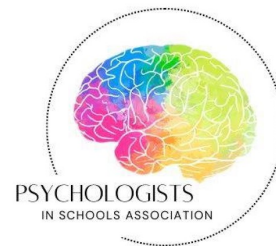


SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS' TRAINING, COMPETENCE, AND NEEDS IN WORKING WITH INDIGENOUS STUDENTS IN NOVA SCOTIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR TRAINING AND PRACTICE


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Land Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge that we are in Mi'kma'ki, the traditional and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq people. This land is covered by the Treaties of Peace and Friendship, which Mi'kmaq and Maliseet peoples first signed with the British Crown in 1725. We are all Treaty People.





A Note on Language

Although it is acknowledged that there is no pan-Indigenous culture or experience across Canada, a general term, **Indigenous** (i.e., rather than Mi'kmaq), has been used in this work to align findings with language and guidelines used in EECD documents, and to encourage participants to reflect more generally on their training and experiences with all Indigenous groups.



Some Background

- Compared to their non-Indigenous peers, Indigenous students in Canada:
 - typically underachieve academically, have lower graduation rates, and are less likely to pursue post-secondary education (Longboat, 2012; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada [TRC], 2015)
 - are more likely to be diagnosed with a learning disorder and are disproportionately represented on Individualized Education/Program Plans (Longboat, 2012; Mushquash & Bova, 2007; Schroeder et al., 2023)
 - This **opportunity gap** identified as a **key issue** in the TRC's Education Calls to Action (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2012, 2015).
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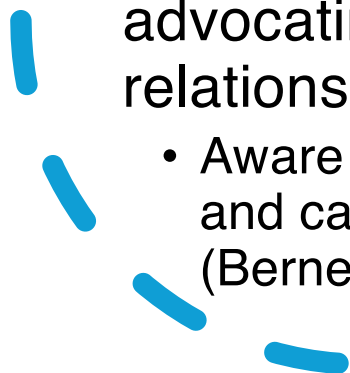
In Nova Scotia

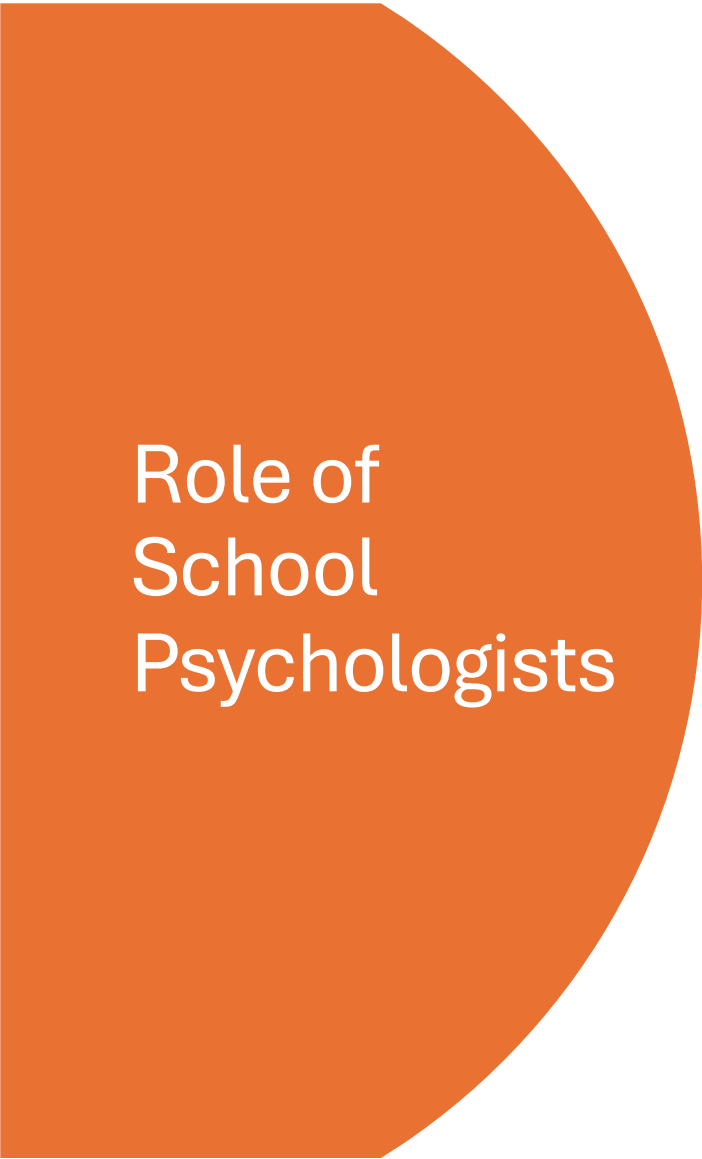
- Significant opportunity gap has been found between Indigenous students and their non-Indigenous counterparts (Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2015)
- Addressing this gap has been identified as a priority
- Educators, administrators, and other school-based professionals must develop awareness of challenges faced by Indigenous students
- The opportunity gap must be addressed holistically to ensure students receive appropriate supports in all areas of school functioning



