



What is a Bilingual School Psychologist?

A National Survey of the Credentialing Bodies of School Psychologists

Marlene Sotelo-Dynega, Laura Geddes, Amanda Luhrs, & Jason Teague

St. John's University

ABSTRACT

What is a bilingual school psychologist? The researchers of the present study surveyed national credentialing bodies of school psychologists to determine which States have a credential for bilingual school psychologists, and of those that do, what are the requirements of the credential? Fifty out of fifty-one state credentialing bodies were contacted. Results of the survey indicate that two states: Illinois and New York, have a credential for bilingual school psychologists. California's Association of School Psychologists offers a certificate.

INTRODUCTION

The majority of school psychologists are credentialed by their respective State Departments of Education and are issued a "certification" which in turn allows them to function within the title and role of a "school psychologist" in the public schools. "Practice credentials legally authorize an individual to use a particular title, render particular services and ensure that these specific titles and practices are used by professionals who meet standards of high quality within their field of expertise." (Fagan, & Sachs Wise, 2007, p. 234) Although there are no "official" specializations within the profession of school psychology, there are a group of practitioners that consider themselves as "bilingual school psychologists". The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) recently created a *bilingual school psychologist directory* that includes approximately 316 members that consider themselves as "bilingual school psychologists". Together they represent 38 states and 39 different languages, with Spanish being the most common (209). Considering that not all school psychologists are members of NASP, it is safe to assume that this is gross under-representation of the number of bilingual school psychologists practicing nationally.

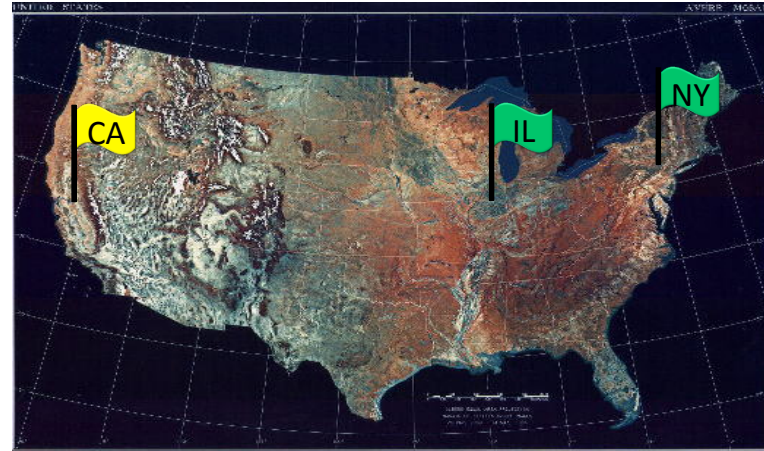
It has been estimated that there are over 5 million English language learners (ELLs) enrolled in the nation's public schools (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000), but the demographics of the profession of school psychology is not representative of the United States at large (Curtis, Hunley, Walker, & Baker, 1999). ELLs (along with other Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) children) are often suspected of having trouble learning, due to the process and nature of the development of a second language, and are then referred for an evaluation to rule out an underlying disability (National Education Association, 2007). Once referred, it is common practice that a "bilingual school psychologist" should conduct an assessment in the native language of the student. Although this is a logical belief, "the mere possession of the capacity to communicate in an individual's native language does not ensure appropriate, nondiscriminatory assessment of that individual. Traditional assessment practices and their inherent biases can be easily replicated in any number of languages" (Flanagan, McGrew, & Ortiz, 2000, p. 291).

The researchers of the present study wanted to investigate whether the title of "bilingual school psychologist" represents a psychologist that has had specific training on effective nondiscriminatory assessment, intervention, and consultation procedures? Or does whether the title simply represents a practitioner that can speak two (or more) languages? To answer these questions the researchers conducted a national survey of SDOEs and other credentialing bodies to determine the existence and requirements for bilingual school psychologists nationally.

METHOD

Fifty-one credentialing agencies (State Departments of Education, N=49; Commission for Teacher Certification, N=1; Board of Psychology Credentials, N=1) of school psychologists were contacted via telephone. Telephone numbers for the respective agencies were obtained via NASP's *National School Psychology Certification and Licensure Online Resource List*. Contact information that was not listed in the document was obtained via an internet search. Once the appropriate representative was reached, they were asked a set of questions related to credentialing of "bilingual school psychologists". Responses were obtained for fifty out of the fifty-one agencies that were contacted.

