while we're still focusing on education. And so we have a lot of kids

that have a lot of needs that people just expect to be filled by the school. But

schools aren't staffed or funded to address those adequately.

Jonathan perceived that if RtI were utilized more in his current district and less time was spent

on being deployed to simply conduct evaluations, school psychologists could provide more

counseling supports to students. Based on Jonathan's statement, it appeared that he recognized

the value of school psychologists providing counseling services. However with significant

barriers and unrealistic expectations regarding his role as a school psychologist within his current

school district, Jonathan does not believe that school psychologists will be able to offer counseling services.

Essence #4: Data collector. For Sherri, the pivotal role for school psychologists was defined by their ability to collect good data. She pointed out, with great authority in her voice, "Certainly, I, you know, I'm a data collector, I like to be able to, you know, collect good -- good data." Sherri exuded a level of confidence in her ability to collect data based on her previous experiences, and also realized how her skill sets are beneficial to all educational stakeholders.

Sherri also noted that she hoped new changes within her school district would afford her the flexibility to utilize her data collection skills, further opening the door for her to consult with teachers. She hinted:

> I'm hoping that's going to change now with, um, my new role as more of a
>
> consultant and maybe data collector and help with, um, monitoring kids under
>
> RTI. I'm hoping that that will, uh, allow me more flexibility and more ability to
>
> consult with teachers and staff and observe kids and even collect data from kids
>
> on, you know, reading fluency probes and things like that.

Sherri believed that serving in the role of data collector could help teachers better understand the needs of students and offer structured intervention plans to help students behaviorally and academically and reduce the time spent in meetings and conducting assessments.

Essence #5: Program developer. Sherri identified a positive point in her career where she had the opportunity to develop a behavioral tracking system for students with disabilities. In her own words, Sherri felt empowered by this experience as "…I guess that was a good experience that I had that helped me to, uh, I guess give me a good perception of special ed and my role in it." For Sherri, it appeared that the ability to freely execute such a program allowed

her to utilize other skill sets she learned while in graduate school, solidifying her role, in her mind, as to what she was able to do as a school psychologist. She said, "Uh, and so that gave me a very positive, um, perception of special education and *my role* [emphasis] in special education." Sherri's story illustrated her belief that there was more to her role as a school psychologist than simply conducting evaluations. The experience demonstrated to Sherri that, when given the opportunity to develop and implement a program at school, it benefitted the school and improved her outlook on her role in special education.

Theme #3: In the trenches: Dealing with tension

"Well it, it helped me to kind of realize what my role is and not to be so, kind of despondent about not having the ideal role. And to realize that, I work within my role and to do my job then you know I was a little bit happier than trying to do everything, to every school, for everybody and spreading myself so, so thin that it was impossible to do anything correctly".- J. Chapman

The work environment is a place where individuals with different philosophies, ideas, beliefs, and trainings come together to do what they perceive is in the best interest of an organization. The same is true within schools. School-based personnel have their own perceived truths based on their lived experiences. However, differences in these perceptions may create tension for individuals on the job, making it challenging to work within the environment. Each participant described events within their lives that helped them positively, negatively, or indifferently handle tensions during their careers.

Essence #1: Finding peace within the tension

Candace described her ability to withstand working in an intense environment stemmed from her individuality and how she marketed herself within her schools. Candace recounted her internship supervisor's example, though she learned to quell tense relationships. According to Candace, she availed herself to her schools simply by networking in classrooms and connecting with students and teachers. She explained how she did this:

Um, I play a big social game, so to speak, I mean … I, I feel as though, I love to

talk, I love to get to know people, so any opportunity that I had that I wasn't in a

meeting, I would be in the hallway. I would be going into the classroom. I would

be like, "Hey, I'm just … you know, I want to learn your student's names. What

are you all working today?" Um, just so that I would get a feel for who the kids

were and so that the teachers would feel comfortable coming to me if they ever

needed to, um so that was huge.

It appeared that Candace's positive approach to how she worked within her schools has created a

level of visibility that made others see her as a part of the team. She asserted "I feel 100%

valued. I feel like I'm part of the staff. I feel like they appreciate everything we do." Based on

her last statement, it appeared that Candace's on the job application of the social networking has

afforded her opportunities to create positive environments where she is able to do her job to the

best of her abilities.

Sharon learned that she had the strength to withstand tensions within intensive work

environments when she re-entered the field after her earlier retirement. For years, Sharon stated

most of her discourse surrounded assessments. She claims that she learned to manage these

tensions after participating in an intensive training she participated in regarding conducting

assessments for students. She found a connection between the skills children were lacking and

the environment she worked in. Sharon verbalized:

And it's the first time that testing has made any sense to me and that you can

really do something with a kid who has processing deficits. That's the only reason

that I went back to practice after I retired because I wanted to do cross battery

assessment.

With this training in place, Sharon felt more comfortable returning back to the field. Sharon

provided another example of where she was able to avoid an intense situation within a school

district. Sharon shared she was asked to conduct assessments in a nearby school district that did

not support her new style of testing. She reported that she freely rejected their offer since she

had her own style of testing and ways of doing things that contributed to her own sense of well-

being and effectiveness. With confidence in her voice, and using a matter of fact tone, Sharon

articulated this approach:

> And right now, that's my criteria when I go into a school and they call me and
>
> they want me to come in and work. I say to them, "Do you want a cross battery,
>
> you know, will I be able to do that?" And [one district] wanted me to come last
>
> year and they didn't want to do it. Then I'm like no, I can't come.

Having the freedom and flexibility to say no in her newly defined approach to testing encouraged

Sharon to feel more confident in her position as a school psychologist and prevented her from

working in districts reminiscent of her past, or those with higher levels of tension.

Tina's experience was quite similar to Candace's, in that she learned to deal with tensions

often present in an intense work environment from individuals already in the field. However,

unlike Candace who learned this lesson during her internship, Tina learned this process during

her first year as a school psychologist. Tina reported that it was during her first week of

orientation that she met individuals in the field who helped her realize that when pressures came,

it was best to go with the flow, rather than resist it. Tina said "…I felt those group of people

kind of taught me to relax and kind of take things not so seriously. I think that's influenced

me…to do what's necessary to keep me healthy and not as stressed out." It appeared that the

words from these seasoned school psychologists served as a continuous reminder for Tina when she said:

> So I think if I hadn't met that group of people, I don't know if I would still be
>
> where I am and kind of the outlook I have because I feel like they kind of taught
>
> me kind of the ropes and that it was okay if things were hard and teachers would
>
> yell at you. And so it was kind of like they gave me this is what really happens
>
> because I don't think I necessarily got that in my internship. I think I was still
>
> very fresh and new. So and I think that still impacts me today.

Tina learned from these relationships that her experiences in her work environment had less to do with who she was as a person and more to do with stressors in education.

Essence #2: Simply the nature of the job. Sometimes the tensions individuals experience on the job simply come with the territory of being school psychologists. Candace shared that there have been times within her career when she had been indifferent to the tensions associated with the job because the assignments ascribed to her position were based on the nature of the job. She asserted:

> I wasn't expecting to be the person that everybody in the school would come to
>
> … to explain the law to them. I expected [laughing] the special ed teachers to
>
> know the definition of a specific learning disability or to have someone to go to if
>
> they didn't understand why, you know, you did X, Y, and Z, or what the timelines
>
> were for state, you know, law. And I didn't, I didn't know we were going to be
>
> the ones, you know, kind of walking everyone through the legality aspect when
>
> we talked about eligibility or, um, you know, doing or not doing an evaluation.

Candace further noted:

> I feel like just the role that we're given in the county that I work … … um, where
> we are kind of leading the meetings for determining eligibility, and we kind of
> manage a lot of that. I see us as this, like, gatekeeper for special education. I feel
> like we have a big hand in um following process, following procedure, *educating*
> [emphasis] people about the law.

It would appear that Candace realized that her expectation of what she should be doing and what she was actually doing were in conflict. She simply made the position her own, having learned simply to deal with the conflict, reflected in her statement, "Really, I think, I think the biggest thing [laughs] is that it's a job where you kind of take what you're given and then it's kind of up to you to do with it what you want." Candace's last statement gave the impression that there were times when she had to find humor in the job in order not to take things too seriously. She recognized this was the only way she could create the type of work experience that fit her beliefs, values, and philosophies.

Jonathan's work experiences have been slightly different than Candace when dealing with tensions on the job. Like Candace, Jonathan came in with expectations based on his training in graduate school. However Jonathan shared that after pairing himself with veteran psychologists in the field, he quickly learned how to work around the tensions as it was simply a part of the job.

> Well, I, I think, you know once you pass the that uh, kind of pie-in-the-sky feeling
> that you're going to do all the things that you were trained to do that, you know,
> the Ivory Tower perception on what school psychologists is going to be (flat
> response noted). Kind of getting to know some of the older psychologists that
> have a more realistic approach to it.

Jonathan's presentation of some tensions he experienced where shared in a 'matter of fact' way. His tone of voice suggested underlying frustrations with the job when he said, "I mean, sometimes I, I kind of would like to have more noticeable outcomes from my work, you know [flat response pattern noted in voice]…" or it could mean that Jonathan was simply indifferent to the tensions on the job since it was all that he knew based on his experiences and those of other colleagues.

