

1985

## Parental perceptions of the availability and usefulness of nine school psychological roles

Lisa Ellen Ball

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PARENTAL PERCEPTIONS OF THE AVAILABILITY  
AND USEFULNESS OF NINE SCHOOL  
PSYCHOLOGICAL ROLES

An Abstract of a Thesis  
Submitted  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Specialist in Education

Lisa Ellen Ball  
University of Northern Iowa  
July 1985

This Study by: Lisa Ellen Ball

Entitled: PARENTAL PERCEPTIONS OF THE AVAILABILITY AND USEFULNESS  
OF NINE SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGICAL ROLES

has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the Degree of  
Specialist in Education

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## ABSTRACT

The present study surveyed parental perceptions of the role of the school psychologist. In particular, it sought to determine which roles were perceived as available, which roles were perceived as useful, and which populations of children parents perceived school psychologists as being most effective in helping. Ninety-five parents of elementary school age children from an Iowa community of 30,000 responded to a questionnaire developed for the study. Results were processed by the university computer. An item profile analysis which generated a frequency count and percentages for all items was conducted. Results indicated that parents tended to view school psychologists as being most effective in cases involving emotional/behavioral disorders. Individual counseling was perceived as the most available and useful role. Services which directly benefit children were valued more highly than indirect services such as research, educational programming, and prevention. The assessment role was seen as neither available nor useful, contrary to actual school psychological functioning. Finally, respondents expressed a desire for consultation with parents, though this role function was not perceived as readily available. The majority of parents reported an absence of contact with a school psychologist; thus, their perceptions were not reality-based. This investigation revealed a need to inform parents about the range of services available so as to improve the home-school relationship.

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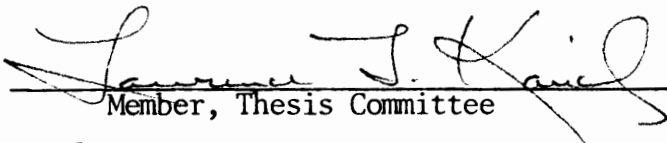
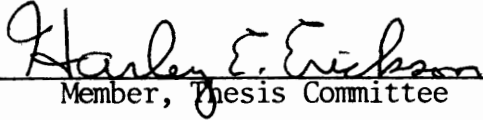
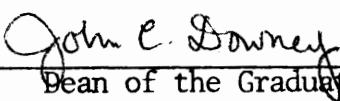
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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

Present-day school psychology can by no means be considered narrow in scope. Now, more than ever, external pressures and constraints have forced school psychology to examine critical new issues and questions. The impact of changing societal values and institutions, racial discrimination in a pluralistic society, economic considerations, litigation and legislation, and the age of accountability have all exerted an influence on the practice of school psychology in the 1980s (Ysseldyke, 1982).

School psychologists are not restricted to the traditional testing role, armed solely with their intelligence test kits. Job descriptions range from the school psychologist functioning as an educational diagnostician, to an educational consultant, to a counselor-therapist, programmer, researcher, and in-service provider (Winikur & Daniels, 1982). Rapid growth within the field of school psychology and the different certification and training requirements between states may well have contributed to confusion about the school psychologist's role (Styles, 1965).

The role and function of the school psychologist has been thoroughly discussed in the professional literature. Researchers have surveyed school psychologists' self-perceptions (Alevy, 1964; Farling & Hoedt, 1971; Roberts, 1970), perceptions of supervisors of psychological services (Kirschner, 1971; Lesiak & Lounsbury, 1977), perceptions of school principals and administrators (Kaplan, Clancy,

& Chrin, 1977; Lesiak & Lounsbury, 1977; Senft & Snider, 1980), and perceptions of school teachers (Ford & Migles, 1979; Gilmore & Chandy, 1973a; Medway, 1977; Roberts, 1970; Styles, 1965). However, an important consumer group of school psychological services has been almost totally neglected. This group is the parents of school age children.

With the advent of Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, came a right for parents to become actively involved in their children's educational programming. Parental involvement is guaranteed by law in two ways: (a) Parents must be notified of and agree to proposed changes in their child's educational programming, and (b) parents must be invited to staffings involving school personnel where placement and programming decisions are to be made (Hoff, Fenton, Yoshida, & Kaufman, 1978). School psychologists today have more requirements to have direct contact with parents than before the legislation of 1975. Thus, determining how the parent consumer group views school psychological services merits study.

Styles (1965) stated that historically the public has been unaware and/or misinformed about the nature of the school psychologist's training and function. Valett (1963) found that, "school psychologists, like other professionals, rarely fulfill all of their clients' expectations . . . at times such shattered expectations can hinder the desirable handling of a case" (p. 90). Perceptions, accurate or otherwise, can either encourage or discourage mutual confidence. In

particular, parents' assumptions about the role of the school psychologist deserve attention because of the potential influence these perceptions may have on the relationship between the parent and the school psychologist. Once again, Valett asserted that,

The school psychologist's role can and must be interpreted in many different ways, according to school policy and the special demands of his situation. What is of greater importance at this time, however, is a consideration of the psychologist's role as perceived by his clients, and what effect this may have on their subsequent relationships . . . All professional psychologists are well aware . . . of the importance of social expectations and the pressure to conform professionally and the necessity of coming to terms with them in some sort of compromise. (pp. 88-91)

Valett further suggested that the school psychologist clarify any misunderstandings that may exist pertaining to his role: "Since many psychological recommendations require the cooperative effort of school, home and community organizations, it is at this point that the psychologist's limitations . . . should be explained" (p. 91).

A lack of knowledge or confidence on the part of parents concerning the school psychologist may make his procedures seem incomprehensible or useless to the parents. Thus, it is important to build parental understanding about who the school psychologist is, as this may facilitate the establishment of a cooperative working relationship between these individuals whose primary concern is to provide the child with the most appropriate education possible.

#### Statement of the Problem

The purposes of the present study were twofold. First, it attempted to determine what parents of elementary school age children perceived to be the role and function of the school psychologist.

This may be considered a "role knowledge rating" and entails whether a particular role is available and performed, as viewed by parents.

Second, this study investigated the usefulness placed on the available school psychological services, as perceived by parents. Nine roles commonly cited in school psychology job descriptions provided the basis for the judgements the parents made. These roles were: counselor, consultant, diagnostician/assessor, liaison agent, researcher, intervention strategist, educational programmer, mental health hygienist, and disseminator of information.

The following questions were posed:

1. Which roles do parents perceive school psychologists fulfill in some capacity?
2. Which school psychological roles do parents perceive as most useful to their child and themselves? Which roles are perceived as least useful?
3. According to parents, which populations of children are school psychologists most and least effective in dealing with?

#### Limitations

This study was based on the results from questionnaires returned by parents from an Iowa community who voluntarily cooperated in the study. Generalizability to other populations is questionable.

#### Definition of Terms

For purposes of this study, the following definitions were forwarded:

Role. Certain expectations of behavior held by both onlookers and by the person occupying the role, with some additional expectation that the individual will exhibit some of his own idiosyncratic personality in his role behavior (Owens, 1981). Operationally defined as one of nine major areas of school psychological functioning: counselor, consultant, assessor/diagnostician, liaison agent, researcher, intervention strategist, educational programmer, mental health hygienist, and disseminator of information.

Role function. One of 25 specific school psychological services incorporated into the questionnaire developed for the present study.

Perceptions. How parents view school psychological services as expressed by their responses to the questionnaire.

Parents. Any adult, either a natural parent or legal guardian, who lives in a household with an elementary school age child.

Elementary school age children. Children in grades kindergarten through six during the 1983-84 academic year.

### Importance of the Study

The school psychologist's role often extends into the realm of public relations, particularly in his relationship with groups involved in, but external to, the educational framework (Gottsegen & Gottsegen, 1963). Parents constitute a major target group. Groups not directly involved in the educational process sometimes find it difficult to comprehend the necessity for actions taking place within the school and often have unrealistic expectations about what school personnel are able to accomplish. Gottsegen and Gottsegen (1963)



argued that the school psychologist can and should act as a spokesperson and representative of the school. They stated:

There is no better way for the community to become aware of what the psychologist is like, of how he functions, and of his global importance within the school setting [than to act as a spokesperson and representative of the school]. (p. 225)

A lack of understanding on the part of the general public, particularly parents, implies the need for public relations work. Psychologists must undertake a conscious effort to educate these groups about their role and function. School psychologists must inform parents how they could be of assistance in the development and education of children before parents will feel comfortable in requesting their assistance.

Determining the perceptions of parents regarding school psychological services is an essential ingredient in improving and expanding the cooperative relationship between these parties. It is crucial that parents understand the role of the school psychologist, as misinformation or a lack of awareness may impede the assessment process. Parents must be aware of the school psychologist's areas of expertise and his limitations. They must not expect more than the school psychologist can deliver. Only when the psychologist's role and function has been made clear can parents and psychologists work as a team in a cooperative decision-making relationship.

This study has further implications. There are a limited number of accepted techniques available to evaluate the effectiveness of school psychologists. Conti and Bardon (1974) contended that utilizing the consumers of psychological services (parents, teachers, administrators) as evaluators may result in a more consistent feedback

system. In Conti and Bardon's words: "The addition of consumer evaluation . . . holds promise for enriching knowledge of our efforts as well as providing a new dimension in the psychologist-consumer relationship" (p. 34).

Furthermore, there is often a lack of congruence between graduate training and the demands placed on school psychologists in actual practice. The results of this study may imply the need for a restructuring or a change of emphasis in some university preparation programs.

## CHAPTER II

### Review of Literature

#### Introduction

This chapter provides a review of the literature related to the present study. It is subdivided into five topics. The first topic discusses the historical influences in the development of present day school psychology. The second topic deals with currently advocated roles and emerging trends of the school psychologist as outlined by various professional organizations and national conferences. Thirdly, a review was made of research concerning other professions' perceptions of the school psychologist, including teachers, superintendents, school principals, supervisors of school psychological services, and school counselors. The fourth topic discusses parental perceptions of the school psychologist's role, ways for school psychologists to increase parental awareness and understanding, and why it is important that they do so. The last topic provides a brief overview of role theory as it pertains to the educational setting.

#### History of School Psychology as a Profession

Two major components of school psychology make its development and practice unique from other professional specialties. Its title is derived from two sources: psychology and education (Bardon, 1983). Thus, the history of school psychology has witnessed a merging of these two distinct yet related fields, which, in part, has led to great diversity in the school psychologist's role function.

The development of an individual intelligence test in 1905 by Alfred Binet and Henri Simon is commonly marked as the beginning of the individual testing movement which has so greatly influenced school psychology. The Binet-Simon Scale demonstrated that mental testing was possible and stimulated the development of many other tests, as well as the public's acceptance (Sattler, 1982). Bennett (1970) stated that, "Psychological testing is usually considered a fundamental aspect of all psychology, and it represents the earliest, and perhaps most enduring, aspect of school psychological functioning" (p. 166). This point will become especially evident in the discussion of professional perceptions of the school psychologist's role.

