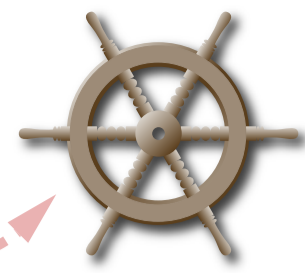




Charting Your Course FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



Do You Know Your School Psychologist?

By Natasha Yorke-Phillip, Co-Vice-President, PISA

Over the past two years, it has become apparent that the role of “education specialists” within the Nova Scotia government, and the NSTU, itself, has been widely misunderstood or unknown. Collectively our activism within our union as well as our self-advocacy as a profession has been quiet, and we now understand the need to change the narrative. The Psychologists in Schools Association (PISA) was founded in 2005 with 33 initial members. Currently, PISA has approximately 250 registered members. As our very membership within the NSTU is in jeopardy (having lost membership this current academic year, and new graduates having been refused membership), more than ever, we need fellow NSTU members to know who we are and what we do to ensure our role is understood, valued and that our place at the proverbial table of the Nova Scotia education system is maintained.

Getting a place at the table is both a journey and a commitment to education. Becoming a school psychologist begins with a Bachelor degree in Psychology, with a required honors thesis program, followed by graduate work. In Atlantic Canada, that means completing the Master of Arts in School Psychology (MASP) program at Mount Saint Vincent University. This program is highly competitive, with only about six students being accepted each year. Over the last two years, over 50% of the program’s graduates left the province.

Within the MASP program, courses focus on child and adolescent neurodevelopment, learning, behavioural supports, resiliency and risk factors, assessment and intervention, ethical practice, and consultation and collaboration with other professionals. There are also supervised practicum and internship components totalling over 1,000 hours.

Once these requirements are complete, the school psychology graduate must register as a candidate with the provincial licensing body — the Nova Scotia Board of Examiners in Psychology (NSBEP). It requires that candidates for registration complete a period of supervision under a registered psychologist for a period of four years (6,000 hours of practice), pass the North American standardized exam — the Examination of Professional Practice in Psychology — and finally, complete an oral exam conducted by at least three members of NSBEP. Once these requirements are met, one becomes a registered psychologist within the province of Nova Scotia. Professional fees are required to maintain this licence, totalling, on average, \$1280.25 annually. As well, we are required by law to deliver competent, ethical and professional services as outlined by the Psychologists Act (2000). Within the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), school psychologists hold the Advanced Teacher’s Certificate 1. This is the equivalent certification of a Master’s of Education. Currently, there is no recognition for the additional years of training required to become a registered psychologist.

Understanding who we are is important but what we do and how we contribute to the provincial education system is paramount. Recently, our role has been viewed as somehow “other” or outside the realm of the classroom. We are members of educational teams within our schools. Our practice does not exist as an add-on or a service that occurs in a vacuum. All of our services require a collaborative approach with all school staff, along with the family. Psycho-educational assessments are a component of what we do, but to define our services as such is restrictive, too narrowly focussed, and a severe under representation of our contribution to students.

We provide support, insight, and advocacy for our students from the time they enter our schools until the moment they transition out into our communities. We are valued members of the program planning teams within our schools. We provide professional development on a variety of topics within the field of development, neuropsychology, behaviour, trauma, and mental health for students, educational assistants, school support staff, and fellow educators. We are part of the teams that respond when tragedies occur in our communities. We provide consultation and supports for behaviours that have overwhelmed teachers’ usual classroom management strategies. We help students, parents/guardians, and educators understand why learning in a particular way is challenging and how to use strengths to support learning. We research new approaches that are evidence-based and can improve the quality of education for our students. We advocate for safe and inclusive schools that offer culturally responsive learning. We advocate for the mental health supports needed in our schools by adding our voices to committees and policy development both within the education system and our communities at large. Our role is multi-faceted because we are educational specialists who provide much more than the implementation of standardized assessment tools. Therefore, our role should not be quantified by how many names appear on a wait-list for a service that should only occur when all other supports and interventions have been exhausted.

As the future of School Psychologists within the DEECD is unclear, our focus will be on providing clarity around who we are, what we do, and our role as members of the valuable educational teams supporting the struggling and diverse learners of Nova Scotia. “Specialists” within the field of education will be impacted by decisions made within the government, which ultimately, will impact the vulnerable population of students we serve. It is essential for school psychologists to continue to work collaboratively with our colleagues in education, to deliver competent, ethical, and professional mental health services.