Essence #3: Frustrated with the tension

Candace revealed there have been times within her career where she found herself working in intense situations that were uncomfortable. For example, Candace shared she was working with a team member who preferred testing students for special education services rather than providing relevant interventions to see if school-based resources would support the needs of students. She stated:

> Uh, oh, man. Um (long pause), well I worked with one counselor who ... I only worked with him for, like, a year, but he was grumpy, disgruntled, chip on his shoulder, didn't want to do anything for any child. He just thought that everybody, you know, "Let's just test them. We haven't tested them. Let's just test them."

Working in an environment where one person on the team presented a hopeless attitude appeared to create a level of annoyance in Candace's voice as she further described working with this person. Candace indicated that her colleague made her feel like there was nothing more the school or other educational stakeholders could do to provide additional supports to children. This seems to have put Candace in a position where she believed that she needed to redefine her

role as a school psychologist so that she would not succumb to the pressures to giving up like her colleague had.

Sometimes, Candace found that it was even harder to do her job, something she attributed to ongoing pressures at the district level. She said:

I think it's the next level, it's more the higher ups that aren't with us on the daily

basis that maybe don't know what we're doing, don't see what we're doing, don't

know the amount of, you know, hours that it takes us to do certain things. Um,

and I don't think that they always give us the recognition or the praise or just

show the appreciation for what we do. They just say, "Oh, well, they can do

more. They can add this on. Yeah, they're not doing anything else."

Based on her statements, Candace appeared to feel bombarded because of the expectation to multi-task. Balancing so many activities at the same time made it even harder for her to do what she believed was her job. She felt under-appreciated by those in leadership at the district level as well as by school personnel who simply want kids tested. This seemed to lead Candace down a path where she has to remain positive within an environment that could corrode her with its negativity.

Jonathan brought up a lot of raw emotions as he shared his story. He angrily described one point during his fourteen years working in the same school district, noting the downhill decline of his working relationship with his previous supervisor. As Jonathan's tone of voice raised, he shared that, over time, he found his former supervisor to be very condescending in his approach to working with him:

Well, I, I would think we had a supervisor for quite some time that's now gone,

that, uh, really was very much into micromanagement and um, making sure we're

things and of strict adherence to kind of unnecessary policies and procedures.

Um, being really negative about simple requests that would help overall morale

and help overall job functioning, but just kind of always ... It was him and central

office against the employees, being the school psychologist.

This suggested that, for Jonathan, this 'us against them' approach made it harder for him to

simply speak with his supervisor regarding critical issues that occurred at the building level. He

revealed:

Well, it kind of left me out there hanging and really relying on, on colleagues that

I value their opinion for information, rather than going for assistance. It got to a

point where, you know if you ask a question it was silly. Why do you not know

this? Why would you ask that question? You've known this for years.

Jonathan's perceptions of his relationship with his supervisor appeared to have left him afraid to

seek support, perhaps out of concern he would be belittled by the person who was in a position

of authority. He said, "So you stop asking questions and you just get the information from your

colleagues." The lack of communication between individuals serving in a leadership role

intensified the level of tension within the office in Jonathan's eyes.

Sharon's level of frustration within the work environment became evident when her

schools wanted her to be all things at all times. She communicated feelings of powerlessness

when caught in the crossfire of individuals who disagreed with how she did her job. Throughout

Sharon's career she acknowledged, "…they want you to do *everything* [emphasis]. They being

the administrators, teachers, if the kid is in special ed, they want you to somehow put a blessing

in this kid and make him better." As she found out, juggling multiple tasks made it more

cumbersome for her to do her job, as she had to fulfill the requirements set forth by her

department while also "fixing" every academic and behavioral issue related to all students in

special education.

Sharon pointed out that when she was placed in positions where she felt like she was

doing the right thing based on her training, she was placed in situations where she was unable to

defend these choices. Sharon recounted a time in her career where she had an angry parent who

yelled and screamed at the teacher and at her, seemingly out of sheer disagreement about the

information they shared regarding the child's progress. As Sharon described, typically an

administrator or administrative designee would be present during a meeting that was potentially

contentious, yet no one was present. Sharon found herself in vulnerable position, sometimes

even walking out of meetings in order to resolve or diffuse the situation. She gave the following

example:

> Like I said, you have no power. I mean, I have walked out of meetings. I had
>
> told the parents, "You know this meeting is over and we, we reconvene when you
>
> are calmer." Even that's scary when somebody is screaming at you.

Having the knowledge that you are powerless and that there may not be leadership support

during crisis moments appeared to make it more uncomfortable for Sharon to perform her duties

at some of her schools.

Sherri also reported times in her career where she has found it hard to handle the intensity

of the work environment. A constant refrain Sherri mentioned was Sherri mentioned was the

disconnect between what she was trained to do as a school psychologist and what she actually

did in her schools. It appeared that Sherri felt like her hands were tied, limiting her flexibility to

offer supports and services to her schools, while trying to meet unrealistic timelines to complete

evaluations. Even with requests to collect more data to document the lack of students' progress, Sherri indicated she found herself having high referral numbers:

> But because we are asking them to do a lot of data collection, you know, before
>
> we started technically RtI, um, they uh basically, you know, really have to show
>
> that they are not making progress before you refer them. I know that -- I think we
>
> did that for, um, evaluations this year, then the previous year even though it's still
>
> pretty high, about 15, 20 referrals -- 20, 25 referrals, excuse me.

Even with the best of intentions, knowing that some students are not good candidates for special education services, Sherri found that her numbers referring students to special education was higher than she felt it should have been.

Sherri also believed that the lack of funding in states, specifically the distribution of educational funding, was one contributor to the tension within her schools. For schools (and states) that have higher funding levels achieved through other means (i.e. corporate partnerships or higher home property taxes), Sherri saw teachers that were more apt to collect data and her referral numbers were typically smaller. "But, unfortunately, because of the economic and political [clears throat] and basically economic [voice rises] status of the schools, we don't have the money to provide the services or the number of people, at least in -- in this state [laughter]." Based on Sherri's statement, it would appear that she has come to the realization that her job is dictated by outside forces beyond her control.

Tina's self-perceptions of her role as a school psychologist withered based on how she had been treated on the job over time. Tina believed that no matter how much she tried to be the best school psychologist she could be and support the needs of her school, it always came across to her that she was under appreciated by most staff members. As Tina put it:

I would say it's usually my interactions with these people that make me feel the

crappiest. It's the people who umm that I just described that it just makes me feel

bad because I feel that I always try to do 100% in my job. Even if it is just

evaluating and writing reports, I always write the best reports I can, and it's

ignorant … that's mean.

Tina was particularly effective in her description of how she felt like some administrators and

teachers were unwilling to try new intervention plans, believing their primary objective was to

test students and place them in special education. Tina thought that a lot of the pressures to test

stemmed from some general education teachers inability to effectively work with children with

learning differences. Tina said "I perceive in their perception that kid gets to get out of the

general ed classroom and go to resource and then it's the special ed teacher's problem." She

further expounded "It's been my experience too it lightens the principal's load because they no

longer have to deal with a child like that, umm and they don't have to listen to a teacher bitch

about a child like that." For Tina there appeared to be a lack of connection between educational

stakeholders' rationale for evaluating students and doing what was in the best interest of

students. When she does disagree, Tina stated she finds herself in a place of loneliness as she

seems to be the only person who understands the mental and emotional conflict she undergoes

when doing what is in the best interest of students.

Theme #4: The road less taken: Dealing with ethical dilemmas

Well I think like the best way to tell you is to give you an example of a case I just did at the end of last year where they signed a permission to test on a child, and I was not there, and I did not agree with it. He was eight years old. He just came from Vietnam. He spoke very little English…They just wanted to put him in special ed to "help" him (laughs) because then he wouldn't be the teacher's problem because he was a third grader and he was at a kindergarten level, but he had never been in school.- T. Rheinhart

Jonathan, Sherri, Tina, Candace, and Sharon each disclosed situations that caused them to experience some level of personal and professional discomfort in the field. Each participant presented stories where they felt like they were placed in compromising positions. These centered on challenges following their ethical commitments based on their personal and professional beliefs, values, and philosophies in comparison to giving in to the demands of pressures associated with others perceptions of the roles of school psychologists. Although the level of discomfort was common among all participants, the cause was specific to each person's perception and recollection of the event(s).

Essence #1: The voice of frustration. Jonathan shared a time in his career when he found himself in a precarious position, when his ethical commitment to the profession was called into question during a meeting with other educational stakeholders. With frustration in his voice, he explained he was in the midst of an eligibility meeting for a student who was two weeks away from graduation. Members of the team agreed that the student should be found eligible for special education services but Jonathan disagreed based on the evidence. This created a stark level of discomfort as Jonathan's recalled the event, and he says it changed his perceptions of himself as a school psychologist. Jonathan painfully relived this event with some tension in his voice when further asked "has there ever been a time when you were asked to engage in any type of unethical behaviors in your role as a school psychologist?" He said:

> Yeah I have. I did, and it didn't end well for me. I uh, clearly disagreed with the
>
> team about the ... It's sort of the social worker. But there was uh, a student that
>
> clearly wasn't going to graduate from high school. They wanted to find her
>
> eligible two weeks before graduation to give her an IEP and allow her to
>
> uh, graduate on an IEP diploma. I adamantly pushed the team in the direction of

no. And to that I was reprimanded, um, received a letter in my file, and uh, was

ultimately removed from the school.