The development of special education ran parallel to the testing movement. In the early part of the twentieth century, schools were gradually becoming child-centered. This encouraged an awareness of individual differences and a focus on the individual learner, the foundation of special education. State money was appropriated to special needs children only if a licensed psychologist performed an evaluation of their abilities prior to placement. This requirement stimulated the growth of the profession called school psychology (Cutts, 1955).

Another major influence was the emergence of the mental hygiene movement in 1908. This triggered a growing recognition of the significance of the childhood period in the development of behavior disorders. Schools began to see children in a broader, more complex light. Children's affective, emotional, and social lives were

receiving increased attention and preventive mental health practices were on the rise in many schools.

More recently, two types of court cases have greatly affected both legislation at the state and federal level and the practice of school psychology. These were right-to-education cases and placement-bias cases. Right-to-education decisions such as Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (1971) and Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia (1971) served as catalysts for similar cases in almost every state. School psychologists were required to provide comprehensive psychoeducational evaluations to handicapped children, resulting in expanded assessment services and an increase in the number of school psychologists (Farling & Hoedt, 1971). Placement-bias cases such as Larry P. v. Riles (1972) and Diana v. State Board of Education (1970) focused on both the overrepresentation of minority students in special classes and the bias of evaluative instruments. Abramowitz (1981) indicated that these cases, "illustrate the parental dissatisfaction with the tasks school psychologists were required to perform" (p. 124). Reschley (1983) stated that the use of IQ tests was only a part of the problem in these cases: "The overall influence of litigation, further reinforced by recent legislation, affects the entire process, content, and outcome of psychoeducational assessment" (p. 81).

Haring (1982) stated that, "court rulings in favor of handicapped citizens have, in turn, prompted legislators to press for new laws that spell out the responsibilities of public schools" (p. 11).

Certainly the most far-reaching and hotly debated piece of legislation is Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975). The stated purpose of this law follows:

It is the purpose of this Act to assure that all handicapped children have available to them, within the time periods specified, a free, appropriate public education which emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs. (PL 94-142, 1975, Sec. 3,c)

Tindall (1979) asserted that, "the implementation of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 appears to have placed increased emphasis on psychoeducational assessment activities with children exhibiting learning or adjustment problems in schools . . . The current emphasis is on multifactored assessment" (p. 19). PL 94-142 requires school psychologists to be knowledgeable about a wider range of populations, including preschool children, secondary and postsecondary persons, and the multiply handicapped student.

In sum, the historical development of school psychology has led to a diverse role description. From the beginning, school psychologists have worked within many theoretical frameworks and have provided a variety of services, both direct and indirect. The complexity and diversity in school psychological functioning has created a need to establish a common purpose for all school psychologists.

#### The Role of the School Psychologist as Outlined by Various Professional Conferences and Organizations

A number of conferences have been convened for the purpose of discussing and making recommendations regarding the school psychologist's role and function. This section will discuss two of

these: the Thayer Conference and the Spring Hill Symposium. Current role functions as advocated by the State of Iowa Department of Public Instruction and the Iowa Area Education Agency participating in this study will be touched upon, as well.

The Thayer Conference. In August of 1954 the Thayer Conference, organized at the request of Division 16 of the American Psychological Association, was convened for the purpose of establishing a definite statement in regard to the roles and training of school psychologists (Cutts, 1955). At this time, school psychology was still in its infancy, with only 20 states having certification requirements, and the profession was experiencing many growing pains. Ysseldyke (1982) stated that, "at the time of the Thayer Conference 'school psychologist' was such a nebulous term that no accurate estimate of the number of people practicing in that capacity could be made" (p. 547).

A major outcome of the Conference was an agreed-upon definition of school psychologists and their function:

School psychologists are psychologists with training and experience in education who use their specialized knowledge of assessment, learning, and interpersonal relationships to assist school personnel to enrich the experience and growth of all children and to recognize and deal with exceptional children. (Cutts, 1955, p. 74)

Tindall (1979) summarized the five major recommendations concerning the roles of school psychologists that came about as a result of the Thayer Conference:

1. Assisting and interpreting the intellectual, social, and emotional development of children.

2. Helping to identify exceptional children and collaborate with other professionals in developing individual education programs.
3. Developing ways to facilitate the learning and adjustment of all children.
4. Encouraging and initiating research and interpreting research findings applicable to the solution of school problems.
5. Diagnosing personal problems and recommending remedial programs. (pp. 14-15)

As Tindall commented, these recommendations do not differ greatly from those responsibilities cited in many current school psychologist's job descriptions, even though they were written 30 years ago.

Spring Hill Symposium. The Spring Hill Symposium on the Future of Psychology in the Schools, held in June of 1980, was the first comprehensive examination of school psychology by school psychologists since the 1954 Thayer Conference (Ysseldyke, 1982). Like the Thayer Conference, Spring Hill focused extensively on the role and function of school psychologists. Five themes arose in the paper presentations and group discussions (Peterson, 1981):

1. What can school psychologists do to serve children and the school process as effectively as possible?
2. What are the conditions under which effective services might be provided?
3. How can environmental conditions for the provision of effective services be brought about?
4. What is the appropriate entry level for the practice of professional psychology?
5. We must all work together to help children learn better. (pp. 307-309)

The participants strongly opposed the abandonment of tests, as they were considered important assessment instruments, albeit with serious limitations. In addition to the utilization of traditional assessment techniques they advocated that other more useful services be developed, such as in-service training, principles of behavioral analysis, and



program development and evaluation. The participants agreed that it is crucial that school psychologists know how to provide the services, implying the need for an evaluation and redesigning of many university training programs. Peterson stated, "collectively school psychology may broaden and diversify, but everybody cannot do everything" (p. 308). Reminiscent of the Thayer Conference, the issue of how to serve the largest number of students possible while maintaining effective services for individuals in view of current economic and social considerations was a greatly debated topic.

Iowa definitions of the school psychologist. School psychology in Iowa is closely related to the Department of Public Instruction, Special Education Division. The state department gives partial reimbursement for students in special education programs only when a certified school psychologist has provided a full psychoeducational assessment of the child and she/he has been found to qualify for special programming. A 1977 publication of the Department of Public Instruction's Special Education Division provides the following brief definition of the school psychologist:

[The] school psychologist shall provide psychological services for the identification, planning, referral and counseling of children requiring special education programs and services, and consultation with school personnel and parents. (Rules of Special Education, 1977, 12.26[3])

This definition focuses on the school psychologist providing direct services to the individual child and significant others in that child's environment.

The Iowa area education agencies employ school psychologists to help in the identification of special needs children, to aid in their educational programming, and to provide consultation to both the school and family. The area education agency serving the community utilized in the present study advocates the school psychologist's role as incorporating the following functions:

1. Promote a positive learning climate for individuals and groups within the school, home, and community.
2. Consult with school personnel and parents and make recommendations to develop, implement, and maintain appropriate procedures for individuals and/or groups of students.
3. Participate through an interdisciplinary decision-making process in the determination of eligibility and appropriate assignment of students for special education programs . . . assist in reevaluation.
4. . . . Provide individual and/or group education and education-related counseling when appropriate to psychologist's training and experience and the individual's needs.
5. Provide assistance to pupils, parents, and school personnel in establishing effective procedures for behavior management.
6. Provide comprehensive psychological evaluations to determine the academic, social, and emotional needs of individual pupils.
7. Develop and maintain contact with community agencies and specialists in order that community resources and services of the school psychologist would complement one another.

8. Assist in the evaluation of programs . . . and make recommendations for improvement.
9. Serve in a consultive capacity to school personnel regarding psychological implications of school policies, practices, and curriculum.
10. Promote public understanding and support of the school psychological services.
11. Provide in-service education for school personnel and members of the community.
12. Promote, conduct, assist, and implement applied research.
13. Evaluate and report . . . the nature and extent of present psychological services and indications of present and future needs for such services.
14. Provide professional supervision for interns and practicum students in school psychology.
15. Assist in development and implementation of any new special education programs, or experimental pilot projects.
16. Advocate the protection of human and civil rights of all pupils.

Collectively, these role descriptions place primary importance, either implicitly or explicitly, on the child-as-client model, with the school psychologist acting as a child advocate by providing direct services to special needs students. The Thayer Conference, Spring Hill Symposium, Iowa Department of Public Instruction, and Iowa area education agencies regard assessment and individualized educational

programming as basic roles school psychologists are expected to perform. These professional meetings and organizations exert a strong influence on actual school psychological role functioning.

#### Professional Perceptions of the School Psychologist's Role

The following section is a summary of surveys which have been conducted to explore school psychologists and their role as perceived by school psychologists themselves, teachers, principals, supervisors of school psychological services, and school counselors.

School psychologists' self-perceptions. Keenan's (1964) study attempted to identify the duties of school psychologists in the Massachusetts public school system to aid in the adoption of certification requirements. Results revealed that the school psychologists worked most in the areas of consultation, diagnosis, and administrative activities. Professional growth and research were perceived to be important functions, however little time was spent in these activities. The most frequently performed function was not the administration of individual intelligence tests but rather teacher consultation.

Farling and Hoedt (1971) found somewhat different results. This nationwide survey sought to determine the then present status of school psychology. Results indicated that most of the respondents described their role as that of tester, report writer, and participant in parent-school conferences. Counseling, consultation, behavioral management, and program development and evaluation were reported as

the most desirable functions; however, these roles were not the most frequently performed functions as in Keenan's investigation.

A 1979 national survey by Ramage utilized questions from the Farling and Hoedt study and added additional questions in the areas of professional development and ethics. The researchers found that responses were fairly consistent between actual and desired roles of the school psychologist. That is, the respondents felt the roles they ideally would like to perform were very close to the roles they actually fulfilled. However, respondents indicated that they would like to spend less time in psychoeducational evaluations and do more group counseling, research, and in-service training. The authors concluded that the present and ideal roles in this study appear to be more similar than in the Farling and Hoedt (1971) survey. Respondents reported more congruence in the areas of assessment and report writing than in the earlier investigation. In addition, the 1979 study reported more of a preference for involvement in research and in-service training than the 1971 study. Overall, the school psychologists appeared to be more satisfied with their roles in the 1979 study.

A national sample of 758 practicing school psychologists responded to a questionnaire in an attempt to examine the problems of role functions and diversity of training (Meacham & Peckhman, 1978). Results revealed a consistent discrepancy between university preparation and the practice of specific skills. Priorities on the job appeared different from those in training. Four skill areas were reported to

have less emphasis in practice than in training: personality testing, intelligence testing, developing research, and carrying out research. The other 21 skills each received more emphasis in actual practice than in training programs. While significantly less attention was paid to assessment in practice than in training, this role ranked first in importance under both conditions. Under preferred job conditions the psychologists placed consultation as their top priority, with assessment taking the second position, followed by change agent, interpretation, remediation, and research. The authors concluded that consultation is becoming a more central role for the school psychologist. However, they predicted that assessment will continue to maintain high priority in the school psychologist's repertoire of functions.

