

Becoming an Educational Psychologist in Newfoundland and Labrador: A Brief Review of Employment Roles and Responsibilities, Educational and Training Options, and Registration Processes

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Please note that authors have been deemed to have made relatively equivalent contributions to this paper so are presented in alphabetical order.

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Abstract

Educational psychology is a sub-discipline of psychology concerned with promoting students' learning as well as cognitive, social, and emotional development. It is a broad educational-clinical discipline that focuses largely on assessment of students along with other types of roles and responsibilities. Although there are currently no specific educational/training programs in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador focused on educational psychology, there are programs that focus on professional psychology preparation. The current paper details these programs along with suggested competencies for professional educational psychology. The current paper also focuses on psychologist registration in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

This paper explores educational psychology in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. The goal of the paper is to present an overview of the core competencies and roles of educational psychologists, training and educational routes, as well as the process of registration as a psychologist in Newfoundland and Labrador. It is our hope that this paper will help inform people considering educational psychology as a potential career path in the province.

Roles and Core Competencies

The title "educational psychologist" or better known as "school psychologist" connotes many definitions and roles (Fagan & Wise, 2007). In Newfoundland and Labrador, 'educational psychology' and 'educational psychologist' are the common titles used to describe this profession and its members as opposed to 'school psychology' or 'school psychologist'. Some have noted the reason for this may be related to our strong connection to the United Kingdom (e.g., Martin, 2001). Throughout this paper we will use both terms interchangeably, to refer to this applied sub-discipline of psychology. In Newfoundland and Labrador, the professional roles of educational psychologists vary somewhat both within and between school districts (Harris & Joy, 2010).

Overwhelmingly though, educational psychologists in Newfoundland and Labrador report assessment as their primary and most time consuming role (Harris & Joy, 2010). The National

Association of School Psychology (NASP, 2010) defines the scope of school psychologists' professional roles as:

School psychologists provide effective services to help children and youth succeed academically, socially, behaviorally, and emotionally. School psychologists provide direct educational and mental health services for children and youth, as well as work with parents, educators, and other professionals to create supportive learning and social environments for all children (p. 1).

The Canadian Psychological Association's (CPA, 2007) professional practice guidelines for school psychology in Canada espouse that the mandate and scope of the school psychologists' interventions include the total child or adolescent. School psychologists investigate the child's developmental and family history, present circumstances and the child's ability to function in the school and the larger community. With the recent movement to more inclusive practices in schools, the need for psychologists and psychological services has increased and their role has become even broader (CPA, 2007).

Educational psychologists have core competencies in how children learn and behave and how they develop cognitively, socially, and emotionally. At the core of educational psychology is an emphasis on learning and developmental psychology. Educational psychology is informed by a developmental-wellness model yet it is also diagnostically focused. Primary responsibilities of educational psychologists include assessment, diagnosis, and program recommendations. Typically this process occurs in a team context and requires collaboration with family, school and/or community members. Educational psychologists also have knowledge of brief and psychoeducational counselling, psychotherapy (e.g., cognitive-behavioural), research methodology, and program evaluation. This knowledge base informs their practice in the areas of assessment, prevention, intervention and consultation at the individual, group and systems levels (CPA, 2007). School psychologists are also involved in the provision of in-servicing on a variety of issues such as behaviour management and parenting skills. Their mandate is to work closely with school teams in an effort to provide the most effective and comprehensive service to the school population.

Educational psychologists both nationally and internationally share many similar roles/duties and there is consensus that the amount of time dedicated to psychoeducational assessment is quite high (see Corkum, French & Dorey, 2007; Harris & Joy, 2010; Hutton, Dubes & Muir, 1992). However, there is a desire among some members of this group to have more time to devote to areas such as prevention, counselling, and research (see Harris and Joy, 2010). This can be a challenge given the ratio of educational psychologists to students in Newfoundland and Labrador (i.e., roughly 1 to 1,544; ratio based on 2012 statistics when there were roughly 44 educational psychologist positions and 67,933 students in the province). While the roles and competencies of educational or school psychologists may vary, they share an underlying philosophy or belief that the goal of school psychology is "the promotion of children's learning and cognitive, emotional and social development" (Jordan, Hindes & Saklofsky, 2009, p. 245).