It appeared that this event created a level of undue stress for Jonathan regarding his work

relationship with the school. In turn, Jonathan then began questioning his self-worth as a school

psychologist. He added:

It made me feel useless because the principal actually got um, that was involved

with this was, was then promoted to be director of high schools. The guidance

counselor who was a part of his meeting was then, directed to ... Was then made

uh, director of school counseling. And I was just basically shown the door. And

even though special education said I was right, and backed me up, it didn't really

show that way in how I felt I was treated.

Such feelings of intense emotions and concerns regarding his ability to function as a school

psychologist made Jonathan question on numerous occasions whether or not he should remain in

public education. Based on his own words, it appeared that Jonathan realized that no matter how

hard he tried to be ethically right, he clearly saw that others would not support him. The political

aspects became personal when he was let go.

Tina's situation entailed feelings of frustration, disappointment, and at times anger when

she described how others tended to engage in unethical behaviors on the job. Tina

communicated a time in her career where she felt like she was treated unfairly for following

federal and district regulations. Specifically, with some anger in her voice, she painstakingly

shared the following as her tone lowered as she carefully chose her words:

At the meeting, the principal and the counselor I would say ganged up and were

very rude and condescending and told me in front of the parents that we just need

to make an exception for this case and that he needed to get the help and that he

needed to be in special ed.   And umm I said no, and that was something that I just

felt strongly on. There are certain legal criteria that we have to stick to, and umm

the principal talked to my supervisor and my supervisor's supervisor about it

because he didn't get the response he wanted.

Tina noted that there were times when she found herself in combative situations for following

the rules. Often, she heard rude comments, for example, "…I am told by the administrator or the

teacher that you know I'm just an asshole and that I need to just make an exception for this one

case." The work environment is clearly contentious, and suggested that Tina might be fighting

an uphill battle to remain true to the ethical mandates established by federal, district, and

professional regulations while still proving to other educational stakeholders that she is a team

player.

Tina expounded that she does what is right for children based on the law. "Umm well for

me, I don't feel like it's an ethical issue on me because I feel like I'm following our ethical code,

and I'm sticking to what I know is right." However, conflict can arise when other professionals

within the field give in to the demands to find students eligible for special education when they

are not. Tina believed this made her job cumbersome:

I know there are other school psychologists in our district who don't want to put

up a fight and be treated so rudely that they will go ahead and make a kid eligible.

And umm that is not ethical, and I feel like this has gone on for awhile. So some

of those administrators and teachers feel that they can treat me that way because

they've gotten other psychologists to do what they know is not right.

For Tina, it appeared that having such insight as to how others choose to behave unethically within her district simply made her attempt to be even more ethical. This could explain Tina's disdain for the profession at this point in her career when she continued:

> I don't know a school psychologist that wouldn't say that. [long pause] I would say that there's not a week that goes by that I don't think of getting out of school psychology and working in a school district and trying to figure out another avenue I could go. Like I feel like I'm in my job because it pays the bills at this point, and I feel in order to keep being a school psychologist, you have to kind of sell yourself, like your soul away a little. You have to kind of decide that you're not going to totally care about things, and that bugs me because like I said, I always want to try to give 100% and do my best at things, but in order to do the job they want me to do, I feel like at times you don't.

The idea of knowing to do what is ethically fair and not having the ability to do so has created a high level of frustration and anger for Tina.

Sharon told a different story, when compared to Jonathan and Tina. Sharon said she was never placed in a situation where her ethical commitment was compromised. Instead, she relayed instances when her power as a school psychologist was removed from her and other educational stakeholders when stakeholders at the building level were not allowed to determine student eligibility for special education. Sharon shared the following:

> Actually, it was the opposite. I worked in a large inner city school district that had little money and they rewrote the eligibility qualifications, making it almost impossible for students to qualify for SLD. They also told the psychologists they had to send the report to the DO before having the eligibility meeting and were

told whether or not the student qualified, without input from other team members (teacher, parent, student, etc).

Having a loss of control and power in doing what was right by students appeared to create a level of frustration for Sharon when she pointed out "I left the district that year as did a couple of other psychs." Sharon's disagreement with the manner in which her former school district handled the eligibility process for students with suspected disabilities was unethical in her view and illegal under federal law. This further explained Sharon's lack of contentment with the field for so many years. There seemed to be continuous disconnects between district level expectations and what Sharon believed was best practices for students:

> Well, my perceptions about my role, the greatest impact is the uh, the district
> policy. I mean, *often* [strong emphasis] we do not do what is not best for kids.
> We do what the district wants us to do as far as money is concerned… And you
> know they didn't care and you could bring in all the data and everything else… It
> didn't matter to them.

Sharon further revealed her level of frustrations regarding the impact of district level procedures in determining eligibility when she noted:

> And you know it's *really, really* [strong emphasis] frustrating when you get those
> really tough, tough cases of kids who really need a special program particularly if
> it's outside the district or something like that… And I'm not saying that every kid
> should have a Cadillac placement… *But* [strong emphasis] that being said, there
> are times when you're putting a Band Aid on a kid that's got a broken leg here.
> It's not going to help. And that is, I think the bane of every school psychologists.

Sharon continued to share that she perceived that her power as a school psychologist in doing what was ethically fair in her eyes in addressing the needs of students with disabilities were stripped away from her over the years when she solemnly asked, "What am I doing? Nothing." It appeared that Sharon felt like she was powerless in helping students acquire the supports and services needed to be successful.

Essence #2: Empowered to push back. Although faced with ethical challenges on the job, Sherri pointed out that she always stood her ground when educational stakeholders attempted to corner her in eligibility meetings and she would push back when needed. While responding in a jovial manner, Sherri shared, "Um, there may have been people who tried to push for that but it didn't always work [laughs]." This statement suggested that even during times of contention it was expected that others would view information differently in order to acquire desired results. However, Sherri never assumed that individuals called into question her ethical commitment as a school psychologist. Instead she qualified that each person perceived data differently and defended their position as such. Specifically, Sherri noted:

> Or they wanted to, um, you know, look at the data in a different way. I mean I
> don't think they were trying to be unethical. I think that they just were looking at
> it in more than maybe just the way that the checklist always presented itself as
> opposed to the child.

Sherri noted that for her, many cases of confrontation arose because of how district criteria worksheets were constructed. For Sherri, it was challenging not to find a child eligible for special education services because the school's resources were not well-equipped to meet students' needs based on district criteria worksheets. As she pointed out:

So, sometimes there is a little more wiggle room because, uh, for instance, our

new learning disability checklist says you have to have done this and this and this,

but not all schools are RtI specifically, you know, really full time RtI type schools

but they say you have to have done RtI instruction, um, before qualifying this kid

for a learning disability and -- and sometimes you can't deny services for a kid

who may need that but just because that's the fault of the school, that the school

hasn't, you know, got this program implemented, you know, all the way that you

should penalize a child. So I guess in that case, you know, we've sometimes

qualified kids when they might not have met the criteria, um, because of the fault

of the school or the -- the system.

It appeared that in Sherri's eyes it would be more unethical to not find a child eligible for

services due to a flawed system than to ensure that their educational needs were met based on

presented evidence.

Sherri compared how a well-equipped, financially stable school district can minimize

contentions within stakeholder meetings as she described a school district she had worked for:

Well, actually, in Texas, I did -- I have a pretty good ratio. We were actually --

 I worked in a richest school district in Texas - because of the oil refineries, also,

they've made a law that said that you had to distribute the money from one rich

school district to the poor school districts. But still, we had pretty good funding

in that school district and so that probably made it easier and, uh, able for me to

provide more services for kids. So, I guess in this oil deficient states

[laughs] that I've been working in [laughter], we don't have as much money

[laughter].

Sherri suggested that well funded school districts opened more doors for students to receive more help prior to evaluating for special education services. With more evidence in hand, there was less room to question if the school or system was at fault for not meeting students' needs. Sherri's story would suggest that even when she had to push back at meetings, there were times when individuals agreed to disagree. Having worked in a fully progressive school district versus a less progressive school district, Sherri came to terms that it was better to do what was in the best interest of the child than to be placed in combative situations with other educational stakeholders. It appeared disagreement would not be in the best interest of children.

Candace's story was very similar to Sherri's in that she felt she always knew when to push back or engage in in-depth discussions before making her professional decision to find a child eligible or ineligible for special education services. Candace's strategy for pushing back was based on what she knew was ethically fair based on the needs of students and federal, district, and professional mandates. In Candace's case, she shared the following:

> Oh, yeah. Yes. I mean, I think every year there has been at least one, if not,
> multiple occasions where I felt pressure from some party at the table to find a
> child eligible whether the data didn't show it. I mean, and I think it's just
> because, um, for whatever reason, they just think that this is what the child needs,
> and they just have decided in their mind that this is it and yeah, I mean, and push
> and push and push.

This statement suggested that Candace was aware that there were pressures on the job to find students eligible, which is why she shared that she always assessed for any and all potential disabilities. Candace also noted that when she felt pressured to find a student eligible for special education services, she had no problem reminding her team that she was only one member of the

team and each person had a voice, a concept highlighted in IDEIA. Candace indicated that she

had no problems pushing back when others wanted to find a student eligible for services who

clearly did not present with a disability when she said:

> "If you *think* [emphasis] that you can answer, you know, yes to this question or
>
> you have it, you know, let me hear it. Like, let's talk about it, and, you know,
>
> again, I'm one member. I'm not going to agree for X, Y, and Z reasons," um, but
>
> I mean, you kind of have to put it back on them.