A national survey of 335 randomly selected school psychologists (45% of the original sample) was conducted to determine the amount of time spent on each of 13 possible psychological activities (Lacayo, Sherwood, & Morris, 1981). Data were computed for the entire survey as a whole to provide a profile of the "average" school psychologist. The 13 activities and the percentage of time dedicated to each is presented in the following:

	<u>% of Time</u>
Psychoeducational assessment	21
Review/Write up cases	18
Lunch/Personal	10

	<u>% of Time</u>
Teacher Consultation	9
Staff Consultation	9
Staff/Case Meetings	8
Parent Consultation	7
Driving Time	6
Individual Counseling	5
Attending Workshops	2
Giving Workshops	2
Research/Program Evaluation	2
Group Counseling	1

An analysis of the results indicates that psychoeducational assessment took up most of the typical school psychologist's time, about one fifth of the day. When combined with the time spent reviewing cases and writing reports, assessment took up nearly 40% of the day.

Winikur and Daniels (1982) investigated the amount of time school psychologists in New Jersey spent performing various professional role functions in an attempt to quantify any developmental trends in school psychologists' functioning. In particular, the authors were interested in determining the impact of team functioning upon the school psychologist's role, as New Jersey has had a long-employed team decision-making model. Survey data were collected over three time periods, the academic years of 1973-74, 1974-75, and 1977-78. Chi-square analysis indicated that the amount of time spent on various

roles did not differ significantly over the three survey years. During all three time periods the school psychologist was viewed primarily in the role of psychodiagnostician. The authors concluded that it appeared that the diagnostic activities that are closely related to team functioning are firmly grounded in the New Jersey school system.

Although there are discrepancies across the studies, some common threads can be found. Psychodiagnostic activities seem to occupy most of the school psychologist's time; however, this was not usually viewed as the most desirable function. School psychologists preferred to increase their involvement in consultation and other indirect services, but time constraints seemed to be the major prohibiting factor. Especially since the passage of PL 94-142, most school psychologists reported spending much more time evaluating children for possible special education services (Ysseldyke, 1982, p. 549).

Teachers' perceptions of the school psychologist. Styles (1965) surveyed 459 teachers in four Ohio school districts concerning their perceptions of the school psychologist's role. There was a strong tendency for them to perceive psychologists as being most useful with cases of severe emotional disorders, and least useful with speech and physically handicapped students. These perceptions once again emphasize the clinical orientation of school psychology. Among teachers who had professional contact with the school psychologist, written reports and individual conferences with the teacher were rated as the areas which provided the teachers with the most useful



information. Specific test results, such as IQ, were perceived as the most useful function by only 14% of the teachers.

Roberts' (1970) study solicited the perceptions of 100 school psychologists and 296 teachers with five or more years of teaching experience from the state of Iowa. Within each group a comparison of the actual and desired roles of the school psychologist were analyzed by t-tests for related differences. Comparisons between groups were made via the chi-square analysis. General results indicated that both teachers and psychologists perceived much diversity in functions performed by the school psychologist.

1. Both teachers and school psychologists rated the role of psychometrist as very important; teachers believed more emphasis should be placed on this role than did school psychologists.

2. School psychologists perceived the role of consultant was more important in actual practice than did teachers. However, both groups desired that more emphasis be placed on consultation.

3. Both groups agreed that little emphasis is placed on the role of mental hygienist, and both groups also desired that this role be given greater attention.

4. Both teachers and school psychologists concurred that the role of therapist is assigned little importance in actual practice. Teachers desired that more emphasis be placed on this role, while school psychologists, as a group, did not demonstrate this tendency.

5. School psychologists felt that they were more effective with academic problems, class placement problems, and classroom management

problems than did teachers in both actual and desired situations. It appears that school psychologists strongly identify themselves in an educational role, while teachers identify them with clinical, social, and medical models.

A random sample of 37 school psychologists and 186 teachers of educable mentally retarded children from Ohio responded to a questionnaire concerning factors relating to teacher attitudes toward psychological reports and recommendations (Lucas & Jones, 1970). Data revealed that teachers who had above median contact with the school psychologist rated them as significantly more helpful than low-psychologist contact teachers. Many significant differences appeared when the teachers' and psychologists' rankings of the importance of 11 school psychological roles were compared by means of a t-test. Several teachers stated that they were unable to rank the present role because they did not know what it was. Basically the teachers perceived the school psychologist's role as involving test administration, interpretation, and making recommendations in remediation and behavioral management cases. The school psychologist ranked testing and recommending remediation needs significantly higher than did teachers. While teachers requested more emphasis on psychotherapy, school psychologists reported this to be the lowest priority role. This concurs with Roberts' (1970) results that teachers identify school psychologists more with clinical and medical models, while school psychologists identify themselves more with the educational model. The authors argued that, "more communication with

teachers regarding the psychologist's role within his district is needed" (p. 130). They concluded that a lack of professional contact with the school psychologist seems to be a major cause of disappointment with psychological services.

Gilmore and Chandy (1973a) solicited information from 33 teachers from two southern school districts in individual structured interviews. The teachers were classified on two variables, degree of contact with the school psychologist, and years of teaching experience. Results revealed that the teachers, as a whole, desired psychologists to increase their involvement in the areas of emotional and behavioral problems, retardation, and low achievement, rather than with gifted education and out-of-school problems. They perceived the school psychologist's primary role to be that of tester, with classroom observations occurring less frequently than any other diagnostic activity. The teachers indicated that the psychologist usually gives verbal or written recommendations and seldom is directly involved with treatment and follow-up. Concerning the skills of the school psychologist, teachers perceived children's emotional and cognitive development to be their primary areas of expertise, though school psychologists were viewed as being less knowledgeable than teachers in the areas of teaching in general and classroom management. A comparison by years of teaching experience found that veteran teachers expected more than just recommendations and credited the psychologist with actually conducting the treatment more often than did less experienced teachers. In contrast to Roberts (1970), confidence

placed in the school psychological services showed somewhat of a decline once the services had been rendered to the teachers. The teachers expressed a wish for, "consistent and long-term involvement of psychological personnel" (p. 144). They also desired more direct contact between the school psychologist and teachers and children, especially in terms of planning and carrying out a treatment program.

An expansion of the previously cited survey (Gilmore & Chandy, 1973b) attempted to make the data more generalizable, to investigate the effects of the socioeconomic status (SES) of the school, and to compare the perceptions of teachers, principals, and psychologists. A total sample of 211 educators (192 teachers, 7 principals, and 12 psychologists) completed a group-administered questionnaire. Significant and relevant results, analyzed by means of a t-test, included the following:

1. Teachers of all experience levels perceived the school psychologist as most useful in cases of behavior problems and agreed that there is little involvement at the direct treatment level.
2. Teaching experience in and of itself did not appear to be the critical variable in the results; rather, prior contact with the school psychologist was found to be the significant factor affecting teacher perceptions.
3. Teachers with high psychologist contact viewed him in a more restrictive role, that of tester, compared to low psychologist contact teachers who perceived him as a psychoeducational consultant.

4. Teachers with no psychologist contact viewed him as a greater help to students than did teachers with moderate and high psychologist contact.

5. The school's SES was a critical variable. Educators at low SES schools perceived the school psychologist as possessing fewer skills and performing a more restricted role than teachers at high SES schools.

6. Principals and psychologists attributed greater utility and skills to the psychologist than did teachers.

The authors recommended that . . . "psychologists, teachers, and principals would benefit from short-term joint training programs designed to communicate both complimentary and contradictory needs, expectations, and skills" (p. 401).

Medway (1977) sought to examine teachers' knowledge of school psychologists' involvement in seven professional activities. Fifteen school psychologist interns were required to record the amount of time spent in various professional activities, and this information was compared with teachers' responses to a questionnaire assessing their perceptions of the school psychologist's role. Two groups of fifteen teachers took part in this study, those who had five or more professional contacts with the psychologist and those that had between one and three encounters over the course of seven months. Means were computed on teachers' and psychologists' rank scores for each activity. The psychologists' rankings revealed that most time was spent in test administration and report writing, and the least

time was spent in diagnostic interviewing and teacher consultation. Conversely, teachers perceived teacher consultation, diagnostic interviewing, and student counseling as occurring most often, and testing, report writing, and principal consultation as occurring least often. The F-test was nonsignificant when the perceptual accuracy of high and low psychologist contact teachers was compared. Neither group had an accurate perception of the school psychologist's responsibilities. It appears that roles typically performed in the presence of teachers affected teachers' perceptions more than those roles of which teachers had limited contact or information about.

Kahl and Fine (1978) obtained different results. In their survey 54 teachers from a midwestern metropolitan school district were grouped on two dimensions, years of teaching experience, and professional contact with the school psychologist. In addition, the eight participating schools were grouped according to SES. Data obtained from the completed questionnaires revealed that as years of teaching experience increased, teachers viewed the school psychologist as less knowledgeable about children's abilities and felt the psychologist was providing an adequate amount of services. Also, as years of teaching experience increased so did the teachers' view of the psychologist in a consulting role, as a liaison agent, and as being helpful with underachievers and learning disabled students. As the degree of teacher contact with the psychologist increased the teachers perceived the psychologist as more helpful in cases involving underachievers, learning disabled, emotionally disturbed, and

home-problem children. No significant differences were obtained on the school SES variable; however, the lower SES schools reported more contact with the school psychologist.

In a survey of 150 teachers from a Delaware school district, Ford and Migles (1979) found that the group, as a whole, placed the most value on the school psychologist providing screening services that would facilitate children's placement into appropriate special classes. The roles of diagnostician, counselor, and consultant to teacher were also rated as important. In general, the teachers considered direct and remedial services that did not infringe on their turf as more important than indirect services and preventive measures. Teachers' perceptions did not significantly differ on the basis of grade level taught, teacher gender, or amount of teaching experience.

Dean's (1980) survey compared experienced and inexperienced elementary teachers' perceptions of the school psychologist. Thirty-two experienced teachers were matched with the same number of third year college students in training. In general, the experienced teacher and the novice agreed about the psychologist's importance in the school, ranking him third behind the principal and school nurse. They also tended to agree about the types of referrals appropriate for psychological services. On the other hand, though both groups viewed the psychologist as an appropriate referral agent, experienced teachers had lower expectations about the services provided than did the novice teachers, who often had idealistic and unrealistic expectations.

The research on teacher perceptions indicates an overwhelming trend to perceive the school psychologist primarily in the role of psychoeducational diagnostician. Teachers tend to view the psychologist as most knowledgeable and effective with emotionally/behaviorally disordered students, reflecting the clinical orientation of school psychology. An increased desire for school psychologists to function in a consultive capacity was expressed.

It appears that teachers who have high school psychologist contact tend to see them in a more restrictive role than teachers with little or no contact. Teaching experience itself does not seem to be the critical variable. Though it may appear that teachers' perceptions become pessimistic over time, it may be that they become more reality-based. Increased contact seems to encourage more realistic perceptions about what school psychologists can accomplish by making the constraints they must work within more apparent to teachers.