Education and Training Programs

While Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN) established an Educational Psychology program in 1970, the Department of Education did not formally recognize this title or allocate funding for such an employment position until 1979 (Martin, 2001). Currently, no program exists in Newfoundland and Labrador that focuses specifically on educational psychology. Having said that, two programs are available which focus on professional psychology preparation. Within the

Faculty of Education at Memorial University exists the counselling psychology program. This is a master's level program that focuses primarily on the preparation of school and community counsellors. However, students entering the program with a background in psychology (i.e., typically an undergraduate degree in psychology with the foundational areas of psychology represented) would have the option of following a unique route through the counselling psychology program in order to complete the degree as a graduate level degree in psychology. Such a route requires the student to take a lead, in consultation with faculty, in charting specific courses, research, and internship experiences that will, at times, vary from the more typical counsellor preparation route. For example, students desiring registration with the Newfoundland and Labrador Psychology Board (NLPB) would complete additional research training (e.g., a thesis) and complete specific courses with Registered Psychologists or Professors of Psychology. This degree option emphasizes several areas of psychology and counselling and thus is not a program solely devoted to educational or school psychology. Again, students entering this program who wish to become educational psychologists would need to ensure they have appropriate pre-psychology preparation (along with other important areas of preparation such as education) and take a leadership role in developing the route they would take through the counselling psychology program itself.

The second psychology preparation program in the province is the Doctorate of Psychology (Psy.D.) program in the Faculty of Science at Memorial University. This clinical psychology program's foundation is in the scholar practitioner model and generalist training. The Psy.D. (2012) program's goal is:

to prepare clinical psychologists for practice in a wide range of interprofessional settings and in a rapidly changing scientific and human services environment. A clinical generalist program provides students with a broad and flexible foundation of clinical and research skills. Generalist training allows for opportunities to gain experience working with clients across the lifespan, with couples, families, and community groups, and also with clients from diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds (Training philosophy section, para. 2).

The primary emphasis of this program is on psychologist preparation. It is "focused on issues related to meeting the health needs of individuals and groups in both rural and urban communities" (Psy.D. program, 2012, Training philosophy, para. 2). While the program outlines education and training in a number of theoretical perspectives such as cognitive-behavioural, psychodynamic, developmental, and family systems, the emphasis of the program is not specifically on educational psychology.

There is another program in the Department of Psychology at Memorial University that focuses on clinical science. This is a Master's of Science degree in Experimental Psychology and further information on this program can be obtained from this website: <http://www.mun.ca/psychology/bio/mezo.php>

Another important consideration around training and employability is the need for a Bachelor of Education degree. Although the Department of Education has created new provisions for the certification (non-teaching) of educational psychologists who are registered with the NLPB, employment is still difficult without a Bachelor of Education degree, especially in more urban areas within the province.

There are several Canadian programs aimed directly at school or educational psychology preparation. The geographically closest to Newfoundland and Labrador is Mount Saint Vincent

University's School Psychology program (Faculty of Education) (<http://www.msvu.ca/en/home/programsdepartments/graduatecalendar/graduateprograms/education/schoolpsychology/default.aspx>). This two year, full time program is designed to prepare school psychologists for clinical-educational work related roles. The Canadian Psychological Association publishes a detailed listing of Canadian school psychology programs and other Canadian psychology programs (<http://www.cpa.ca/cpsite/userfiles/Documents/Graduate%20Guide%202009-2010.pdf>).

Importantly, in this province, registration is granted as a 'psychologist' versus a specific type of psychologist (e.g., educational psychologist). This places a large onus on the individual professional to ensure specific competencies are met to be able to practice in certain sub areas of psychology (e.g., educational psychology). One may become registered as a psychologist with a very generalist level preparation and thus further training may be required for competent practice.