For Candace, it would appear that it was best to place the decision back on other educational

stakeholders than to engage in a combative situation. As she pointed out, "Because if it's

unethical, I don't want to do it. If they're fine with it, then that's their deal." Candace seemed to

be comfortable in the knowledge that it was okay to agree to disagree as long as she followed the

law.

Based on the information Candace shared, it appeared that she has been able to withstand

the pressures of engaging in any form of unethical behaviors because of the experiences she had

during her internship. As Candace reminisced further, she was shared that it was more important

to be confident when presenting the evidence even when others disagreed with the evidence as

"... you know, you have to be confident with what you're presenting and what you believe to be,

so just, you know, having that, um, security to do so." Based on this last statement, Candace

appeared to positively describe her ability to defend her position during intensive meetings

because she had developed a sense of security by knowing what was right under the law and

what was right for students, presenting the evidence to support her claims.

Concluding Statement:

The four emergent themes within this research study were lost identity, redefining the identity, dealing with tension, and dealing with ethical dilemmas. Each of the participants shared their experiences regarding the perceived roles of school psychologists as related to social, political, and economical changes in education, with a special focus on how they made sense of the phenomenon in K-12 education. Their views reframed the identity of school psychologists: ranged from providing counseling supports to being advocates. Individual opinions surrounding the best means of dealing with tensions were based on their individual perceptions of the tension. These perceptions ranged from feeling a level of comfort to outright frustration. Ethical dilemmas appeared to be situation-based and focused less on the ethical beliefs and values of school psychologists instead conflict arose from outside personnel, who were not mandated to follow the same professional guidelines as school psychologists, and seem to have lower levels of knowledge about laws and procedures. This chapter presented a summary of these findings and a narrative account of how each participant experienced the phenomenon of their perceived roles in education based on social, political, and economical changes in education. The following chapter discusses of the implications of these findings, building from these findings and the extant literature surrounding changes in education and how the roles of school psychologists can be reframed.

Chapter V: DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

This interpretative phenomenological analysis study sought to understand the perceptions, expectations, and lived experiences of individuals who were closest to the phenomena as related to the impact of social, political, and economic changes in education on the perceived roles of school psychologists. Based on the literature and observation, there was disconnect between others' views of the roles of school psychologists in comparison to school psychologists. Most of the research that has been conducted has focused on others' views of the role of school psychologists. However, limited research from a qualitative perspective has focused on how school psychologists view themselves amongst the continuous educational changes.

This research sought to better understand the perceptions of those most closely connected to the phenomenon of educational changes and how the process of meaning-making varied among school psychologists in the study. Cognitive dissonance theory provided an analytical framework that complemented the interpretative phenomenological analysis methodology.

Research Questions

The primary research question for this study was:

- How have recent socio-political-economic changes impacted the perceived roles of school psychologists?

To address this question, the following sub-questions were formulated:

- How do school psychologists perceive their usefulness in their schools based on their service delivery practices?

- How do school psychologists report their experiences regarding their ability to work based on imposed tensions associated with socio-political-economic changes in education?

- How do school psychologists perceive their ethical commitment as special educators in the wider field of special education based on imposed tensions associated with socio-political-economic changes in education?

Data analysis generated four salient super-ordinate themes from the data collected from participants in the study. The themes were as follows:

1. The lost identity: 'I am whatever you say I am'

2. Reframing the identity of school psychologists

3. In the trenches: Dealing with tension

4. The road less taken: Dealing with ethical dilemmas.

The discussion that follows focuses on these themes, how they support and add to the literature on the perceived roles of school psychologists, and how these perceptions are related to changes in education. The chapter continues with a discussion of the significance of the conclusions and limitations of the findings. Finally, the discussion closes with the research's implications for the educational community.

Interpretation of Themes

Four primary themes emerged from the research: the lost identity, reframing the identity of school psychologists, dealing with tension, and dealing with ethical dilemmas. Although all four themes are intertwined, threaded throughout the participants' experiences and most strongly represented in the findings was the primary theme of the lost identity. Central to the discussion of this theme was the researcher's impression of how strong the participants' opinions were.

This was based on the high level of emotional responses, which ranged from sheer anger to feelings of indifference.   Tied closely to this first theme, reframing the identity of school psychologists also elicited a high level of emotion, and also included a range of experiences and beliefs shared by participants. Some of the sentiments participants shared ranged from a desire to engage in other activities outside of the expected roles of school psychologists to frustration that school psychologists were not afforded opportunities to engage in these other activities due to district and school level expectations and resources.

Dealing with tensions was another theme that emerged, though individual respondents' perceptions presented with great fluctuation based on their situations. Some individuals were able to positively handle tensions within their work environment while others felt like they were unable to control their environment, in alignment with the theoretical framework's assumptions. It appeared that the potential for experiencing tension was influenced by an individual's respective environmental setting and the individuals with whom they worked. The views participants had when dealing with ethical dilemmas proved to be the most interesting, as all of the school psychologists in the study indicated that their personal ethics were not a point of concern. However, some of the school psychologists did question other educational stakeholders' ethical obligations, requirements, and abilities to follow federal, state, and district regulations in relation to IDEIA. This is a significant finding not previously discussed in the current literature, most likely due to a lack of research on the impact of social, political, and economic changes in education has on the perceived roles of school psychologists.

The lost identity: 'I am whatever you say I am'. Congruent with the current, available literature related to the historical expectations of the perceived roles of school psychologists, all of the participants felt a sense of identity loss based on the mismatch between their educational

training as psychologists in graduate school and their own the job expectations. The cognitive dissonance theory illustrated in Figure 1 seems to align with the findings. For example, Candace said "Um, so I certainly think I'm a go-to person that my name is sort of thrown out as like, "Oh, go talk to Christina, oh, Candace. Go talk to the school psychologist, you know, she'll help you with that." when asked how her administrators perceive her role as school psychologist. Candace's example described a positive dissonance to the tensions within one of her work environments based on her belief that her administrators perceived her as being a team player at this school. On the other hand, Sharon was asked to describe experiences that impacted her perceptions of her role in special education during her tenure as a school psychologist. She said:

> Well, my perceptions about my role, the greatest impact is the district policy.
>
> I mean, often we do not do what is not best for kids. We do what the district
>
> wants us to do as far as money is concerned.

It appears that he political and economic changes in education overall appeared to shape Sharon's perceptions of her roles as a school psychologist in a negative way, demonstrating a negative dissonance to the tensions related to her tenure as a school psychologist. This study's findings supported the literature, concluding that school psychologists' roles and responsibilities are derived from the needs of their schools and district mandates. This point of view was consistent with the findings of Braden, DiMarino-Linnen, and Good (2001) related to the history of school psychology and how their roles have been defined over the years by educational stakeholders.

Although some the school psychologists had opportunities to engage in other activities like counseling, the current results indicate that all of the school psychologists spent their time conducting assessments and serving as the gatekeeper of special education. As Young and

Gaughan (2010) found that although the roles of school psychologists are gradually changing as education changes, the fact remains that a large portion of school psychologists' time is spent as testers or gatekeepers. This was supported by the findings of this study. All of the school psychologists in the study felt a sense of irritability and frustration tied to their identity as school psychologists. They knew that they had more to offer their schools, but felt like they were pigeon-holed into the ascribed roles set forth by their schools and district leaders, chiefly as assessors and the gatekeepers to special education services. While Natasi (2000) mentioned that school psychologists have been trained to provide mental health services, those that took part in this study had not been able to fully engage in providing mental health services because of how the roles of school psychologists have been conceptualized for so many years. This dissonance, in turn, has fostered a professional identity crisis. School psychologists lack the professional flexibility to reshape their roles within schools without buy-in from other educational stakeholders and power structures. For school psychologists that want to move beyond their traditional roles in schools, this disconnect between what they know they can accomplish and not being able to do so can create or heighten their disdain for the profession.

This conception of a lost identity or an identity in crisis is documented in the literature, and supported by this study. Proctor and Steadman (2003) suggested that for those school psychologists who continue to find themselves backed into corners doing nothing but testing have a greater propensity toward questioning their self-worth, culminating in professional burn out. This was supported in this study, as several participants questioned their purpose in the discipline. Three of the five participants described a state of loneliness or indifference in doing their jobs, believing that no matter how hard they tried to provide appropriate supports and services to their schools, their efforts were not viewed as readily acceptable practices.

Participants often reflected on other settings where they were afforded more opportunities to utilize their full range of skills. However, as one of the participants noted, his reality was simply how the district designed his position and he had to follow the rules, even when he disagreed that what he was doing was not best for students.

There was clearly no difference in how school psychologists perceived their roles in education when compared to historical research dating back to the 1960s. Bardon's (1983) ongoing study of the field found school psychology has historically been in search of its identity in education for a number of years. The fact that perceptions of the roles of school psychologists has not changed or been clarified in more than forty years is alarming. With all of the educational changes that have occurred, the role of school psychologists and how individuals perceive those roles has remained stagnant and confused. The participants in the study felt stuck. Regardless of whether time was an issue, they reported being stretched thin between school assignments, and/or having unrealistic or inappropriate referrals for evaluations. In fact, all of the school psychologists indicated that losing their identity was simply a part of the job. It had been accepted as a normative process.

