

# **4th Annual Educational Psychology Forum**

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Massey University – Albany Campus

*Increasing Evidence-Based Services for ALL  
Populations*

***Professional Educational Psychology in NZ:  
Time for the Last Rites ?***

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# Introduction

- This presentation will present an analysis of feedback from participants of the Third Educational Psychology Forum held in Christchurch in November 2010.
- It is intended that this will stimulate discussion about the current situation of the educational psychology profession in New Zealand.

# Recent History

- Don Brown's keynote at the 2<sup>nd</sup> EP Forum in Wellington in 2009 suggested that, unless drastic action was taken, the professional practice of educational psychology in NZ was going the same way as the dodo, ie. on the way to extinction. This was followed up by his article, and two others, by myself, and Peter Coleman & Tony Pine, in the May 2010 issue of Psychology Aotearoa (PA).
- These issues were raised again in a later PA article by Peter Stanley (2010) who agreed that 'educational psychology is in trouble', suggested several reasons for this, made a strong case for the important role which ed psychs could currently be playing, and made a plea to, '...rejuvenate and refocus educational psychology...'

# Recent History ctd.

- An article by Warwick Philips (2011) in a subsequent issue of PA, did not directly address the serious issues raised in the preceding articles. Instead it discussed some current initiatives and concluded that, 'The practice of educational psychology in the Ministry today is indeed alive and well and it has a very bright future.'
- Another article on the topic, considering the negative impact of SE2000 on the roles and functioning of ed. psychs was recently published in Kairaranga (Coleman, 2011).
- This recent flurry of publishing on the state of the educational psychology profession in NZ does not seem to have stimulated significant debate or activity, such as a major review by the MoE, which seeks to address the situation.
- But what about feedback from participants of the 3<sup>rd</sup> EP Forum ???

# Survey of EP Forum Participants

- At the last session of the 3<sup>rd</sup> EP Forum in ChCh I agreed to survey participants to gain their feedback on the Forum, as well as the training and operation of educational psychology practice in NZ.
- After considerable work with MoE managers to ensure that survey questions would not compromise MoE employees' duty not to criticize the MoE, an anonymous survey was emailed to around 100 participants.
- A total of eight replies were received !!!!!
- This was very disappointing and suggests possible apathy, resignation, or browbeaten silence is rife among the profession. Or could it be that all are so blissfully happy that they saw no need to respond to the survey. All we have to go on is the responses from the eight who did reply. Analysis of these responses follows:

# Survey of EP Forum Participants

- I will focus here on the replies to the two survey questions on the operation of educational psychologists in NZ. These were:
- *“What do you consider are the strengths and weaknesses in the way educational psychologists’ work is organised, delivered and evaluated now in NZ?”*
- *“What do you consider would improve the way in which educational psychologists work is organised, delivered and evaluated in NZ?”*

# Responses

- Of the eight replies, three did not respond at all to these two questions !!!
- Summaries, with quotes, from the other five respondents are presented next

# *Strengths in way educational psychologists' work is organised, delivered and evaluated*

The following strengths were identified by participants 1 through 5:

- 1) 'Behavioral orientation'
- 2) 'Uptake of incredible years and positive behaviour for learning.....'
- 3) 'There still are some.....' (none specified)
- 4) 'Not as label dependent as other systems...'
- 5) 'Not so many at the moment unfortunately. Morale seems quite low.'

*Weaknesses were considered next.....*

*Weaknesses in way educational psychologists' work is organised, delivered and evaluated*

- 1) Too narrow a scope of practice;
  - Ed psychs should be doing prevention, counselling, assessment;
  - too much oversight on individuals;
  - not enough ed psychs;
  - RTLBs not trained for work they are doing, should be done by ed psychs;
  - too much passing buck to Ministry of Health for work which should be done by ed psychs

*Weaknesses in way educational psychologists' work is organised, delivered and evaluated*

2) Special Education Advisors;

- management of psychs by non-psychs

3) Too few, too hard to get to, too high a turnover;

- general public do not know how to access psychs or what they do;
- system is flawed, you get ORS or not, RTLB or not...

## *Weaknesses in way educational psychologists' work is organised, delivered and evaluated*

- 4) Number of layers teachers/parents have to go through to see a psych;
- high caseload and paperwork;
- funding criteria dominates student's needs;
- expected to work only on individual cases;
- many students who could benefit miss out

*Weaknesses in way educational psychologists' work is organised, delivered and evaluated*

5) Evaluation of ed psych work by managers is based on CMS system which is a 'through-put' model which does not take into account relationships or effectiveness of interventions

*Considering possible improvements next...*

# *Improvements in way educational psychologists' work is organised/delivered/evaluated*

- 1) Restructuring of the roles and functions of ed psychs
- 2) Psychs need their own leadership. Corrections  
Psych service seems to be flourishing....
- 3) More time discussing cases in small groups. Less time sitting at computers.....
- 4) Addressing limited scope of their work and inability to work at systems level... Should be more accessible to teachers and parents...

*Improvements in way educational psychologists' work is organised/delivered/evaluated*

- 5) Get a voice, we are obvious by our silence on a number of important issues, we are too willing to not rock the boat and seem to prefer to continue to plug away martyr like.
- Make access to a psychologist feasible for the general public and schools
- Support ed psychs who are willing to voice concern...
- People don't say anything either because they are afraid of recrimination or they are comfortable and used to 'the way things are' – or both

# Discussion

- The very low response rate coupled with the mainly negative responses suggests a profession that has low morale and is well on its way to extinction, and perhaps beyond salvation.
- We seem to have moved a long way from the vision for the profession created by Winterbourn (1974) & furthered by inspirational psychologists such as John McKenzie & Don Brown.
- *Is it now too far gone to change the trend??*
- *Is it time for the last rites to be administered???*
- *What are your thoughts???*

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