It is our view that appropriate education and training in school psychology should consist of coursework and internship/practica experience including the following areas: developmental psychology (normal and abnormal), learning/motivation theories, personality, neuropsychology, diversity, supervision and consultation, counselling (individual and group-especially brief and psychoeducationally based), psychoeducational assessment, diagnostics (especially in learning, development, and behaviour; DSM focused), legal and ethical considerations, and research (including a thesis). We also acknowledge the training benefits attained from teaching and working in a classroom and school setting. Additionally, we support the current model for provisional registration, which requires additional supervision following the completion of degree. What follows is a description of the present registration process in the province.

Registration as a Psychologist in Newfoundland and Labrador

The NLPB was established under the *Psychologists' Act (2005)*¹. The mandate of the Board is to protect the interests of the public and, in particular, those who receive services from registrants of the Board. The *Psychologists' Act (2005)* reaffirms the legislative framework for registration as defined in the earlier Act of 1985. The term "psychologist" is a protected title. Individuals are not permitted to present themselves to the public by name or description of services as a psychologist unless they hold registration with the NLPB. The *Psychologists' Act (2005)* does not define scope of practice.

As the title "Psychologist" is in the name *Educational Psychologist*, an individual who claims to be an Educational Psychologist must be registered with the NLPB. Thus, Educational Psychologists are subject to the same criteria for registration as a Psychologist in Newfoundland and Labrador with all the rights the title offers through the governing legislation.

The registration process and criteria to be met are clearly outlined in the *Psychologists' Act (2005)*. There are two paths to achieve full registration – one is through a new applicant format and the other is through the *Agreement on Internal Trade (AIT)*. Each path requires a completed application form with accompanying documentation. The NLPB does not review incomplete applications. Application forms may be found on the NLPB website at www.nlpsychboard.ca.

The application process for a new applicant includes the submission of an NLPB application form with required documentation. This documentation includes, but may not be limited to: official university transcripts; original Code of Conduct including a Vulnerable Sector check; three reference forms; a signed attestation; and the accompanying fee.

New applicants must meet specific requirements of academic training, supervision and examinations (NLPB, 2009). Academic training requires the applicant to hold an undergraduate degree in psychology **and** either a doctoral degree or master's degree in psychology from an educational institution approved by the board. The undergraduate degree path of study in psychology must demonstrate a foundational knowledge component (with the cognate areas of psychology represented) and the graduate degree path of study must demonstrate the required competencies. Foundational knowledge and competencies are based on national standards and practices, as well as tenets of the *Mutual Recognition Act (2005)*².

Tables 1 and 2 outline the areas required for foundational knowledge and the competencies required for registration in an acceptable path of study of an undergraduate and graduate psychology program. *Foundational Knowledge* areas are usually completed in an undergraduate degree program in psychology. Each competency area has a specified number of courses/hours and some require a Registered Psychologist as a core instructor. A complete description of these areas can be found at the *NLPB* website at www.nlpsychboard.ca at the link "Guidelines for Evaluation of Applicants."

Table 1. Foundational knowledge core areas required in an undergraduate degree in psychology.

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- A. Knowledge of the biological bases of behaviour
 - B. Knowledge of the cognitive-affective bases of behaviour
 - C. Knowledge of the social bases of behaviour
 - D. Knowledge of psychology of the individual
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Table 2. Competencies required through a graduate degree in psychology

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- A. Interpersonal relationships
 - B. Assessment and evaluation
 - C. Intervention
 - D. Research
 - E. Ethics
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Following NLPB approval of the application, the applicant is granted Provisional Registration. Provisional registration may be subject to the terms, conditions and limitations that may be set out by the board, including those respecting professional supervision and the specific location for which the registration is valid. The conditions and limitations include, but may not be limited to: a specified period of supervision by a fully registered psychologist, an approved supervision plan, and an approved passing grade on the *Examination for the Professional Practice in Psychology (EPPP)*. While a provisionally registered psychologist may claim to be a psychologist, they may not practice independently. Upon completion of all conditions set in the provisional registration, the applicant is eligible to apply for full registration with the NLPB. If these requirements are met, and they acquire full registration status, then they may practice independently.