Professionals' comparative perceptions. A 1965 investigation by Baker (1965) analyzed questionnaires returned by 333 administrators, teachers, and counselors from a large Ohio school district. The teachers indicated that they generally felt comfortable working with the school psychologist, but were dissatisfied with the time lapse between referral and service. Administrators and counselors felt the time lapse was appropriate. As compared to inexperienced teachers (four or fewer years), the experienced teachers expressed greater unhappiness with the school psychologist's functioning. These results are very similar to those obtained by Gilmore and Chandy (1973a) and



Dean (1980) in that confidence in the psychological services showed somewhat of a decrease once the services had been rendered.

Administrators and counselors, as a whole, placed greater confidence in the psychologist and perceived him as being more useful than did teachers. Overall, Baker stated that "the largest single weakness brought out in this investigation was the relatively poor communication existing between the classroom teacher and the school psychologist" (p. 41).

The purpose of a survey by Kirschner (1971) was to identify the interests of school psychology supervisors in regard to the services provided by the school psychologist. A 13-item questionnaire was distributed to 130 pupil personnel directors representing the largest metropolitan areas in the United States. One hundred fourteen were completed and returned. Results indicated that respondents preferred the school psychologist with advanced training who functioned primarily as a generalist, as opposed to a specialist. Remedial instruction was the only role that the respondents rated as something they did not want the school psychologist to do.

In Hoelzer's (1972) thesis, 122 school counselors from Ohio were surveyed regarding their perceptions and knowledge of school psychologists and psychological services, especially with regard to the unique and overlapping roles of these two professions. Results showed that, in general, the school counselors were satisfied with the school psychologists' qualifications and usefulness in carrying out their services. They perceived them to be most qualified in

providing traditional school psychological services, such as administering and interpreting tests, preparing psychological reports, and contributing to teacher education. Two of the eighteen functions listed were not given any credit as the school psychologist's function: assisting teachers in securing and interpreting information about students and counseling students with discipline problems. The respondents claimed these functions as uniquely their own as school counselors. Five functions were designated by over 75% of the counselors as duties to be performed by both school counselors and school psychologists: (a) making referrals to community agencies for therapy and other reasons; (b) making recommendations to teachers for dealing more effectively with children; (c) conducting case conferences concerning individual students; (d) cooperating in the identification of retarded students, gifted students, and students with personal-social adjustment problems; and (e) collaborating in the educational planning for these students. This study showed that the roles of the school counselor and school psychologist were perceived by counselors as both overlapping and distinct. This implies possible conflict between these two groups over functions and collaborative efforts.

Smith (1972) sought to determine whether the school psychologist's role was perceived differently by elementary principals and school psychologists. A sample of 140 principals and 123 school psychologists from the state of Iowa responded to a questionnaire seeking to discover the opinions of both groups regarding who is and who should be responsible for selected tasks, the effectiveness of

school psychological services, and several aspects of authority. T-test results indicated significant differences between the two groups on seven of the nine factors on school psychologists' effectiveness: ability to communicate ideas, appropriateness of recommendations, flexibility in adapting to situations, sensitivity to teacher needs, understanding of the children seen, helpfulness during parent conferences, and adequacy of follow-up. The school psychologists rated their services higher than the principals on all of these except adequacy of follow-up, which principals rated significantly higher than school psychologists. Principals gave their highest ranking on knowledge of the field, and there was no significant difference between the groups on this dimension. There was a general lack of agreement between the psychologist and principal with regard to who is and who should be responsible for certain duties. On four of the five items dealing with who is responsible for tasks there were significant differences between the groups. These items were: making the final decision as to whether or not parents should be requested to take their child for a psychiatric evaluation, making decisions about placement in special classes, setting up conferences, and implementing recommendations. Principals appeared to want school psychologists to take more responsibility for routine tasks and placed the responsibility for larger decisions upon themselves. Both groups indicated that psychologists were no more likely to be involved in conflict than were other special service personnel, so it appears that

both principals and psychologists have learned to tolerate some degree of role ambiguity.

In Waters' (1973) study questionnaires were distributed by 12 Master's-level school psychologists to school personnel from a Houston school system with whom they had been working for six months. Questionnaires were returned by 16 teachers, 30 counselors, and 27 principals and assistant principals. The survey required respondents to provide information about the frequencies with which the school psychologist engaged in consulting and child study activities, the school personnel's evaluation of nine school psychological skills, and their role preferences for the school psychologist. Results indicated that school psychologists placed more emphasis on consultation than individual child study, and the school personnel preferred these consulting activities over psychometric activities. Although school psychologists were perceived as cooperative, knowledgeable, and skillful, they were also viewed as relatively undependable and inefficient. It was concluded that the consultant model was a viable one, as in this study it was more highly valued than the traditional psychometric model.

An investigation by Lesiak and Lounsbury (1977) compared the perceptions of 98 elementary school principals from Michigan to those of 114 supervisors of psychological services utilized in Kirschner's (1971) study. The principals completed a questionnaire utilized by Kirschner to determine the perceptions of psychological service supervisors. Results revealed significant differences between the two

groups on six items. Supervisors placed more value on preventive work, teacher in-service for learning/social problems, and applied research than did principals. Principals attached greater importance to special education screening, counseling parents of problem children, and acting as a liaison between the school and community than did supervisors. Both groups rated individual diagnostic activities and teacher consultation as the highest priority roles, while neither group considered remedial instruction as a role of the psychologist. It appears that principals value those services that directly benefit the individual student and teacher, while supervisors tended to place importance on those roles that benefit the system as a whole. Both principals and supervisors preferred a school psychologist who is a generalist, as opposed to a specialist proficient in only a few areas.

Kaplan, Clancy, and Chrin (1977) found that school superintendents' priority roles for the school psychologist were similar to the results of Lesiak and Lounsbury (1977) in the study of principals and supervisors. A sample of 418 Ohio school superintendents completed a 21-item survey concerning school psychologist role functions. They were asked to rate the 21 services as either high-, medium-, or low-priority services for their district. Average ratings for each role were computed. Data analysis indicated that the roles most important to the superintendents as a group were those related to traditional child study and diagnosis, in-service work with teachers, and counseling of parents and children. The superintendents placed highest priority on the school psychologist

providing psychological services to elementary school children, with more limited support in providing service to secondary and preschool children.

An investigation by Senft and Snider (1980) found that principals most valued the traditional services provided by school psychologists, such as psychological testing, personality and emotional assessment, consultation and screening for special education services. The one-page questionnaire returned by 297 elementary school principals nationwide also indicated that they desired school psychologists to increase the time devoted to individual and group counseling, preventive mental health and in-service training. These results were considered to be fairly consistent with those of Kaplan et al. (1977).

A statewide survey in Ohio (Garguilo, 1981) examined the perceived role and function of the school psychologist as viewed by administrators, teachers, and school psychologists. The respondents to the 17-item questionnaire were 191 teachers, 90 administrators, and 51 school psychologists selected on a random basis. Findings suggested that both school psychologists and teachers viewed the school psychologist as most frequently utilized for individual child study and consultation, whereas principals most often utilized the psychologist for child study only. Teachers and principals believed that conferences with individual teachers, written evaluations and test results were the most helpful services provided by the school psychologist. School psychologists, however, perceived a more generalized role as beneficial, incorporating aspects of consultation,

assessment, and behavioral programming. All three groups concurred that school psychologists rarely conduct actual treatment programs, although they sometimes aid teachers in program implementation. Principals, teachers, and school psychologists generally agreed that psychologists are most effective in dealing with learning disabled children. School psychologists also perceived that they were effective in dealing with mentally retarded children. Principals and teachers felt the psychologist was least effective in dealing with multiply handicapped, hearing impaired, and gifted children, with principals placing the socially withdrawn child on the list as well. The psychologists felt they were least helpful with all handicapping conditions other than mental retardation and learning disabilities. The authors assert that these findings imply the need for a restructuring of some school psychological education and training programs, providing potential school psychologists experience with all disability groups.

Even though it is difficult to generalize from the research, it is evident that there is much role confusion surrounding the school psychologist. Teachers and school psychologists differ in their perceptions of the actual and desired roles of the psychologist. Both groups tend to view the school psychologist's major responsibility as that of psychodiagnostician, and both report varying degrees of dissatisfaction with the time devoted to this role, although its importance is realized. Teachers tended to perceive the psychologist as more involved in consultation and other roles that teachers

observed directly than in roles with which they had limited experience and knowledge. However, both teachers and psychologists desired that more emphasis be placed on the school psychologist acting as a consultant. There was a general trend for teachers' satisfaction, confidence, and expectations to decline somewhat once the school psychologist provided services. In addition, teachers tended to view the school psychologist as most knowledgeable and useful in cases involving emotional problems, identifying school psychologists most strongly with clinical, medical, and social models, whereas the psychologists tended to identify themselves with the educational model.

Principals, administrators, and supervisors tended to value school psychologists who operate as generalists possessing skills in a variety of areas, rather than specialists proficient in only a few functions. They appeared to place the highest priority on the school psychologist's role in individual child study and consultation, though they agreed with teachers and psychologists that more time should be spent in the consulting role. Like teachers, principals seemed to value those roles that directly benefit the individual child, whereas supervisors desired school psychologists to become more involved in roles that result in schoolwide benefits. School counselors perceived their role as both unique and overlapping that of the school psychologist, with psychodiagnostics perceived as the psychologist's primary role. This lack of clear role diffusion could result in inter-professional conflict.



### Parental Perceptions of the School Psychologist

The perceptions of parents regarding the school psychologist's role has been virtually untouched in the professional literature. However, a few studies have been conducted that relate their perceptions to some extent.

Graber (1975) attempted to determine parents', teachers', administrators', and psychologists' expectations and goals for school psychological services. Data were obtained via a 75-item questionnaire from school psychologists throughout California and a random sampling of the other three groups from a San Francisco school district. Results indicated somewhat of a schism between parents and teachers on one hand, and school psychologists and administrators on the other. Parents and teachers tended to value the psychologist working directly with students in diagnosis and placement, while psychologists and administrators tended to place more emphasis on serving students in a broader, indirect role, incorporating such functions as consultation, in-service training, parent education, curriculum development, and preventive mental hygiene. Parents and teachers appeared to want quick solutions which could be easily assessed. The top ten rank-ordered items were analyzed and it was found that all four groups placed early identification of students who appear to need assistance with learning and psychological problems as the first priority role of the school psychologist. All four groups also included helping the regular classroom teacher cope with children with learning problems in the top ten priorities.

Three groups, excluding the psychologist, placed early identification of children with emotional problems as the second priority role of the school psychologist.

Dembinski and Mauser (1977) sought to provide parents of learning disabled children with the opportunity to evaluate the diagnostic and counseling process they received from three groups of professionals, physicians, educators, and psychologists. Questionnaires were distributed by state and local affiliates of the Association of Children with Learning Disabilities. A total of 234 parents completed and returned the survey. The following recommendations were made to the psychologists by at least 50% of the parents:

1. Use terminology we can understand.
2. Give us materials to read.
3. Require both parents to discuss their concerns with you.
4. Give us copies of reports.
5. Tell us how to discipline our child.
6. Tell us what other children might think about our handicapped child.
7. Tell us what to do when our child throws a tantrum.
8. Tell us our child's IQ.
9. Tell us how to explain sex and drugs to our child.