Reframing the identity of school psychologists. Building from this loss of identity, each of the school psychologists in this study sought ways to reframe their position, with differing levels of success. All of the participants agreed that they would be willing to engage in more activities within their schools. In fact, a few had gone out of their way to expand their roles and 'prove' to their schools that they have more to offer than simply testing and serving as gatekeepers of special education. The negative feelings associated with the perception of their value were balanced by the outreach attempts. As Crocker and Knight (2005) pointed out, "…regardless of whether or not people typically have high or low self-esteem, they seek the

emotional high associate with success in domains of contingent self-worth and strive to avoid the emotional lows that accompany failure in these domains" (Crocker & Knight, 2005, p. 200). Performing duties outside of what is normal helped to positively change many of the school psychologists' perceptions of their self-worth. However, as each of the participants noted, the lack of flexibility within their day to add other activities made it challenging for them to engage in these activities, potentially leading to feelings of sadness or disdain. These conclusions were consistent with the available literature, which stated that although some individuals have experienced great success in changing their roles within schools, the results have not been widespread (Bradley-Johnson & Dean, 2000).

School psychologists have been trained to offer a variety of educational supports and services to their school communities. The participants reported a wide range of skills that their graduate education helped them build. And these skills have value in the broader community. With ongoing crises within families due to finances, mental health issues, and dysfunctionality, students are not available for learning. Spending hours on end focusing on academics and behaving appropriately in school is the least of many students' priorities. Some are simply trying to figure out if they will have a bed to sleep in or food to eat the next morning. This may hold even greater truth in communities with lower socio-economic status, which often correlates with schools with fewer economic resources. The literature is adamant that children undergoing significant stressors have a harder time functioning in schools (Bramlett, R. K., Murphy, J. J., Johnson, J., Wallingsford, L., & Hall, J. D., 2002; Crockett, 2003). School psychologists, like as school counselors and school social workers, can assist families and bridge the gap between familial needs and outside community resources in an effort to help meet the needs of students. School psychologists can also provide behavior management plans both at home and school to

help children deal with unexpected changes. As all of the school psychologists in this study indicated, each received significant training in the areas of counseling, consultation, and developing behavioral plans throughout their graduate level training. Yet as long as these skills remain underutilized, school communities will not be able to access all of the benefits school psychologists are ready and willing to offer them.

Each school psychologist provided information offering insights into their perceptions about what their preferred roles would be within their school communities. These insights were consistent with the expectations of NASP's professional standards and the current literature. This suggests that "there is a strong desire to decrease time spent in the psychoeducational role and increase time in the area of preventative services" (Corkum, French, & Dorey, 2007, p. 108). Participants suggested roles ranging from developing programs to serving as advocates.

Though there was insufficient evidence collected to determine the impact of professional organizations in the study's participants' conceptions of their professional role, the literature does offer clues. VanVoohis and Levinson (2006) highlighted the importance for school psychologists to connect with their local professional organizational divisions in order to have an established identity and monitor their overall job satisfaction. Should this fail to occur, there are no guarantees that children will "…be afforded high quality school psychological services" (VanVoohis & Levinson, 2006, p. 88). Therefore if the field of school psychology continues to have its identity shaped by the ebb and flow of educational changes, the identity of school psychologists will be lost and individuals' abilities to handle tensions within the field will vary based on their perceptions of their work situations.

In the trenches: Dealing with tension. Work tensions in the environment can have positive, negative, and/or ambiguous effects on how individuals perceive themselves, others,

and/or their situation (Lloyd, King, & Chenoweth, 2002). Specifically, individuals' perceptions

of a situation and the context of the situation shape how individuals' perceive the level of support

within an organization (Griffin, Mathieu, & Jacobs, 2001). The results from this study suggested

that most of the participants perceived the tensions within their work environment as negative.

The sheer level of frustration and anger alluded to by each participant indicated that these

individuals struggled to find resolutions to make their situations better. More often than not, they

believed having a positive resolution was out of their locus of control. High levels of negative

tension in the work environment may also lead to unwarranted stress within the environment.

Kyriacou (2001) suggested that the nature in which individuals experience tensions within the

work environment may be attributed to excessive demands on the job and/or individuals'

perceptions of themselves and their ability to handle stressors. The results from this study noted

these emotions from participants as they shared their stories regarding their lived experiences.

Yet, this study also found that not all tension was negative. In fact, there were some who

were able to see tension positively, filtering it through outside support networks. Collins (2002)

indicated that "support is one of the most important strategies involved in coping" (Collins,

2002, p. 1179). The participants who sought out mutual support groups found they were better

able to cope with tensions within the work place. For example, one of the participants reported

reminding herself that she could not view the tensions at work as personal attacks, but had to

view them as levels of frustration voiced by others because of district regulations. This

participant learned how to select her battles based on information shared with her from her

support network during her first year as a school psychologist. Another participant learned to see

the positives within the tensions based on lessons learned from her internship supervisor. These

mentoring roles allowed the participants to reflect on their experiences and the positions of other

stakeholders. By creating a level of visibility within her schools, as her internship supervisor encouraged her to do, one participant was able to subdue some of the negative tensions at her schools, transforming the perceptions of others so that she is viewed as an intricate part of her school-based teams.

This study also found that there were times when individuals were simply ambiguous or indifferent to the tensions around them. The tensions experienced were deemed as simply another component of the job. It appeared that, over time, the individuals who were indifferent to the tensions within their buildings became accustomed to the pressures. Specifically, individuals' perceptions of a situation and the context of the situation shape how individuals' react. For those school psychologists who believe that tensions are the norm, they seem to have normalized these lessons from veterans within the field or as a part of their on the job experience. Therefore, having prior knowledge of what to expect seemed to serve as a buffer to help these individuals maintain a neutral stance when experiencing tensions within their work environments.

The road less taken: Dealing with ethical dilemmas. Ethics is a crucial component in education. As Christie wrote (2005), "Building an ethics of care in education means building a capacity to face suffering and deal with difficult emotions without denying or rejecting them, and without rationalising them away" (Christie, 2005, p. 247). For the school psychologists who participated in the study, the issue of ethics had nothing to do with them *per se*. Instead, issues related to ethics arose for those individuals who believe they were caught in the crossfire— following ethical mandates while struggling to come into consensus with other educational stakeholders who had different perceptions as to the appropriate action.

The study's participants described their beliefs, values, and perceptions of their roles as school psychologists, and these were in close alignment with the NASP guidelines. As NASP guidelines mandate the conduct of school psychologists, expecting they behave themselves in a manner that is respectful of individuals, act as a professional at all times, exuding a level of honesty and integrity, and demonstrating a level of responsibility for all members within their school community (NASP, 2010). Each of the participants described following these standards to the best of their abilities.

Zey-Ferrell, Weaver and Ferrell (1979) found that many of the ethical dilemmas within groups arise when the perceptions of peers' behaviors towards an issue or decision conflicts with that of one's personal beliefs. This seems supported in the conflicts described by study participants. Some found themselves in contentious positions when they disagreed with the decisions of team members. Some described pressure to reconsider their interpretation of district criteria to find students eligible for special education services, as well as statements from their peers that were not in alignment with their own ethical standards. Some peers were able to rationalize their actions as appropriate, asking the school psychologist to make an exception because of some contextual pretense. This process was described by Seitz and O'Neill (1996) who found that the context of a situation determines the ethical decision making processes individuals undergo. In this study, the individuals who consciously chose to stand their ground faced negative consequences: they were spoken to harshly by team members and/or removed from their schools.

Because of the variability of participant's responses, there was some variation as to how individuals interpreted the meaning of ethics based on their own personal perceptions. Within this research study, there were some individuals who felt like they were not asked to engage in

any type of unethical behaviors at their schools. However, some are asked to overlook certain aspects of the special education eligibility process. Discord or dissonance was evident when individuals interpreted district criteria differently from the school psychologists. Points of dissonance included when there was a lack of resources on the part of the school and/or district, or pressure to find a child eligible for services even though they may not meet the criteria to do so. The central issues seemed to magnify because of the collaborative process of determining if a child should be found eligible for services. In fact, the ethical dilemma for one participant supported earlier research that suggests when individuals are unaware of the conversational dynamics in groups; these dynamics may positively or negatively impact the effectiveness of the collaborative process (Scribner, Sawyer, Watson, & Myers, 2007). Therefore, there are times when school psychologists may find themselves in precarious situations when they disagree with the criteria that govern eligibility. They may believe it would be unfair to penalize a student by withholding services when a student clearly has an educational need. Yet, as the regulations themselves note, this should be a team decision based on all of the data presented during the collaborative process. This study underscored the complexities of these group dynamics in a school setting.

Although not a common practice in many school districts, there are some localities that have centralized teams that determine if students are eligible for special education services. Often, these districts do not have the school based team present, leaving staff members including school psychologists feeling powerless and voiceless (Arches, 1991). One of the participants in this study had been employed in a district that used this model, and felt a sense of disempowerment, eventually leaving the district.

Implications for Educational Practice

The perceptions of the role(s) of school psychologists has undergone multiple changes over several decades due to social, political, and economic changes within education. The changes created and recreated the vision educational stakeholders have, not only the roles of school psychologists within their buildings, but also how they treat school psychologists. These perceptions can create tension between school psychologists and other educational stakeholders, and these tensions can positively and/or negatively impede individuals' interactions.

Many of the educational changes (both political and legislative) over the years have tried to improve students' outcomes, both academically and behaviorally. Because these changes were externally created and imposed, the changes generated an unwarranted sense of dissonance among educational stakeholders. It is during these times that some school psychologists find themselves grappling with who they are in the realm of education and what their roles and responsibilities should be.