RESULTS



CALIFORNIA Certificate

- California Association of School Psychologists
- ✓ School Psychologist Certification
- ✓ Two years of practice as a school psychologist (full-time)
- ✓ Documentation of 15 hours of post credential training (minimum 3 hours in each area):
 - Second Language Acquisition
 - Educating English Language Learners
 - Culturally & Linguistically Diverse Perspectives
 - Bilingual Assessment
- ✓ Required 16 hour CASP workshop
- ✓ Competency based on submission of two comprehensive reports of English learners

ILLINOIS

Bilingual Special Education Approval State Board of Education

- ✓ School Psychologist Certification
- ✓ Coursework:
 - Assessment of the Bilingual Student
 - OR
 - Psychological/Educational Assessment of the LEP Student with Disabilities
- ✓ Language proficiency in the non-English language

NEW YORK STATE

Bilingual Education Extension State Education Department

- ✓ School Psychologist Certification
- ✓ 15 semester hours of coursework:
 - Cultural Perspectives of Bilingual Education
 - Theory & Practice of Bilingual/Multicultural Education
 - Methods of Providing Services in the Native Language
 - Supervised fieldwork
- ✓ Language proficiency in English & other language

CONCLUSIONS

- ✓ With the exception of New York and Illinois, there are no credentials or training criteria for school psychologists that are bilingual.
- ✓ Implications:
 - What methods are bilingual school psychologists using to assess children?
 - What kind of training prepared them to use these methods?
 - Are these practices effective?
 - Norm Referenced Tests
 - When using norm-referenced tests practitioners should be aware of the potential for bias towards different cultural groups.
 - The absence of the systematic inclusion of acculturation levels, and English language proficiency invalidates the comparison of the performance of CLD individuals to the standardization sample (Ortiz, 2008).
 - Bilingual Assessment
 - Bilingual assessment is the evaluation of a bilingual, by a bilingual, in a bilingual manner and requires that the examiner:
 - Knowledgeable about, and familiar with the examinee's culture, have prerequisite training and education in non-discriminatory assessment. Speaks the examinee's native language fluently (Ortiz & Ochoa, 2005, p. 161)
 - Bilingual assessment is a new endeavor with virtually no research to guide the process of evaluation or interpretation (Ortiz & Ochoa, 2005, p. 161)
 - Truly bilingual psychologists are scarce (Ochoa, Powell, & Robles-Peña, 1996).
 - Culturally and Linguistically Diverse students are overrepresented in special education (National Education Association, 2007).
 - ELLs are at risk of being over-represented in districts with small ELL populations (Keller-Allen, 2006)
 - ELLs are at risk of being under-represented in district with ELL populations over 100 (Keller-Allen, 2006)

REFERENCES

Curtis, M.J., Hunley, S.A., Walker, K.J., & Baker, A.C. (1999). Demographic characteristics and professional practices of school psychology. *School Psychology Review, 28*, 104-116.

Fagan, T.E., & Sachs Wise, P. (2007). *School psychology: Past, present, and future (3rd)*. MD: NASP.

Flanagan, D.P., McGrew, K.S., Ortiz, S.O. (2000). *The Wechsler intelligence scales and G/Gc theory: A contemporary approach to interpretation*. MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Keller-Allen, C. (2006). English language learners with disabilities: Identification and other state policies and issues. VA: Project Forum, National Association of State Directors of Special Education.

National Association of School Psychologists. *National School Psychology Certification and Licensure Online Resource List*. <http://www.naspschoolpsych.org/certification/cslr.html>. Retrieved 07/06/2008.

National Education Association. (2007). *Truth in labeling: Disproportionality in special education*. Washington, D.C.: NEA.

Ochoa, S.H., Powell, M.P., & Robles-Peña, R. (1996). School psychologists' assessment practices with bilingual and limited-English proficient students. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment, 14*, 250-275.

Ortiz, S.O. (2009). Bilingual-multicultural assessment with the WISC-IV. In D.P. Flanagan, & A.S. Kaufman (Eds.). *Essentials of WISC-IV assessment*. Second edition. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Ortiz, S.O., & Ochoa, S.H. (2005). Conceptual measurement and methodological issues in cognitive assessment of culturally and linguistically diverse individuals. In R.L. Rhodes, S.H. Ochoa, & S.O. Ortiz (Eds.). *Assessing culturally and linguistically diverse students: A practical guide*. NY: Guilford.

U.S. Bureau of the Census. (2000). *Census 2000 supplementary survey summary tables*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.