It appears that the parents in this survey tended to view the psychologist primarily in the role of educator, rather than counselor or consultant.

Holloway (1977) surveyed 94 parents of retarded children from a Pennsylvania county following diagnostic feedback sessions to determine how they rated the services of the school psychologist. He found that generally the school psychologists were rated high, especially on items related to the conduct of the conferences. However, items pertaining to the usefulness of the information they received were rated relatively lower. There was an education difference, with college educated mothers rating the psychologist significantly lower than those with a high school education. It was apparent that the higher the frequency of contact with the school psychologist, the more favorable the impression the parents had of the psychologist. In addition, a significant positive correlation was established between the parents' ratings of the school psychologist and their children's educational program.

The purpose of a study by Tidwell and Wetter (1978) was to determine the expectations, concerns, and suggestions parents had regarding psychoeducational evaluations. Forty-four parents of children receiving outpatient services at the Los Angeles Children's Clinic completed a 17-item questionnaire following summary conferences in which evaluation results were presented to the children's parents. In general, the perceptions of parents were positive regarding the usefulness of the reports. They viewed the reports as especially useful to themselves, inasmuch as they were provided with ideas, information, and techniques that would help them deal with their children's problems on their own. The evaluation itself was also

valued by the majority of parents because it diagnosed their child's problem. The authors concluded that these results indicate that parents are ready and willing to be change-agents and to be actively involved in the process of remediation with their children.

A few broad conclusions may be made from this limited number of studies. Parents feel the services of the school psychologist are useful, especially those that involve direct diagnosis and intervention with individual children. They seem to value the psychologist acting as a consultant and educator, rather than counselor. Parents generally perceive the actual and desired roles of the school psychologist similarly to the perceptions of teachers.

What are the reasons for the limited research with parents? A perceived lack of importance may be one. But with the increase in parental involvement with the school psychologist their perceptions are now more important than ever. Gilmore (1974) asserts that parental contact is often necessary for effective diagnosis and intervention. Sadly, though, this consumer group has been grossly neglected. Sepez (1972) stated:

The specialty within the field of psychology most crucial in the role of community contact is school psychology. It is the one area of psychology most visible and most accessible to the public. It is also the one specialty in the field most influenced by general public opinion and demand. School psychological services can be introduced, expanded, or eliminated rather readily through the ground swell of local community opinion. (p. 371)

He continued by stating that because of school psychology's visibility, the image it projects often influences the public's attitude toward all aspects of psychology. Sepez advocates contact with community

groups, such as the PTA, in an effort to educate the public about available school psychological services, as well as to project its image. Gilmore (1974) agreed by suggesting that school psychologists establish a consultation contract with parents which defines the psychologist's role and the type of involvement psychologists can offer. He argued that school psychologists must advertise to parents the range of services available and the way in which parents can initiate an appointment. Perceptions, whether accurate or not, can either encourage or discourage mutual confidence. As Styles (1965) wrote, "school psychologists . . . rarely fulfill all of their client's expectations . . . at times such shattered expectations can hinder the desirable handling of a case" (p. 90). Lolli (1980) asserted that, "the fostering of a strong basis of parental support is perhaps the single most effective means of increasing the effectiveness of the psychologist" (p. 73).

### Conclusion

An overall trend exists in the professional literature on perceptions of the school psychologist's role. That is, that perceptions vary by definition of who is the primary client. If the child is perceived as the client, then those services that tend to directly benefit the child will be valued: psychoeducational assessment and counseling. If the teacher is viewed as the school psychologist's primary client, then functions which assist the teacher in dealing more effectively with children will be valued: consultation, teacher education, and intervention programs. If the principal and/or

superintendent is seen as the client, services that directly benefit the school and the district, respectively, will be valued: research, prevention, education. Finally, if the parent is perceived as the primary client of the school psychologist, then services that benefit the parent will be valued: parent education, behavior management training, promoting public awareness. Though this is a general trend, time and administrative constraints serve to limit the roles school psychologists are able to perform. Since contacts with the school psychologist seem to affect perceptions, how the client is defined by the psychologist may be affecting the research.

It seems clear that even though the school psychologist's role has become broader and more diversified in recent years, many school personnel remain somewhat unaware and misinformed about the range of services available (Lolli, 1980). Although research on parental perceptions is limited, it is also evident that this consumer group is relatively unknowledgeable about the school psychologist's role. Lolli (1980) argued that, "since the general role of the psychologist is that of providing services, it would seem appropriate to seek information from recipients of such services" (p. 74). Thus, it is the purpose of this study to determine how parents of elementary school age children perceive the role of the school psychologist.

#### Parental Perceptions and Role Theory

The school psychologist functions within a complex organizational setting: the school. Owens (1970, 1981) stated that a complex organization has two components, the formal structure and the informal

structure. The "fabric of roles" constitutes its formal structure. These roles are predetermined constants concerning how an individual should function within the organization. A school psychologist's job description is an example of a formal structure. However, a school psychologist is more than what is outlined in the job description. She/he brings a variety of unique personality traits and social needs to the organization. Thus, Owens defined the informal structure as the collection of unique human factors and argued that, "this requires interaction between people, not just interaction between roles" (1970, p. 50).

Halpin and Croft (1963) were the first ones to apply the concept of organizational climate to education. Organizational climate is experienced by people in the organization. Thus, they reasoned, the perceptions of these people are important factors to consider. Owens stated that, "though one may argue that perceptions themselves are not objective reflections of 'reality' but may be influenced by subjective factors, the point is that whatever people in the organization perceive as their experience is the reality to be described" (1980, p. 196).

In the present investigation, conceptually, parents' formal role expectations of the school psychologist were assessed. However, as Owens pointed out, the institutional and personal dimensions of a role are interdependent in practice. Thus, parental expectations concerning the school psychologist's formal role can be expected to be influenced by personal characteristics of the psychologist and parent. This study did not attempt to separate these two dimensions.

## CHAPTER III

### Methodology

The steps followed in investigating the role of the school psychologist as perceived by parents of elementary school age children were: defining the population, selecting the sample, developing the questionnaire, mailing the questionnaire, tabulating data, and analyzing the returned questionnaires.

#### Population

The study was conducted in an Iowa community of 30,000 citizens. The nine elementary schools in the district all had access to school psychological services. The population was defined as the parents of elementary school age children kindergarten through sixth grade who attended school in the district during the 1983-84 academic year.

#### Sample

Potential respondents were randomly selected from a master list of 1,539 parents of elementary school age children in the district. Each parent was assigned a number and a table of random numbers was utilized to select the sample of 200. The sample represents approximately 13% of the total population.

#### Questionnaire Development

A preliminary questionnaire was developed with the aid of the reviewed literature and current Iowa school psychology job descriptions. A pilot study was conducted in August, 1984, using a randomly selected sample of 10 parents. Modifications were made and the instrument was



revised taking suggestions from the parents and a number of university professors into account.

The final questionnaire (see Appendix A) consisted of the following four sections:

1. Parental perceptions of the actual role functions performed by the school psychologist (Section I).

2. Parental rankings of the usefulness of various school psychological role functions (Section II).

3. Parental rankings of the school psychologist's effectiveness in dealing with eight populations of children (Section III).

4. Background information (Section IV).

In Section I, parents were instructed to indicate which of 25 specific role functions they perceive the school psychologist fulfills in some capacity. Section II presented the same list of 25 role functions and asked parents to rank the top ten in terms of usefulness to their child and themselves. The 25 role functions utilized in the present study were obtained through the literature survey and represented nine major areas of school psychological functioning:

(a) counseling, (b) consultation, (c) diagnosis/assessment, (d) remedial planning/programming, (e) liaison agent, (f) intervention, (g) mental hygiene/prevention, (h) dissemination of information, and (i) research.

Section III requested parents to rank order the school psychologist's effectiveness in serving eight populations of children. These eight groups were: (a) mentally retarded, (b) physically handicapped, (c) speech impaired, (d) sensory impaired, (e) emotionally/

behaviorally disordered, (f) talented and gifted, (g) learning disabled, and (h) children in the regular classroom not receiving special services.

Section IV asked for demographic information that could be related to parental perceptions of the school psychologist's role, including the number of contacts with the school psychologist, how information regarding the school psychologist has been acquired, and whether the name of the school psychologist is known.

#### Mailing of the Questionnaires

Questionnaires with cover letters (see Appendix B) were mailed on October 15, 1984. Three days after the mailing, all potential respondents were contacted by telephone to solicit participation and to more fully explain the purpose of the study. The researcher made it clear that participation was strictly voluntary. The deadline for the return of questionnaires was November 2, 1984. Ninety-five usable questionnaires were returned for a 48% response rate, 6% of the total population. Nine questionnaires were discarded due to incomplete data.

#### Statistical Analysis

The questionnaire responses were transferred to 10-column NCS Answer Sheets and processed by the university computer with the Statistical Processing for the Social Sciences package (SPSS). The data were computed for the group as a whole. Individual respondents remained anonymous. An item profile analysis which generated a

frequency count and percentages of responses for all questions was conducted. Group responses were organized into table form.

## CHAPTER IV

## Results

Responses to the questionnaire concerning the role of the school psychologist were organized into table form. First, a number of background variables were analyzed to determine any biasing characteristics of the sample which may have influenced the obtained results. Next, the responses to Sections I and II of the questionnaire were analyzed to determine whether there was agreement between school psychologists' available roles and valued roles, as perceived by parents. Finally, school psychologists' effectiveness in working with particular populations of children was analyzed.

Background Characteristics of the Sample

Respondents were asked to report their relationship to the elementary school age child in question, the number of contacts they had with the school psychologist, whether their child had ever been referred to the psychologist, whether the school psychologist's name is known, and where most information regarding the school psychologist had been obtained.

The data showed that there were twice as many female respondents as males. Mothers comprised 69% of the sample, while fathers made up 31% of the total.

An overwhelming majority of the parents (96%) stated that their children had not been referred for school psychological services during the previous 3 years. Only 4% of the parents reported that their children had undergone a psychological evaluation at school; however,

this percentage is roughly equivalent to the percentage of children referred for school psychological services in the population as a whole. Thus, the sample appears generally representative of the larger population in this respect.

The data indicated that the school psychologist was not widely recognized by the parents. Roughly one half of the respondents knew the name of the psychologist at their children's school (46% knew it, while 54% did not).

Sixty-three percent of the respondents revealed that they never had contact with the school psychologist. Approximately 18% reported 1 contact, 15% had 2 to 5 contacts, 1% had 5 to 10 contacts, while 3% had more than 10 contacts with the school psychologist.

When asked to cite the source of their information regarding the school psychologist, 42% of the parents stated that they did not possess any information at all. Roughly 18% said they gained most of their knowledge from actual contact with the school psychologist, while 6% gained their information from books, 19% through other school personnel, and 15% said their children were their major information source.

Overall it appears that although only a small percentage of parents (4%) had contact with the psychologist via a formal referral, approximately 37% reported contact in some form, while approximately one half of the parents appeared at least somewhat familiar with this individual and the role she/he plays in the schools.