This IPA study explored how socio-political-economic changes in education have impacted the perceived roles of school psychologists, considering the lived experiences of participants, their perceptions of and ability to handle tensions associated with change, the impact on their professional and personal ethics, and how these individuals made meaning of their experiences. Based on the findings and conclusions, the following implications are offered. The impact three distinct factions within K-20 education: graduate school program coordinators, K-12 faculty, and school psychologists themselves.

Implications for graduate school program coordinators. The findings were significant for graduate school program coordinators because they show a disconnect between the preparation of school psychologists within current graduate level programming conventions

and what school psychologists are realistically expected to do within the field. This study

revealed a lack of adequate preparation can become problematic, and has the potential to lead to

a sense of disappointment for individuals anticipate that their graduate trainings will be utilized

once they are integrated into the field. Furthermore, it showed that better communication

between individuals at the K-12 level and members in graduate level school psychology

programs is needed to. Stronger relationships and communication can ensure that school

psychology students receive the most up to date information, forming their understanding of

what their roles and responsibilities will be within the field, teaching coping strategies to help

them deal with tensions associated with the job. If these tensions are unresolved, it could create

a loss of self-identity for new school psychologists, which in turn may lead to early burn out,

impacting the profession as a whole.

With the new information garnered from this study, graduate school programs can

pinpoint places to bridge the gap between theory and practice. For example, graduate school

program coordinators should invite active school psychologists to serve as mentors or present

mini-lectures regarding what the special education process looks like in K-12 education in

practice, the duties of the school psychologists during this process, and how educational

stakeholders view the role of the school psychologists, acknowledging that these processes may

vary from school to school and case to case. By arming students with this information before the

step into schools, it can help them make more informed decisions on how to best work with

administrators, teachers, parents, and students.

Implications for K-12 faculty. The findings present significant opportunities for K-12

faculty as well. School psychologists work intensely with these individuals to meet the growing

demands of supporting children. Yet, with the ongoing pressures on both sides of the aisle to

produce students who will successfully pass end of the year examinations, teachers, administrators, and school psychologists find themselves in combative relationships. The conflicts center around whether or not the challenges experienced by some students are due to curriculum issues or an educational disability, or other factors outside the classroom. These struggles produce unwarranted tensions within an environment that is supposed to provide a safe haven for children. Therefore, two critical recommendations emerged from the study to help improve faculty perceptions of the roles of school psychologists. These components are improving the lines of communication and providing useful professional development training regarding special education policy and procedures.

The first step to improving the rift some school psychologists perceive within their buildings is improving the lines of communication. More times than not, the tensions experienced are based on philosophical differences during the eligibility determination process or outright frustration that students' needs are not being addressed. When multiple individuals are talking at the same time, it makes it difficult for anyone to hear what others are saying. Fostering stronger communication between stakeholders is one way to minimize these trends.

A positive way to improve the lines of communication is to give team members the space to acknowledge that it is okay to agree to disagree. This empowers others to voice their opinions, ensuring each person involved in the decision making process hears what is being said before making final decisions that impact students or team members. By creating a level of openness to share one's thoughts and ideas without reservation, it will further open the door to develop more trusting relationships among educational stakeholders.

Trust is another component needed to improve the lines of communication among team members, for when trust is broken it makes it harder to work as a group. By giving opportunities

to earn and build trust, educational stakeholders allow themselves to be vulnerable, sharing when they may not be knowledgeable about certain topics, but are willing to learn in order to improve the success rate of students. Trust takes time and commitment on both sides to develop. But if all parties are willing to do so, it has the potential to give school psychologists more opportunities to collaborate with faculty members, positively impact the perceptions of school faculty and staff, remove the perception that school psychologists are stumbling blocks guarding special education services.

In order to reassure faculty members that the school psychologist is there to be a supportive team member, the second recommendation is offering professional development (PD) training. The reality is that there are some school faculty members who are not readily trained on special education policy and procedures. To presume all team members have an even level of knowledge or comfort with the topic or expressing frustration when they do not advances unnecessary tensions in one's building(s) further breaking down the lines of communication.

Professional development training offers school psychologists the opportunity to bring faculty members into their world, sharing how students are identified for services. By engaging in knowledge sharing activities, faculty members can gain deeper understandings of why certain activities like collecting data with fidelity and integrity are critical components to identify students' strengths and weaknesses related to the curriculum in comparison to their performance on psychometric assessments. For many students, this data could prove crucial in helping school psychologists qualify students for special education services even when all of the cognitive and academic quantitative numbers would suggest otherwise.

A second reason why professional development training is recommended based on this study is that training opens the door for school psychologists to clarify their roles and

responsibilities in education in their own words. Since the roles of school psychologists are ascribed to them based on district expectations as well as school needs, sometimes the other skill sets school psychologists can offer goes unnoticed. By customizing professional development trainings based on the strengths of the school psychologist and the needs of staff members and school populations, school psychologists are able to 'showcase' their other skills. This can lead to a more cohesive perception of what school psychologists are there to do, reducing environmental tension.

A third reason why professional development training is recommended based on this study is that school psychologists are knowledgeable regarding federal, state, and district regulations. School psychologists have sat in on meetings or served in consultant roles to educate their stakeholder peers about processes or policies. By taking time to help educational stakeholders clearly understand these processes or policies, it is the hope that other educational stakeholders will be more familiar with the laws and will be able to facilitate eligibility meetings and/or serve in consultant roles. This too can also lead to a reduction in environmental tensions.

Finally, professional development training can prove fruitful for school psychologists as they will have more opportunities to address misperceptions regarding the special education process. Timing is always a grave concern for many school psychologists since many of them serve multiple schools with varying needs. It may prove challenging for many school psychologists to offer PD trainings on professional development days. However, one way to resolve scheduling challenges might be to leverage technology and secure permission from one's school administrator to host an asynchronous webinar on critical topics related to special education. Teachers and administrators alike would have the opportunity to note questions or concerns presented during the webinar, which in turn would serve as a point of conversation for

one-on-one consultation with faculty members or the even hosting a lunch group for staff

members on non-meeting days.

      Implications for school psychologists. Based on the information provided as a result of

this IPA study, school psychologists should begin to re-evaluate their roles within their schools

and determine what steps are necessary in order to make themselves more well-rounded as

school psychologists. Unfortunately for some school psychologists, the disconnection and

tension often experienced within their buildings is based on how individuals perceive students'

problems in relation to overall educational outcomes ascribed by district and state and federal

level mandates. Sometimes these mandates prove irrelevant to address how students learn.

      Therefore, school psychologists need to be fully aware of the resources available within

their school buildings. For example, school psychologists should ensure teachers provide

appropriate intervention strategies for students in need, that teachers have a clear understanding

of what documentation should be collected and how to collect this data. If the necessary

resources are not available, school psychologists should be willing to provide sample

intervention strategies for teachers, and, if time permits, tutor teachers on how to document and

collect data. It is the hope that by creating a more visible school psychologist outside of the

perceived roles of assessment evaluator and gatekeeper of special education, not only will others'

perceptions of the roles of school psychologists improve within their buildings but also improve

school psychologists' own perceptions of their roles as critical members in the wider field of

both general and special education.

Limitations of this Study

      Sample size is always of concern when conducting a qualitative study. Although the

researcher had more than the minimal three participants as recommended for IPA (Smith &

Osborn, 2007), there are potential concerns regarding the results as to whether they are transferable to the identity of other school psychologists. The researcher's stance is that qualitative work is not intended to be transferable or generalizable to other settings. That is not the intent of the approach. Instead, the purpose is to gain a deep understanding of the context and the issues, and this in and of itself has value (Creswell, 2012). The researcher believed that the richness of information shared is useful and contributes to the current body of literature while remaining true to the goals of IPA. To improve the transferability of the results, future research may use a range of approaches to see if the results are replicated with other participants.

A second possible limitation is the lack of gender parity within the study. Although the researcher attempted to recruit several male participants within the study, the singularity of male participants in this study reflects of the lack of active male school psychologists within the districts selected. It may also signal a lack of feedback from male participants. Unfortunately, this was beyond the control of the researcher. In order to determine if there are strong gender differences surrounding the central phenomena, future research should actively recruit more male school psychologists. Their voices should be heard as male school psychologists still make up an important portion of school psychologists in the field.

The final possible limitation would be the choice to quantify the years of service in participant selection, effectively pre-determining how social, political, and economical changes in education impact the perceived roles of school psychologists. The participants in this study had a range of experiences, and there were no marked differences in how school psychologists perceived their roles in education as well as how others perceived their roles in education based on years of service. Therefore, reducing the selection criteria from five to three years of completed service may be useful for further research, expanding the possible study population.

Recommendations for Further Research

The topic of how social, political, and economic changes in education impact the perceived roles of school psychologists is filled with rich opportunities for future exploration. Several branches of this line of inquiry have already been suggested, but the researcher makes the following recommendations:

1. Investigate the gap between what individuals learn during their graduate level training and internship experience in relation to what actually occurs in the field. Further exploration of this area could ensure that future school psychologists are readily prepared to meet the demands of practice within their schools more efficiently and effectively, while remaining true to their professional and personal ethics, values, and beliefs.

2. Explore gender differences within the topic, examining whether or not men view the central phenomena in the same manner as the one male participant within the study. Future research using IPA should be considered to illuminate the lived experiences and perceptions of their roles in education based on social, political, and economic changes. By incorporating the voices of more men adds a plethora of knowledge to understanding how males experience the central phenomena in comparison to women.