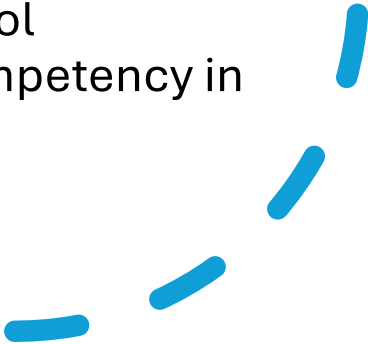
Role of School Psychologists

- Play an important role in identifying students who are at-risk of academic underachievement and making recommendations for academic program planning
- Can also play a role beyond the educational setting, by advocating for Indigenous sovereignty and fostering community relationships
 - Aware of the potential harms of well-intentioned but misplaced support and can be important allies in promoting culturally responsive practices (Bernett et al., 2023; Tabor et al., 2023)



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Role of School Psychologists

- Although there is acknowledgement by school psychologists that they have a responsibility to advance equity, diversity, and inclusion in educational settings, many school psychologists report that they lack the competence and necessary training to work effectively with Indigenous students (Robinson-Zañartu et al., 2023; Rogers et al., 2022; Sabnis & Newman, 2023; Schroeder et al., 2023)
 - Difficult to address opportunity gap and to support Indigenous students if school psychologists feel that they lack competency in this area
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Goals of this Research

To ask practicing school psychologists about their preparation and perceived competency when working with Indigenous students and their families

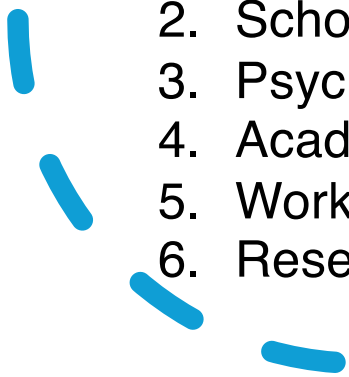
To identify gaps in knowledge and training

To develop recommendations for training programs to ensure school psychologists can practice in a culturally competent and responsive manner



Method

We used a survey to ask practicing school psychologists in Nova Scotia to describe (1) level of training; (2) perceived current level of knowledge; and (3) knowledge required for effective practice with Indigenous students across six domains of cross-cultural competency:

- 
- A blue curved line graphic on the left side of the slide, consisting of several segments of varying lengths and curves.
1. Legal and ethical issues
 2. School culture, policy, and advocacy
 3. Psycho-educational assessment
 4. Academic, therapeutic, and consultative interventions
 5. Working with interpreters
 6. Research

(Robinson-Zañartu et al., 2011)

Participant Demographics

N = 49 (56.3% of currently practicing school psychologists in NS [*N* = 87])

N women = 44 (89.7%)

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Range
Age	36.5	8.5	24-54
Years registered	4.58	6.87	0.33-22
Years working in schools	4.56	6.87	0.16-22
Number of schools services	5.98	6.68	2-37
Number of students receiving service each year (estimated)	39.63	23.7	2-145

Note: All RCEs were represented

Results

Most school psychologists ($n = 43$; 87%) had experience working with Indigenous students but were unsure about percentage of Indigenous students on IPPs.

Multiple means of developing preparedness for working with Indigenous students:

Method	<i>n</i>	%
Personal background	5	11.6
On-the-job training	25	58.1
Undergraduate training	4	9.3
Graduate training	21	48.8
Personal research	32	74.4
Other	6	14.0



Results



School psychologists believe it is important to be aware of students' cultural backgrounds

Almost all participants ($n = 47$; 97.9%) reported that it is very important or essential to have knowledge about the specific background, culture or traditions, as well as the historical policies, practices, and educational issues relating to the Indigenous students they serve.



Results

School psychologists identified significant gaps in training, current knowledge, and training needs

Participants reported that they did not feel their graduate training had adequately prepared them and that their level of current knowledge was not sufficient to practice effectively with Indigenous students and communities.

Gaps in training, current knowledge, and training needs appeared across all areas of cross-cultural competency.

Results: Areas 1 and 2

Area of Competency	χ^2	df	p
Legal and ethical issues pertaining to Indigenous children and youth	41.31	2	< 0.001
Training to Current knowledge	20.00	1	< 0.001
Current knowledge to Knowledge needed	11.64	1	< 0.001
School culture, educational policy and institutional advocacy in serving indigenous children and youth	42.25	2	< 0.001
Training to Current knowledge	19.00	1	< 0.001
Current knowledge to Knowledge needed	15.21	1	< 0.001

Results: Areas 3 and 4

Area of Competency	χ^2	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Psychoeducational assessment with Indigenous children and youth	44.81	2	< 0.001
Training to Current knowledge	23.00	1	< 0.001
Current knowledge to Knowledge needed	11.64	1	< 0.001
Academic, therapeutic and consultive interventions	38.45	2	< 0.001
Training to Current knowledge	14.22	1	< 0.001
Current knowledge to Knowledge needed	15.21	1	< 0.001