### Perceived Availability of School Psychological Services

Section I of the questionnaire requested that parents mark all role functions from a list of 25 that they believed the school psychologist at their child's school fulfilled in some capacity. This is the "role knowledge rating" and entails whether a particular role function is available and performed, as viewed by parents. The results were analyzed for the group as a whole (see Appendix C). If 60% or more of the respondents marked a particular role function it was considered to be available and performed. If 40% or less marked a role function, it was considered to be relatively unavailable. The range in between (from 41% to 59%) was considered the moderate or borderline availability range.

Eight services were perceived by parents to be available and performed in some capacity by the school psychologist. They were:

1. Counsels students regarding their emotional development (65%).
2. Counsels students regarding their social development (64%).
3. Helps teachers to work more effectively with children (61%).
4. Observes individual children in the classroom (61%).
5. Follows up on the progress of each child served (61%).
6. Shares information from assessments of children with school personnel (70%).
7. Shares information from assessments of children with the parents (66%).
8. Writes reports on individual children that are served (64%).

Thirteen functions were considered to be relatively unavailable and not performed by the school psychologist, as perceived by parents.

These roles were:

1. Conducts psychotherapy with individual students in the school (26%).
2. Conducts in-service training workshops for teachers (32%).
3. Advises principals regarding classroom disciplinary procedures (36%).
4. Conducts workshops for parents to help them to deal more effectively with children (28%).
5. Gives individual intelligence tests to children (34%).
6. Gives individual achievement tests to children (24%).
7. Helps plan and evaluate school curricula (17%).
8. Develops remedial education programs for special needs students (32%).
9. Serves as a liaison between the school and community services (30%).
10. Advocates the protection of human and civil rights of all students (39%).
11. Promotes public understanding of the school psychological services (36%).
12. Develops mental hygiene among students through preventive educational programs (23%).
13. Designs, conducts, and evaluates applied research in the educational setting (27%).

Four functions fell into the borderline range. These were neither readily performed nor generally ignored, as perceived by the group as a whole. They were:

1. Advises teachers regarding classroom disciplinary measures (44%).
2. Provides personality assessments of children (48%).
3. Develops behavioral change programs to be implemented by teachers (46%).
4. Develops behavioral change programs to be implemented by parents (41%).

#### Perceived Usefulness of School Psychological Services

Section II of the questionnaire requested that parents rank the top ten role functions in term of usefulness to their child and themselves. Total responses for each service were organized in table form (see Appendix D). Criteria utilized to judge usefulness was as follows: If 40-59% of the parents placed a function somewhere in the top ten rankings, it was considered somewhat useful, if 60-70% placed it in the top ten it was considered useful, and if more than 70% placed the role function in the top ten, it was considered to be very useful.

The following functions were perceived by parents as very useful:

1. Counsels students regarding their emotional development (81%).
2. Helps teachers to work more effectively with children (81%).
3. Shares information from assessments of children with the parents (77%).



Three school psychological services were perceived as useful by the total group:

1. Counsels students regarding their social development (68%).
2. Conducts workshops for parents to help them to deal more effectively with children (70%).
3. Follows up on the progress of each child served (65%).

Five role functions were perceived to be somewhat useful from the viewpoint of parents:

1. Observes individual children in the classroom (54%).
2. Conducts in-service training workshops for teachers (40%).
3. Develops behavioral change programs to be implemented by parents (44%).
4. Develops behavioral change programs to be implemented by teachers (45%).
5. Shares information from assessments of children with school personnel (52%).

The following functions were considered not useful. Fewer than 40% of the respondents ranked these roles in the top ten with regard to usefulness. Although some respondents may have felt very positively about particular services, the total group rankings were negative in terms of perceived usefulness.

1. Conducts psychotherapy with individual students in the school (24%).
2. Advises principals regarding classroom disciplinary procedures (16%).

3. Advises teachers regarding classroom disciplinary procedures (35%).
4. Provides personality assessments of children (37%).
5. Gives individual intelligence tests to children (17%).
6. Gives individual achievement tests to children (16%).
7. Helps plan and evaluate school curricula (17%).
8. Develops remedial education programs for special needs students (28%).
9. Serves as a liaison between the school and community services (15%).
10. Advocates the protection of human and civil rights of all students (12%).
11. Promotes public understanding of the school psychological services (33%).
12. Develops mental hygiene among students through preventive educational programs (28%).
13. Writes reports on individual children that are served (34%).
14. Designs, conducts, and evaluates applied research in the educational setting (13%).

Comparison of Perceived Availability and Usefulness by Role

Sections I and II of the questionnaire were compared to determine whether any discrepancies existed between the roles parents perceived as available and those they perceived as useful. Ideally it would be hoped that no discrepancies existed, as this would indicate that the

roles perceived as available were also the ones that were highly valued by parents. Results are presented in table form for each role representing one of nine major areas of school psychological functioning.

Counseling was perceived as an available and useful role of the school psychologist, with the exception of conducting psychotherapy. It appears that parents do not feel school psychologists should provide in-depth therapy to elementary school children. Rather, counseling children through normal developmental stages was a highly valued role function (see Table 1).

Table 1

Availability and Usefulness of the Counselor Role

Role	Available <sup>a</sup>	Usefulness		
		Top five	Top ten	Not ranked
1. Re. emotional development	65	68	81	19
2. Re. social development	64	54	68	32
3. Conducts psychotherapy	26	20	24	76

Note: Numbers refer to percentage of total sample (N = 95). All figures were rounded to the nearest whole number.

<sup>a</sup>Percentage of respondents who perceived the role function as available and performed by the school psychologist.

As shown in Table 2, the consultant role produced somewhat discrepant results. Helping teachers to deal more effectively with children was the only item in the consultant cluster that was perceived as available and performed by the school psychologist. The other items were seen as relatively unavailable. Assisting teachers with classroom discipline fell in the borderline availability range.

In terms of usefulness, items #4 and #8 were perceived as very useful. However, though conducting workshops for parents was highly valued, it received the lowest availability rating. Conducting in-service workshops for teachers was seen as somewhat useful, while assisting principals with classroom discipline received very low usefulness rankings (see Table 2).

In general, the assessment/diagnosis role was not highly rated, as shown in Table 3. Parents perceived conducting classroom observations as the only readily available role function, and as a somewhat useful function of the school psychologist. Conducting personality assessments was seen as moderately available, but was not seen as useful. Administering intelligence and achievement tests was not seen as either available or useful. This conflicts with the literature, which suggests that psychoeducational assessment takes up a major portion of the school psychologist's day.

Parents did not see the school psychologist as an educational programmer, nor did they perceive this role as useful. This is shown in Table 4.

Table 2

Availability and Usefulness of the Consultant Role

Role	Available <sup>a</sup>	Usefulness		
		Top five	Top ten	Not ranked
4. Helps teachers	68	61	81	19
5. In-service for teachers	32	17	40	60
6. Classroom discipline- principals	36	7	16	84
7. Classroom discipline-teachers	44	14	35	65
8. Workshops for parents	28	35	70	30

Note: Numbers refer to percentage of total sample (N = 95). All figures were rounded to the nearest whole number.

<sup>a</sup>Percentage of respondents who perceived the role function as available and performed by the school psychologist.

As shown in Table 5, the only item in the liaison role cluster that parents perceived as being fulfilled in some capacity was following up on the progress of each child served. This also was the only item that was highly valued. All other role functions received very low availability and usefulness ratings.

Table 3

Availability and Usefulness of the Assessor Role

Role	Available <sup>a</sup>	Usefulness		
		Top five	Top ten	Not ranked
9. Personality assessments	48	21	37	63
10. Intelligence tests	34	12	17	83
11. Achievement tests	24	6	16	84
12. Classroom observations	61	26	54	46

Note: Numbers refer to percentage of total sample (N = 95). All figures were rounded to the nearest whole number.

<sup>a</sup>Percentage of respondents who perceived the role function as available and performed by the school psychologist.

The intervention role was viewed as moderately available and somewhat useful (see Table 6). There was no difference in perceived availability and usefulness between behavioral change programs to be implemented by teachers versus programs implemented by parents.

As shown in Table 7, the mental hygienist role was not perceived as available or useful. Over three-fourths of the respondents did not think this role was performed, while an equal percentage did not place the role in the top ten rankings for usefulness.

Table 4

Availability and Usefulness of the Educational Programmer Role

Role	Available <sup>a</sup>	Usefulness		
		Top five	Top ten	Not ranked
13. School curricula	17	5	17	83
14. Remedial education	32	10	28	72

Note: Numbers refer to percentage of total sample (N = 95). All figures were rounded to the nearest whole number.

<sup>a</sup>Percentage of respondents who perceived the role function as available and performed by the school psychologist.

The school psychologist acting as a disseminator of information was perceived as a readily available role (see Table 8). In terms of usefulness, sharing information from assessments of children with the parents was an extremely valued role function. Sharing information with school personnel was given a somewhat useful rating, while report writing was not perceived as a useful function.

Parents did not see the school psychologist as a researcher, nor did they perceive this role as useful. This is shown in Table 9.

Table 5

Availability and Usefulness of the Liaison Agent Role

Role	Available <sup>a</sup>	Usefulness		
		Top five	Top ten	Not ranked
15. Serves as liaison	30	3	15	85
16. Follows up	61	21	65	35
17. Protects rights	39	3	12	88
18. Promotes understanding	36	7	33	67

Note: Numbers refer to percentage of total sample (N = 95). All figures were rounded to the nearest whole number.

<sup>a</sup>Percentage of respondents who perceived the role function as available and performed by the school psychologist.

Effectiveness with Particular Populations

Parents were requested to rank the school psychologist's effectiveness in working with eight populations of children. These rankings were computed for the group as a whole and cumulative frequency percentages were analyzed (see Appendix E). The first place ranking, signifying the population in which parents perceived school psychologists were most effective, had the greatest skew towards the high rankings, whereas the eighth (last) place ranking had the greatest



Table 6

Availability and Usefulness of the Intervention Strategist Role

Role	Available <sup>a</sup>	Usefulness		
		Top five	Top ten	Not ranked
19. Implemented by teachers	46	19	45	55
20. Implemented by parents	41	20	44	56

Note: Numbers refer to percentage of total sample (N = 95). All figures were rounded to the nearest whole number.

<sup>a</sup>Percentage of respondents who perceived the role function as available and performed by the school psychologist.

skew towards the low rankings, in terms of frequency percentages. The other rankings were determined by interpolating this midrange.

Sixty-four percent of the respondents felt that school psychologists were most effective in dealing with behaviorally disordered/emotionally disturbed children, ranking this population first by a wide margin. This was followed by learning disabled, mentally disabled, talented and gifted, physically handicapped, speech impaired, and sensory impaired. Parents perceived school psychologists to be least effective in dealing with children in the regular classroom not receiving special services. Thirty-seven

percent of the parents placed this population in eighth place in terms of school psychologists' effectiveness.