3. Conduct an IPA study examining how school psychologists' perceptions of their identities influence their stress level, related to burn out. Although many of school psychologists concluded they would stay in the discipline until retirement, their affect suggested high levels of indifference in their perceptions of their roles in education. Further exploration in this area may prove beneficial in providing school psychologists with support activities (i.e. through professional development training) that will help

them find balance in changing those things that are within their control and finding more

positive outcomes for those things that are out of their control.

4. Conduct studies exploring how parents and students perceive the roles of school

    psychologists. All of the respondents in this research study were unsure as to how these

    other educational stakeholders viewed their roles. Future explorations in this area may

    serve as a useful tool for school psychologists to have more direct interactions with

    families, outside of evaluating for special education services. Such research could also

    provide parents and students with a positive outlook on other roles school psychologists

    may offer within the school community.

Personal Reflection

A day of in the life of a school psychologist is filled with a world of wonderment. Some

days are better than others. Other days a school psychologist may be unaware if they are coming

or going as he is simply there to do a job and go home. As I consider my own journey as a

school psychologist, I have felt this way on many occasions throughout my career. There are

some days where I feel like I am actually being a contributing member to my school and other

days I feel like I am simply a psychometrist. There have been times in my life when I questioned

if I made a mistake in getting into the field. More times than not, the latter were fostered by my

own personal ethical dilemmas wherein I questioned if the decisions I made were really in the

best interest in children. Specifically, there were times when I questioned if I was doing right by

the children whom I served or were my decisions based on keeping the peace with parents,

teachers, and administrators. For me as a school psychologist, it has been a task juggling what is

ethically right even when others may be in disagreement with my decisions. This has led to

times of loneliness and uncertainty in whether or not I still had what it took to be a school psychologist and whether or not I was still useful to my schools.

As a school psychologist, I have years of educational and professional developmental training in performing roles outside of evaluating students for special education. I am able to provide counseling supports to students, create and monitor intervention plans with teachers, serve as a mediator between parents and teachers who may not agree on what is in the best interest of a child and so much more. Yet I feel like my other skills have been underutilized over the years as they often times do not yield immediate results for some educational stakeholders. It is during these times when I find myself caving in and evaluating students for special education services unnecessarily. I simply feel like the only role that I am able to perform consistently is that of being the gatekeeper of special education (Kuriloff, 1975; Yoshida, Maher, & Hawryluk, 1984).

When I initially started my quest on my research study, I needed something or someone to blame for the level of frustration I have felt over the years a school psychologist. It seemed no matter how many ways I tried to redefine myself within my schools it simply just wasn't enough. I thought I found a way to justify why I felt stagnant in the field in No Child Left Behind 2001. For some reason it seemed that I became a testing machine once this legislation took effect and no one wanted my services as a consultant or an intervention strategist as it simply was all about passing tests. I found myself an unhappy professional and it was due to NCLB or so I thought.

From this research study, evaluating my own perceptions and listening to those of fellow professionals, I found that NCLB is only a small part of the level of dissatisfaction I have felt for so long. Like many of my participants, I came to the realization that with all of the skill sets I have to offer my schools, I feel like my skills are being underutilized. I feel like everything that

was promised to me throughout my graduate training and internship experience was all for nothing. I too have played the social game and stood my ground in disagreement with team members over the years. Yet, that had nothing to do with NCLB. Instead it had everything to do with the undue pressures we all face as educators trying to do right by students on a poor person's budget.

Through the eyes of my participants I realized that as a professional I am not alone in this journey. Each of us has experienced the same joys and pains. What differentiates us all is how we perceive the problems and are ability to handle the tensions which either makes us or breaks our will to stay in the field.

Conclusions

Reflecting on the central phenomena, I believed that the results of this study were significant because they added a new dimension to the body of research literature on how the perceived roles of school psychologists are impacted by social, political, and economic changes in education. School psychologists are a group of educators in K-12 education who have had limited to no voice in documented research regarding how they perceive and make sense of these components associated with educational changes. This thesis provided an opportunity for readers to acquire an insider's view into the world of school psychologists and their perceptions of social, political, and economic changes in education as related to their roles and responsibilities. There has been little qualitative research and specifically little phenomenological and hermeneutic research like IPA to document the shared experiences of school psychologists and how they perceive their roles in education. This research illustrated the participants' experiences and its effect on how school psychologists perceive themselves in education and deal with tensions related to their professional and personal ethical mandates as

educators. As a result, this study contributed to the qualitative research on how school psychologists perceive their roles in education and how these individuals made sense of it in their own way.

The results of this study are only initial steps in understanding how social, political, and economic changes in education impede the roles of school psychologists based on their experiences from their perspectives. The research, in this final chapter, identified several potential areas for future research studies to be conducted including recruiting more male participants to see if the results gleaned from one male's perceptions of his roles in school psychology would replicate the results of the current study. As Reschly and Wilson (1995) indicated, the voices of males serving as practitioners in the field of school psychology has subsided as more men are going into teaching at the collegiate level while women are dominating the field as practitioners. With ongoing shifting in educational policies, the confusion still exists. However, with research, advocacy, and open communication, the perceptions of the roles and responsibilities of school psychologists related to educational stakeholders can further expand and develop, improving the cooperative partnerships within school communities. I hope this study will initiate serious conversation about the many functions school psychologists are able to offer their schools, beyond serving in the roles of tester and the gatekeeper of special education. I hope that honest and open communication will occur as to 'why' school psychologists are required to follow the law and 'how' these regulations may not fit nicely within the grand scheme of education. By increasing the conversation and learning to listen to what is said from all educational stakeholders, the level of confusion and tension that currently exists will gradually dissipate with time.

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Appendix A- 2010 National Association of School Psychology

Professional Standards

1. **Respect the dignity and rights of all persons:** School psychologists engage only in professional practices that maintain the dignity of all individuals. In their words and actions, school psychologists demonstrate respect for the autonomy of persons and their right to self-determination, respect for privacy, and a commitment to just and fair treatment of all persons.

2. **Professional competence and responsibility:** Beneficence, or responsible caring, means that the school psychologist acts to benefit others. To do this, school psychologists must practice within the boundaries of their competence, use scientific knowledge from psychology and education to help clients and others make informed choices, and accept responsibility for their work.

3. **Honesty and integrity in professional relationships:** To foster and maintain trust, school psychologists must be faithful to the truth and adhere to their professional promises. They are forthright about their qualifications, competencies, and roles; work in full cooperation with other professional disciplines to meet the needs of students and families; and avoid multiple relationships that diminish their professional effectiveness.

4. **Responsibility to schools, families, communities, the profession, and society:** School psychologists promote healthy school, family, and community environments. They maintain the public trust in school psychologists by respecting law and encouraging ethical conduct. School psychologists advance professional excellence by mentoring less experienced practitioners and contributing to the school psychology knowledge base.

Adopted from the National Association of School Psychology Professional Standards Retrieved

on 07/17/13 from http://www.nasponline.org/standards/2010standards.aspx.

Appendix B- Email Sent to Participants Requesting Participation

Dear Potential Participant:

My name is April Lisbon-Peoples and I am a doctoral candidate at Northeastern University in Boston, MA. I have worked in the field of school psychology for over 14 years in public education. I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my doctoral degree in Curriculum Leadership and I would like to invite you to participate. You are receiving this email because you are employed as a school psychologist in public education. Your email address was obtained from direct communication to you or from one of your colleagues.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to schedule a time that is mutually agreed upon and will occur either via telephone or video conference, whichever you prefer. In particular, you will be asked a series of open-ended questions regarding how recent social, political, and economic changes in education have impacted your perceived roles in education. This interview should last about 45-60. The session interview will be audio taped so that I can accurately reflect on what is discussed. The tapes will be reviewed by a secured web-based transcription service who will transcribe the information. I will analyze them.

You may feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. Although you probably will not benefit directly from participating in this study, I hope that others in education/field of school psychology in general will benefit from your answers. Your participation is confidential. The study information will be kept in a secure location. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings but your identity will be kept anonymous.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You do not have to be in this study if you choose not to participate. You may also quit being in the study at any time or decide not to answer any question you are not comfortable answering. To be able to take part in this study, you must be:

1. Over the age of 18.
2. Have a minimum of a Masters Degree.
3. Currently employed as a school psychologist in public education.
4. Have a minimum of five consecutive years in public education as a school psychologist.

If you are interested in participating or have any questions about the study, please e-mail April Lisbon-Peoples at lisbon-peoples.a@husky.neu.edu or call at (702) 324-4146.,

Sincerely,

April Lisbon-Peoples

Appendix C- IRB Approval from Northeastern University

Northeastern

NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION

Date: August 15, 2013   IRB #: CPS13-07-08

Principal Investigator(s):   Karen Reiss Medwed
                               April Lisbon-Peoples

Department: Doctor of Education
                               College of Professional Studies

Address: 20 Belvidere
                               Northeastern University

Title of Project: Voices in the Wind: How Social, Political, and Economic
                               Changes in Education Impact the Perceived Roles of
                               School Psychologists

Participating Sites: N/A

Human Subject Research Protection

DHHS Review Category: Expedited #6, #7

960 Renaissance Park
360 Huntington Avenue
Boston, MA 02115

Informed Consents: One (1) unsigned consent form

Monitoring Interval: 12 months

617.373.7570
f 617.373.4595
northeastern.edu/hsrp

APPROVAL EXPIRATION DATE: AUGUST 14, 2014

Investigator's Responsibilities:

1. The informed consent form bearing the IRB approval stamp must be used when recruiting participants into the study.
2. The investigator must notify IRB **immediately** of unexpected adverse reactions, or new information that may alter our perception of the benefit-risk ratio.
3. Study procedures and files are subject to audit any time.
4. Any modifications of the protocol or the informed consent as the study progresses must be reviewed and approved by this committee **prior to being instituted.**
5. Continuing Review Approval for the proposal should be requested at least one month prior to the expiration date above.
6. This approval applies to the protection of human subjects only. It does not apply to any other university approvals that may be necessary.