Results: Areas 5 and 6

Area of Competency	χ^2	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Working with translators and interpreters in relation to working with Indigenous children and youth	25.05	2	< 0.001
Training to Current knowledge	6.00	1	0.014
Current knowledge to Knowledge needed	9.94	1	0.002
Research with Indigenous children and youth	29.04	2	< 0.001
Training to Current knowledge	12.00	1	< 0.001
Current knowledge to Knowledge needed	8.00	1	0.005



Results

School psychologists identified gaps in knowledge of Federal and Provincial policies, programs, and legislation related to Indigenous peoples

Very few participants reported adequate or strong knowledge of policies/programs, apart from Jordan's Principle and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report.

Program/Policy/ Legislation	Unaware it Existed Before Today	Some	Adequate	Strong
Indian Act (N = 42)	1	22	18	1
Peace and Friendship Treaties (N = 49)	2	29	17	1
Jordan's Principle (N = 49)	1	10	28	10
Aboriginal People's Training and Employment Commission (N = 49)	33	11	4	0

Program/Policy/ Legislation	Unaware it Existed Before Today	Some	Adequate	Strong
Child Help Initiative Program (N = 49)	39	7	2	1
Nova Scotia Action Plan for Education (N = 49)	11	30	7	1
Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey (N = 49)	31	16	1	1
Truth and Reconciliation Commission (N = 49)	0	19	25	5

Implications and Takeaways

- School psychologists understand the **importance of developing competency** related to working with Indigenous students and families
- Need to **Indigenize School Psychology programs** to reflect the experiences and concerns of Indigenous peoples
 - Include explicit acknowledgement and remembrance of the harms inflicted on Indigenous peoples by the profession
- **Need to recruit more Indigenous peoples to the profession of psychology** and – more specifically – school psychology
 - Necessary to remove barriers to postsecondary education often experienced by Indigenous students

Relevance to Training

- The profession of psychology has an obligation to students being trained in applied psychology to ensure that they can demonstrate Indigenous cultural literacy, engage in discussion about the value of Indigenous knowledge, and identify areas in which Indigenous knowledge can be balanced with Western practices (CPA, 2018)
- This is especially true for school psychologists
 - Nature of the job means that they are highly likely to meet Indigenous students and families in their practice
- Graduate training in school psychology must include curriculum and practicum/internship/residency experiences that include exposure to Indigenous epistemologies and practices
- Useful and meaningful professional development should be provided to develop enhanced competence and capability among more experienced clinicians.

Relevance to Training

- Training opportunities must focus on **depth and breadth of experience and content** to ensure graduate students and practicing psychologists develop a holistic conceptualization of cultural competency
- We propose implementing a **transformative approach** to training:
 - Focus is on the development of critical thinking skills that allows students to engage in problem-solving and thinking in a way that acknowledges that learning and behaviour are influenced by several factors in a complex way (Lopez and Bursztyn, 2013)
 - Trainees conceptualize diversity issue by integrating values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours and understanding their interactions with variables such as culture, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and SES

Relevance to Training

- A transformative approach to training is consistent with the Indigenization approach to psychology training described by Ansloos et al. (2022, p.555):

“Indigenous peoples and perspectives [should be] reflected and respected within educational experiences”


- Indigenization in applied psychology training programs therefore include content and pedagogy that reflect the experiences and concerns of Indigenous peoples across all courses and, where possible, practicum/residency experiences
 - Include explicit acknowledgement and remembrance of the harms inflicted on Indigenous peoples by the profession as well as culturally relevant content that values Indigenous knowledge (Ansloos et al., 2022)

Relevance to Training

- Increased Indigenization efforts could result in more Indigenous students enrolling in psychology graduate programs and increase the number of Indigenous faculty in these programs
 - Decrease barriers for Indigenous students
- Encourage Indigenous graduates of school psychology programs to return to communities to provide mental health care
 - Ideal model of mental health services provision in communities that may not have easy access to hospital or health centre (see CPA, 2023)
 - Prevention approach



Closing Thoughts



This work is a **first step** in understanding the gaps in knowledge and training needs of Nova Scotia school psychologists

It is essential to work with Indigenous educators, knowledge keepers, and communities to understand their experiences with and needs related to school psychological services

Thank You

We gratefully acknowledge the school psychologists and Indigenous educators who participated in and advised us about this research.

We gratefully acknowledge the support of IURN for their generous funding of this work.

The first author would like to acknowledge the support of the women at the Acorn Writing Retreat who provided feedback and thoughts on early drafts of this work.



A young boy with curly hair, wearing a green and white checkered shirt, is sitting at a wooden desk in a classroom. He is smiling and raising his right hand. In the background, other students are seated at their desks, and the classroom walls are decorated with various posters and drawings. The word "Questions" is overlaid in white text on the right side of the image.

Questions