Table 7

Availability and Usefulness of the Mental Hygienist Role

Role	Available <sup>a</sup>	Usefulness		
		Top five	Top ten	Not ranked
21. Preventive programs	23	16	28	72

Note: Numbers refer to percentage of total sample (N = 95). All figures were rounded to the nearest whole number.

<sup>a</sup>Percentage of respondents who perceived the role function as available and performed by the school psychologist.

Table 8

Availability and Usefulness of the Disseminator Role

Role	Available <sup>a</sup>	Usefulness		
		Top five	Top ten	Not ranked
22. Shares info. with school	70	19	52	48
23. Shares info. with parents	66	27	77	23
24. Writes reports	64	4	34	66

Note: Numbers refer to percentage of total sample (N = 95). All figures were rounded to the nearest whole number.

<sup>a</sup>Percentage of respondents who perceived the role function as available and performed by the school psychologist.

Table 9

Availability and Usefulness of the Researcher Role

Role	Available <sup>a</sup>	Usefulness		
		Top five	Top ten	Not ranked
25. Applied research	27	4	13	87

Note: Numbers refer to percentage of total sample (N = 95). All figures were rounded to the nearest whole number.

<sup>a</sup>Percentage of respondents who perceived the role function as available and performed by the school psychologist.

## CHAPTER V

## Discussion, Implications, and Summary

A summary of findings is presented in this chapter and the implications are discussed. Parents of elementary school age children responded to a questionnaire concerning perceived availability and usefulness of school psychological services. The following problematic questions were addressed:

1. Which roles do parents feel school psychologists fulfill in some capacity?
2. Which school psychological roles do parents perceive as most useful to their child and themselves? Which roles are perceived as least useful?
3. According to parents, with which populations of children are school psychologists most and least effective in helping?

Discussion

Counseling, except for its psychotherapy aspects, was seen by parents as the most readily available and useful function of school psychologists. Only one quarter of the respondents believed psychotherapy was an available service and the same proportion perceived this item as useful, which can be considered an accurate perception of actual school psychological functioning. Of the published research investigating time spent on various functions, not one listed psychotherapy as a role performed by school psychologists. Just one study of perceptions (Lucas & Jones, 1970) rated psychotherapy as a valued function.

Parents strongly identified school psychologists with clinical, social, and medical models rather than educational models. They perceived school psychologists as most effective with behaviorally disordered/emotionally disturbed children and least effective with children in the regular classroom. Perhaps it is the word itself, "psychologist," that leads the public to view disturbed individuals as the population school psychologists most usually deal with. In any case, it appears that parents tended to perceive counseling activities as occurring more frequently than in actual practice. School psychologists generally report that they are not as involved in counseling as they would like to be (Farling & Hoedt, 1971; Ramage, 1979).

The data suggest possible role confusion between the school psychologist and the school counselor, an observation also made by Hoeszler (1972). Only 37% of the respondents reported any kind of contact with a school psychologist. Unless parents have had direct contact with a school psychologist, they may be confused as to who this person is. Reinforcing this explanation is a question asked by several respondents during the telephone contact: "Is the school psychologist the same person as the school counselor?"

Only one item in the consultant role cluster received both high availability and usefulness ratings, helping teachers to deal more effectively with children. Assisting teachers with classroom disciplinary procedures received a borderline availability rating, but was not seen as a useful function. Respondents did not perceive

assisting principals with classroom disciplinary procedures to be a frequently performed function, nor did they value this role function. Although the data in this study do not present a clear basis for understanding parents' perceptions of authority roles, a plausible explanation for this may be that parents see principals in an authority role over all school personnel, including the school psychologist. Thus, the provision of this type of service by school psychologists is virtually discouraged. Respondents also did not feel that school psychologists provide parents with consultative services, perhaps since few parents in the study actually received such services from the psychologist. However, this was considered to be a very useful role function. Parents seemed to want help in dealing more effectively with their children. Parent education is an area in which school psychologists could consider expanding their involvement.

The assessment role, historically the most frequently cited role function of school psychologists, received rather low availability and usefulness ratings. Observing individual children in the classroom was the one item seen as readily available, but only somewhat useful. Providing personality assessments was considered borderline in terms of performance, and was not seen as a useful function. These two items often fall under the role of the school counselor as well, citing further confusion between these two distinct, yet related, disciplines. One third of the respondents believed that school psychologists give individual intelligence tests, while less than one fourth perceived the administration of individual achievement tests to be a performed

function. Less than one fifth of the parents perceived these two role functions as valuable. Nearly every research study conducted concerning the role of the school psychologist places psychoeducational assessment as the most enduring aspect of school psychological functioning (Bennett, 1970). This indicates a discrepancy between actual and perceived functioning. Once again, unless their children have undergone such assessment practices, parents are probably unaware that such role functions exist.

The liaison role was generally viewed as unavailable and not useful, with one exception, following up on the progress of each child served. Because this role, by definition, links the school psychologist with the community it is not surprising that it received low ratings; few parents have experienced this linkage. Perhaps follow-up was rated highly because the respondents tended to view school psychologists as working with small populations of children over an extended period of time, thus affording them the opportunity to continually monitor progress.

Three roles were perceived as quite unavailable and were not valued: educational programmer, mental health hygienist, and researcher. This may have been partially the result of whom the respondents defined as the school psychologist's primary client. School psychologists who fulfill these roles generally provide services that indirectly benefit the child and directly aid the school and the district on a broad scale. Historically, mental hygiene, research, and educational programming are roles advocated by persons



who perceive the principal and superintendent as the school psychologist's primary client. The parents responding to the questionnaire tended to value the roles that provide direct benefits to the child, particularly counseling, thus advocating the child-as-client model.

### Implications

Throughout the literature, researchers have consistently demonstrated diversity in the perceptions of the school psychologist's role. Inconsistencies in actual school psychological functioning are also evident, though general trends have been established. The results of this study suggest that parents, too, are basically unaware of the school psychologist's role.

Future research should address the following questions and problems:

1. An absence of contact with the school psychologist seemed to be a major factor affecting parental perceptions. Since few respondents actually received services from the school psychologist their perceptions were not reality-based. Further investigations should observe the effects of school psychologist contact by analyzing the perceptions of parents whose children have been referred versus parents whose children have not received school psychological services.

2. In order to preserve confidentiality, this researcher was unable to trace a single individual's responses throughout the questionnaire. Results were analyzed for the group as a whole; thus, it is not known whether the 40% who perceived a role function as

useful was the same 40% who perceived it as available. Future researchers should consider tracing individual responses to determine whether respondents are satisfied with the roles school psychologists perform.

3. Because the school psychologist's role can vary from school to school and from district to district, other investigations should also solicit information from the school psychologists regarding their actual functioning so as to form a base to which parental perceptions may be compared.

4. Possible role confusion between the school psychologist and the school counselor may exist. Further research should address this factor, perhaps surveying parental perceptions of school psychologists' and counselors' overlapping and distinct role functioning.

5. Future investigations should analyze the functional relationship between role theory and its influence on parental perceptions.

It is only after descriptive studies such as this have revealed a clear picture of the public's perception of school psychological functioning, that the next step in promoting public awareness, understanding, and acceptance can be undertaken. Parents must continue to be more informed and involved with this professional in order to encourage positive growth of the home-school relationship.

### Summary

The purpose of the present investigation was to determine how the parents of elementary school age children perceived the availability

and usefulness of nine major roles of the school psychologist. These roles were: counselor, consultant, diagnostician/assessor, liaison agent, researcher, intervention strategist, educational programmer, mental health hygienist, and disseminator of information. The following questions were addressed:

1. Which roles do parents perceive school psychologists fulfill in some capacity?
2. Which roles do parents perceive as most useful to their child and themselves? Which roles are perceived as least useful?
3. Which populations of children are school psychologists most and least effective in working with?

The study was conducted in an Iowa community of 30,000 citizens. The population was defined as parents of elementary school age children kindergarten through sixth grade who attended school in the district during the 1983-84 academic year. There are nine elementary schools in this district and all have access to school psychological services.

A questionnaire was developed with the aid of reviewed literature and current school psychology job descriptions and consisted of the following four sections:

- I. Parental perceptions of the availability of 25 school psychological role functions.
- II. Parental rankings of the usefulness of 25 role functions.
- III. Parental rankings of the school psychologist's effectiveness in dealing with eight populations of children (mentally retarded, physically handicapped, speech impaired, sensory impaired,

emotionally/behaviorally disordered, talented and gifted, learning disabled, and children in the regular classroom not receiving special services).

#### IV. Background/demographic information.

Questionnaires were sent to a random sampling of 200 parents. Three days after the mailing, potential respondents were contacted by telephone to solicit participation and to more fully explain the purpose of the study. The deadline for the return of questionnaires was November 2, 1984. Ninety-five useable questionnaires were returned for a 48% response rate, 6% of the total population.

Questionnaire responses were transferred to 10-column NCS Answer Sheets and processed by the university computer with the Statistical Processing for the Social Sciences package. An item profile analysis which generated a frequency count and percentages of responses for all questions was conducted. Responses were then organized into table form.

A review of the data collected in this study suggests the following specific conclusions:

1. Overall, parental perceptions of the school psychologist appeared quite similar to teacher perceptions, as discussed in the professional literature. Both groups viewed the psychologist as most useful in cases involving behavioral/emotional disorders, identifying school psychologists most strongly with clinical, medical, and social models.

2. Parents responding to the questionnaire used in the present study tended to value school psychologists providing direct services to children, such as counseling. Indirect services (research, programming, and mental hygiene) were not valued. This may reflect a child-as-client orientation.

3. The assessment role, considered to be a major responsibility of school psychologists, was seen as neither available nor useful by parents.

4. Respondents expressed a usefulness in school psychologists acting in a consultative capacity with parents, though they did not believe this function is currently being fulfilled.

5. Sixty-three percent of the respondents indicated that they had never had contact with a school psychologist; thus, their perceptions were not reality-based.

Results of this study imply a need for school psychologists to systematically educate consumers of psychological services, particularly parents, about the range of services available. This can serve to improve the home-school relationship by fostering realistic expectations on the part of parents.

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Appendix A  
Questionnaire

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Instructions: Roles that school psychologists are sometimes required to perform are listed below. Please CIRCLE the number preceding each of the roles that you feel the school psychologist at your child's school fulfills in some capacity.

---

1. Counsels students regarding their emotional development.
2. Counsels students regarding their social development.
3. Conducts psychotherapy with individual students in school.
4. Helps teachers to work more effectively with children.
5. Conducts in-service training workshops for teachers.
6. Advises principals regarding classroom disciplinary procedures.
7. Advises teachers regarding classroom disciplinary procedures.
8. Conducts workshops for parents to help them to deal more effectively with children.
9. Provides personality assessments of children.
10. Gives individual intelligence tests to children.
11. Gives individual achievement tests to children.
12. Observes individual children in the classroom.
13. Helps plan and evaluate school curricula.
14. Develops remedial education programs for special needs students.
15. Serves as a liaison between the school and community services.
16. Follows up on the progress of each child served.
17. Advocates the protection of human and civil rights of all students.
18. Promotes public understanding of the school psychological services.
19. Develops behavioral change programs to be implemented by teachers.
20. Develops behavioral change programs to be implemented by parents.
21. Develops mental hygiene among students through preventive educational programs.
22. Shares information from assessments of children with school personnel.
23. Shares information from assessments of children with the parents.
24. Writes reports for individual children that are served.
25. Designs, conducts, and evaluates applied research in the educational setting.