Coleen Pantalone, Ph.D., Vice Chair
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board

Nan C. Regina, Director
Human Subject Research Protection

Northeastern University FWA #4630

Appendix D- Informed Consent

<u>Northeastern University:</u> **Department of Education**

Name of Investigators: Karen Reiss Medwed, PhD, Principal Investigator, April Lisbon-Peoples, EdS, Student Investigator

Title of Project: Voices in the Wind: How Social, Political, and Economic Changes in Education Impact the Perceived Roles of School Psychologists

Research Project
We would like to invite you to take part in a research project. The purpose of this study is to explore how the roles and responsibilities of school psychologists have changed based on recent socio-political-economic changes in education and how these changes affect school psychologists' perceptions of their roles within special education. You must be at least 18 years old to be in this research project.

Potential Risks/Discomforts
This study will take place at a time convenient for you and will take about one hour. If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you a series of questions regarding your perceptions of your roles and responsibilities in special education.

The possible risks or discomforts of the study are minimal. You may feel a little hesitant in answering sensitive questions. Any information that is shared during the telephone and/or video conferencing will be immediately destroyed once the student investigator and Principal Investigator have fact checked the audio recordings with the transcribed results to ensure accuracy.

Benefits
There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in the study. However, the information learned may help increase knowledge and awareness about school psychologists' perceptions of their roles and responsibilities in special education as well as improve how school psychologists' services might be better utilized in schools beyond conducting assessments.

Confidentiality
Your part in this study will be handled in a confidential manner. Only the researchers will know that you participated in this study. Any reports or publications based on this research will use only group data and will not identify you or any individual as being of this project. The decision to participate in this research project is up to you.

Contacts
If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to call April Lisbon-Peoples at (702) 324-4146 or e-mail at lisbon-peoples.a@husky.neu.edu, the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact Dr. Karen Reiss Medwed at (617) 390-4072 or e-mail at k.reissmedwed@neu.edu, the Principal Investigator.

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University,

Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

You may keep this form for yourself.

Thank you.

April Lisbon-Peoples

_____

Consent to Participate

Appendix E- Primary Interview Questions

Interviewee Background

1. How long have you been a school psychologist?
2. Describe what made you interested in becoming a school psychologist.

Description of Service Delivery Practices

1. How many schools do you serve and what are the grade levels?
2. Which educational levels do you prefer and why?
3. Briefly describe what a typical work day consist of for you at a school.
4. How prepared are you to meet the demands of your school's (schools') needs?
   Follow up Question: (1) Do you believe that you have sufficient materials and professional support to do your job efficiently? Why or why not?
5. What barrier or barriers do you perceive affect your ability to conduct your job?

Experiences

1. Describe one of your best experiences as a school psychologist.
2. Describe one of your least favorite experiences as a school psychologist.

Ethics/Commitment

1. How would your administrator(s) describe your role/work ethics as a school psychologist?
   Follow up Question: How do they view your position in the scope of the school community?
2. How would teachers describe your role/work ethics as a school psychologist?
   Follow up Question: How do they view your position in the scope of the classroom setting?
3. How would parents describe your role/work ethics a school psychologist?
   Follow up Question: How do they view your position in the scope of parental support/engagement?
4. How would students describe your role/work ethics as a school psychologist?
   Follow up Question: How do they view your position in the scope of their educational performance?

Attrition

1. Describe a time, if any, you felt like leaving the field as a school psychologist.
   Follow up Question: What has sustained you in the field up until the present date?

Appendix F- Sherri's Monthly Logs

Instructional Support
Monthly Service Log Summary Sheet

Name: Sherri Pemberton   **Month:** September   **2012**

IF NOT ENTERING A NUMBER, LEAVE SPACE BLANK (NO ZEROS). Use another sheet if necessary. Submit completed form to---

ACTIVITY	SCHOOL: Elementary	SCHOOL: Elementary	SCHOOL: Middle	SCHOOL:	SCHOOL:
Total # of Students	17	24	14		
Child Study			5		
Eligibility Meetings					
Intervention Team					
IEP/504 Plan					
Causal Hearings					
Triennial Planning	13	19	9		
Consultations - Teacher	5	2			
Consultations - Outside Agency					
Observations	2	5			
Counseling					
Psy./Social (Initial)					
Psy./Social (re-evals)					
Psy. Interp. (Initial)					
CBA					
Parent Contacts - Home					
Parent Contacts - School					
Attendance Compliance Plans					
Attendance Coordination					
Court Intake					
Court Hearing					
Presentations					
CSA/Case Management					
FBA (Functional Behavior Assmt.)					
Crisis Counseling (# students)					

Instructional Support
Monthly Service Log Summary Sheet

Name: Sherri Pemberton **Month:** May 2013

IF NOT ENTERING A NUMBER, LEAVE SPACE BLANK (NO ZEROS). Use another sheet if necessary. Submit completed form to---

ACTIVITY	SCHOOL: Elementary	SCHOOL: Elementary	SCHOOL: Middle	SCHOOL:	SCHOOL:
Total # of Students	6	31	15		
Child Study	1	20	4		
Eligibility Meetings	4	7	4		
Intevention Team					
IEP/504 Plan					
Causal Hearings					
Triennial Planning			2		
Consultations - Teacher					
Consultations - Outside Agency					
Observations	1	2			
Counseling					
Psy./Social (Initial)	2	3	5		
Psy./Social (re-evals)					
Psy. Interp. (Initial)	3	3	3		
CBA					
Parent Contacts - Home					
Parent Contacts - School	5	20	10		
Attendance Compliance Plans					
Attendance Coordination					
Court Intake					
Court Hearing					
Presentations					
CSA/Case Management					
FBA (Functional Behavior Assmt.)					
Crisis Counseling (# students)					

Appendix G- Candace's Monthly Logs

Instructional Support
Monthly Service Log Summary Sheet

Name: Candace VanDiesel   **Month:** January   **2013**

IF NOT ENTERING A NUMBER, LEAVE SPACE BLANK (NO ZEROS). Use another sheet if necessary. Submit completed form to---

ACTIVITY	SCHOOL: Middle	SCHOOL: Elementary	SCHOOL: Elementary	SCHOOL:	SCHOOL:
Total # of Students	13	7	19		
Child Study			2		
Eligibility Meetings			1		
Intervention Team					
IEP/504 Plan					
Causal Hearings					
Triennial Planning					
Consultations - Teacher	5	2	14		
Consultations - Outside Agency	1				
Observations	4		3		
Counseling			5		
Psy./Social (Initial)					
Psy./Social (re-evals)					
Psy. Interp. (Initial)					
CBA					
Parent Contacts - Home					
Parent Contacts - School	4	2	6		
Attendance Compliance Plans					
Attendance Coordination					
Court Intake					
Court Hearing					
Presentations					
CSA/Case Management					
FBA (Functional Behavior Assmt.)					
Crisis Counseling (# students)					

Instructional Support
Monthly Service Log Summary Sheet

Name: ___Candace VanDiesel___ **Month:** May 2013

IF NOT ENTERING A NUMBER, LEAVE SPACE BLANK (NO ZEROS). Use another sheet if necessary. Submit completed form to ---.

ACTIVITY	SCHOOL: Middle	SCHOOL: Elementary	SCHOOL: Elementary	SCHOOL:	SCHOOL:
Total # of Students	12	10	15		
Child Study/"Eligibility Group"	3	4	5		
Eligibility Meetings	3	4	3		
Intervention Team	1				
IEP/504 Plan	2	1	1		
Causal Hearings					
Triennial Planning					
Consultations - Teacher	3	3	8		
Consultations - Outside Agency		1			
Observations	2		4	4	
Counseling					
Psy./Social (Initial)		3	1		
Psy./Social (re-evals)	3		1		
Psy. Interp. (Initial)	1	3	1		
CBA			3		
Parent Contacts - Home			4		
Parent Contacts - School	10	7	13		
Attendance Coordination					
Attendance Compliance Plans					
Court Intake					
Court Hearing					
Presentations					
CSA/Case Management					
FBA (Functional Behavior Assmt.)					
Crisis Counseling (# students)					
Other	13	6	14		

Appendix H- Tina's Weekly Log

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Direct Services					
Test Administration	2.0	1.0		1.0	
Classroom Observation	.5	.5	.5		
FBA-related activity					
Diagnostic Interviewing					
Curriculum Based Assessment				1.0	
Consultation- Parents	.25				
Consultation- Teachers	.5	1.0	.5	.5	1.0
Consultation-Off Site Service Providers					
Consultation--Team Meetings (RTI)	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	
Eligibility Meetings	1.0	1.0		1.0	1.0
Indirect Activity					
Report Writing	1.5	3.0	3.0	2.0	3.0
Protocol Scoring	.5	.5		.5	.5
Record Keeping-Logs	.25		.25		.25
PD (training, inservices)					
Research					
Staff Meetings					