Applicants who are currently registered as a psychologist in another jurisdiction in Canada may be eligible for registration as a psychologist in Newfoundland and Labrador through the *Agreement on Internal Trade (AIT)*. The AIT defines professional mobility from one Canadian jurisdiction to another which may expedite the application process for an applicant. Those who wish to avail of this path must complete an application form with accompanying documentation. This documentation includes: an original Code of Conduct including a Vulnerable Sector check, a letter of good standing from current jurisdiction, copies of other certification/documentation if available (e.g., Canadian Register of Health Services Providers in Psychology), a signed attestation, and the accompanying fee.

More often than not, applications not approved by the Board for registration as a psychologist in Newfoundland and Labrador are deficient in an approved undergraduate/graduate degree in psychology, deficient in fulfillment of the criteria for competencies, or both. Applicants often mistake the earning of a degree as equivalent to meeting the academic training requirements for registration. The NLPB has encouraged all potential applicants to contact the Board before embarking on a path of study, if the intention is to become a registered psychologist in the province.

Conclusions

Educational psychology provides a critical service to the education system in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador and beyond. It can be a rewarding, as well as challenging, career choice. The lack of preparation programs in the area of educational psychology in the province poses significant challenges for those interested in pursuing registration as a psychologist and eventually seeking employment in this field.

For those considering entering the field of psychology in Newfoundland and Labrador, it is important to note the following: who to contact, what to ask, and where to find information. Answers to these questions might be obtained from the NLPB, potential employers, university faculty, professional organizations, or others (see resource links). Ideally, when considering a career in educational psychology one should seek guidance prior to their undergraduate degree. Planning is critical to a career in this field in order to ensure an appropriate program of study is chosen. Too often, those interested in becoming an educational psychologist wait until they have chosen a university program, are in the middle of their education or have completed their education to seek guidance from academic advisors, potential employers, and governing bodies (NLPB).

Professional Organizations and Resources

Association of Psychology of Newfoundland and Labrador: www.nlpsych.ca

Newfoundland and Labrador, Counsellors' and Psychologists' Association – A Special Interest Council of the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association: <https://www.nlta.nl.ca/home>

Canadian Psychological Association: www.cpa.ca

Canadian Psychological Association: Regulation of the Practice of Psychology:
<http://www.cpa.ca/practitioners/practiceregulation/>

NLPB Information for Applications Seeking Registration Requirements:
<http://www.nlpsychboard.ca/applicants.aspx>

CPA program guide:
<http://www.cpa.ca/cpsite/userfiles/Documents/Graduate%20Guide%202009-2010.pdf>

Psychologists Act 2005: <http://www.assembly.nl.ca/legislation/sr/annualstatutes/2005/P34-1.c05.htm>

Newfoundland and Labrador, Department of Education: <http://www.ed.gov.nl.ca/edu/>

Memorial University, Faculty of Education, Counselling Psychology Program:
<http://www.mun.ca/educ/grad/counselling.php>

Memorial University, Faculty of Science, Doctor of Psychology Program:
<http://www.mun.ca/psychology/graduate/psyd.php>

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Footnotes

¹An Act to amend the Psychologist Act, 2005 was assented to June 27, 2012 and comes into force on October 31, 2012.

<http://www.assembly.nl.ca/legislation/sr/annualstatutes/2012/1224.chp.htm>

²A description of the MRA can be found in: Garland, John C. (2011). Regulation of Psychology in Newfoundland and Labrador. In David Evans (Ed.), *Law, Standards, and Ethics in the Practice of Psychology 3rd Edition* (pp 57-68). Toronto, Ontario: Carswell a division of Thomson Reuters Canada Limited.