## Appendix A (Continued)

## Questionnaire

Instructions: The same list of school psychological roles is listed below. Please rank the ten roles that you feel would be most USEFUL to you, your family, and your child. Assign a rank of "1" to the most useful role, "2" to the second most useful role,.... and a "10" to the tenth most useful role.

- \_\_\_ 1. Counsels students regarding their emotional development.
- \_\_\_ 2. Counsels students regarding their social development.
- \_\_\_ 3. Conducts psychotherapy with individual children in the school.
- \_\_\_ 4. Helps teachers to work more effectively with children.
- \_\_\_ 5. Conducts in-service training workshops for teachers.
- \_\_\_ 6. Advises principals regarding classroom disciplinary procedures.
- \_\_\_ 7. Advises teachers regarding classroom disciplinary procedures.
- \_\_\_ 8. Conducts workshops for parents to help them to deal more effectively with their children.
- \_\_\_ 9. Provides personality assessments of children.
- \_\_\_ 10. Gives individual intelligence tests to children.
- \_\_\_ 11. Gives individual achievement tests to children.
- \_\_\_ 12. Observes individual children in the classroom.
- \_\_\_ 13. Helps plan and evaluate school curricula.
- \_\_\_ 14. Develops remedial education programs for special needs students.
- \_\_\_ 15. Serves as a liaison between the school and community services.
- \_\_\_ 16. Follows up on the progress of each child served.
- \_\_\_ 17. Advocates the protection of human and civil rights of all students.
- \_\_\_ 18. Promotes public understanding of the school psychological services.
- \_\_\_ 19. Develops behavioral change programs to be implemented by teachers.
- \_\_\_ 20. Develops behavioral change programs to be implemented by parents.
- \_\_\_ 21. Develops mental hygiene among students through preventive educational programs.
- \_\_\_ 22. Shares information from assessments of children with school personnel.
- \_\_\_ 23. Shares information from assessments of children with the parents.
- \_\_\_ 24. Writes reports on individual children that are served.
- \_\_\_ 25. Designs, conducts, and evaluates applied research in the educational setting.

## Appendix A (Continued)

## Questionnaire

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Instructions: Eight populations of children are listed below. Please rank from "1" to "8" the school psychologist's usefulness in working with each group. A "1" designates the population in which school psychological services are MOST useful, and an "8" designates the group in which the services are LEAST useful.

---

- A. Mentally retarded
- B. Physically handicapped
- C. Speech impaired
- D. Sensory impaired (vision, hearing)
- E. Emotionally/Behaviorally disordered
- F. Talented and Gifted
- G. Learning disabled
- H. Children in the regular classroom not receiving special services.

---

Instructions: The following questions are included to provide background information that might be related to your perceptions of the school psychologist. Circle only one letter for each item.

---

1. How many times have you met either formally or informally with the school psychologist at your child's school?
  - A. Never
  - B. Once
  - C. 2-5 times
  - D. 5-10 times
  - E. More than ten times
  
2. Most of the information you have regarding the school psychologist has come from:
  - A. Actual contact with the school psychologist
  - B. Books and other formal sources
  - C. School personnel (teachers, principals, etc.)
  - D. My child
  - E. I have not acquired information from any source
  
3. Do you know the name of the school psychologist at your child's school?
  - A. Yes
  - B. No
  
4. What is your relationship to the elementary school child in your home?
  - A. Mother
  - B. Father
  - C. Other relative
  - D. Legal guardian
  
5. Your gender:
  - A. Male
  - B. Female

Appendix B  
Cover Letter



University of Northern Iowa  
Department of Educational Psychology and Foundations

Educational Clinic  
Cedar Falls, Iowa 50614  
Telephone (319) 273-2648

October 1984

Dear Parent or Guardian:

May I have a few minutes of your time?

I am a graduate student at the University of Northern Iowa working on my thesis towards a Specialist in Education degree. You are one of 200 parents of elementary school age children who have been randomly selected to participate in my research study.

The purpose of my research is to ascertain parents' perceptions of the actual and desired roles of the school psychologist. Hopefully the results of my study will have implications for improved psychological services, as well as for better communication and understanding between school psychologists and parents.

With this goal in mind, the enclosed questionnaire was constructed. I am asking for your cooperation and contribution: Please complete each item of the questionnaire and return it in the stamped, addressed envelope by November 2, 1984.

You can be assured that your responses will be kept strictly confidential. No identifying marks are to be placed anywhere on the questionnaire and the identifying number on the envelope is for follow-up purposes only. Information about particular school psychologists will not be released to the psychologists or their supervisors. Your participation will in no way affect the psychological services available to your child.

Thank you very much for your time and assistance. Your input can help assure that in the future school children receive effective and useful psychological services. Your cooperation is truly appreciated.

Sincerely,

*Lisa Ball*

Lisa Ball  
Graduate Student  
Dept. of Educational Psychology

Project Advisor:  
Dr. Donald Schmits, Ed.D.  
Dept. of Educational Psychology  
Phone #: 273-2648

## Appendix C

## Perceived Availability of School Psychological Services

Role No.	Available?	
	Yes	No
1	65.3	34.7
2	64.2	35.8
3	26.3	73.7
4	68.4	31.6
5	31.6	68.4
6	35.8	64.2
7	44.2	55.8
8	28.4	71.6
9	48.4	51.6
10	33.7	66.3
11	24.2	75.8
12	61.1	38.9
13	16.8	83.2
14	31.6	68.4
15	30.5	69.5
16	61.1	38.9
17	38.9	61.1
18	35.8	64.2

(table continues)



## Appendix C (Continued)

## Perceived Availability of School Psychological Services

Role No.	Available?	
	Yes	No
19	46.3	53.7
20	41.4	58.9
21	23.2	76.8
22	69.5	30.5
23	66.3	33.7
24	64.2	35.8
25	27.4	72.6

Note: Figures represent percentage of respondents (N = 95).

Appendix D

Perceived Usefulness of School Psychological Services:

Rankings by Percentage of Respondents (N = 95)

Role No.	Rankings											Top 10	Not ranked
	1	2	3	4	5	5	6	7	8	9	10		
1	42.1	6.3	8.4	7.4	4.2	68.4	2.1	5.3	1.1	1.1	3.2	81.2	18.8
2	3.2	30.5	5.3	6.3	8.4	53.7	6.3	2.1	2.1	3.2	1.1	68.5	31.5
3	3.2	2.1	9.5	2.1	3.2	20.1	2.1	-	2.1	-	-	24.3	75.7
4	11.6	15.8	8.4	15.8	9.5	61.1	6.3	3.2	5.3	4.2	1.1	81.2	18.8
5	2.1	3.2	6.3	2.1	3.2	16.9	3.2	4.2	5.3	7.4	3.2	40.2	59.8
6	1.1	-	2.1	3.2	1.1	7.5	2.1	3.2	1.1	1.1	1.1	16.1	83.9
7	-	1.1	2.1	4.2	6.3	13.7	2.1	7.4	7.4	4.2	-	34.8	65.2
8	10.5	6.3	6.3	6.3	5.3	34.7	3.2	3.2	10.5	10.5	7.4	69.5	30.5
9	1.1	2.1	9.5	5.3	3.2	21.2	4.2	2.1	3.2	1.1	5.3	37.1	62.9

(table continues)

Appendix D (Continued)

Perceived Usefulness of School Psychological Services:

Rankings by Percentage of Respondents (N = 95)

Role No.	Rankings											Top 10	Not ranked
	1	2	3	4	5	5	6	7	8	9	10		
10	3.2	4.2	2.1	1.1	1.1	11.7	2.1	2.1	-	1.1	-	17.0	83.0
11	1.1	2.1	1.1	1.1	1.1	6.5	3.2	3.2	1.1	-	2.1	16.1	83.9
12	2.1	4.2	6.3	6.3	7.4	26.3	9.5	4.2	4.2	8.4	1.1	53.7	46.3
13	1.1	1.1	2.1	1.1	-	5.4	3.2	2.1	-	1.1	5.3	17.1	82.9
14	1.1	1.1	2.1	2.1	3.2	9.6	4.2	3.2	6.3	4.2	1.1	27.6	72.4
15	-	-	1.1	2.1	-	3.2	1.1	3.2	2.1	5.3	-	14.9	85.1
16	1.1	1.1	6.3	5.3	7.4	21.2	7.4	13.7	5.3	7.4	10.5	65.5	34.5
17	-	2.1	-	-	1.1	3.2	2.1	1.1	2.1	-	3.2	11.7	88.3
18	3.2	1.1	1.1	-	2.1	7.5	2.1	-	4.2	4.2	14.7	32.7	67.3

(table continues)

Appendix D (Continued)

Perceived Usefulness of School Psychological Services:

Rankings by Percentage of Respondents (N = 95)

Role No.	Rankings											Top 10	Not ranked
	1	2	3	4	5	5	6	7	8	9	10		
19	2.1	2.1	3.2	6.3	5.3	19.0	5.3	5.3	5.3	5.3	5.3	45.5	54.5
20	-	2.1	5.3	5.3	7.4	20.1	8.4	4.2	7.4	3.2	1.1	44.4	55.6
21	6.3	5.3	1.1	2.1	1.1	15.9	2.1	1.1	3.2	3.2	2.1	27.6	72.4
22	-	2.1	3.2	2.1	11.6	19.0	9.5	4.2	4.2	11.6	3.2	51.7	48.3
23	4.2	3.2	5.3	9.5	5.3	27.5	7.4	14.7	11.6	5.3	10.5	77.0	23.0
24	-	1.1	-	1.1	2.1	4.3	2.1	5.3	5.3	4.2	12.6	33.8	66.2
25	-	-	2.1	2.1	-	4.2	-	2.1	-	3.2	3.2	12.7	87.3

Appendix E

School Psychologists' Effectiveness with Particular Populations:

Rankings by Percentage of Respondents (N = 95)

Population	Rank							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Emotionally/Behaviorally disordered	64.2	16.8	8.4	4.2	3.2	2.1	1.1	0.0
Learning disabled	9.5	46.3	18.9	7.4	6.3	8.4	2.1	1.1
Mentally disabled	9.5	7.4	16.8	8.4	12.6	11.6	12.6	21.1
Talented/Gifted	3.2	8.4	13.7	16.8	8.4	9.5	25.3	14.7
Physically handicapped	3.2	5.3	11.6	17.9	22.1	16.8	14.7	8.4
Speech impaired	0.0	3.2	9.5	24.2	18.9	23.2	13.7	7.4
Sensory impaired	0.0	4.2	9.5	12.6	22.1	25.3	16.8	9.5
Regular classroom	9.5	7.4	14.7	7.4	5.3	6.3	12.6	36.8