Have you heard about SPAA?

By Denise Boulton, President of the Speech Language Pathologists and Audiologists Association

The Speech Language Pathologists and Audiologists Association (SPAA) could be considered a relative baby when compared to some professional associations within the NSTU. Established in 1981, SPAA has been consistently providing school-based Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists relevant and research-based professional development opportunities. SPAA has traditionally been comprised predominantly of speech-language pathologists, though other professionals within the NSTU are also members. SLPs, as they are more commonly known, are often thought of as ‘those professionals that work on helping students say their sounds’. Though improving students’ articulation skills is an important part of our work in schools, this vastly under-represents the support services this group of professionals are able to offer. SLPs can be found completing assessments or leading therapy sessions with students (individually or classroom-based) in areas including articulation, receptive and expressive language, social communication, phonological awareness and literacy, augmentative and alternative communication, assistive technology, fluency, and voice difficulties. SLPs typically work within a circuit of schools that can change in number from year to year. SPAA works hard, then, to provide professionally relevant professional development (often bringing in international speakers) to help these professionals keep their practice relevant.

Though a small group, the SPAA executive and conference organizing committees are committed to the purpose of being able to provide members with the opportunity for access to quality professional development. For many years of its existence, and as the financial situation permits, SPAA has been able to offer a limited number of PD grants to its members. These grants are awarded on a first-come, first served basis. This has been a well-received initiative by SPAA members, especially since SLPs are required to have at least 40 hours every three years to keep up their certification with Speech-Language and Audiology Canada (SAC).

SPAA’s October conferences typically consist of one well-known speaker for the full day providing PD in an area of their expertise. Recent examples of such speakers include Dr. Scott Yaruss, Dr. Diane German and Dr. Wayne Secord. Dr. Yaruss, a highly respected leader in the area of treatment for stuttering, presented at the October 2016 Conference. Dr. Diane German, author of the “Test of Word Finding” and expert in this area, presented in 2017. We have also had the dynamic Dr. Wayne Secord, co-author of the “Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals”, present at our conference in 2009 on the topic of Leading Best Practice in Communication Sciences and Disorders. Attendees at the SPAA Conference typically number between 100 to 170 each year. As an extra option for professional development for its members, SPAA has also provided specific training at other points in the year when there has been an interest. Some examples of specialized training that has been offered include ‘Prompts for Restructuring Oral Muscular Phonetic Targets (PROMPT)’, the ‘Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)’, and ‘Pragmatic Organization Dynamic Display (PODD)’ communication books .

Serving on the SPAA Executive provides a great opportunity to network with like-minded colleagues from across the province as well as be a part of decision making that will impact our professional practice. The executive meets at a minimum of three times per year in order to organize supports that include, but are not limited to: professional development opportunities at the annual provincial conference; newsletters/social media supports and updates; the website; review of PD grant applications as applicable; and networking with other professional associations such

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SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

support students' ability to learn and teachers' ability to teach.

THEY ARE EXPERTS IN



Learning



Behavior



Mental Health



School Systems

THEY PROVIDE

- Academic, behavioral, and mental health supports
- Evaluation, assessment, and data analysis
- Consultation with teachers and families
- Culturally responsive services
- Crisis prevention and response



THEY SUPPORT

- Struggling and diverse learners
- Student achievement and well-being
- Safe and supportive learning environments
- School-family-community partnerships
- School-wide data-based decision making



THEY SERVE

in schools and other educational and clinical settings.



RECOMMENDED RATIO

1 school psychologist per 500-700 students

Lowering barriers to learning is critical to children's success in school.

Contact your school psychologist to find out how they can help.

School Psychologists:
Helping Children Thrive • In School • At Home • In Life
www.nasponline.org





Above are participants at the 2018 SPAA conference

as the Speech and Hearing Association of Nova Scotia (SHANS), as appropriate. The past year has seen some significant changes for many of SPAA’s membership as the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has made changes to Teacher Certification that directly impacts student support specialists (which includes school SLPs and Audiologists) working in public schools. Like all professional associations, SPAA’s primary role has traditionally been to aid in planning professional development for our members. However, in times and situations such as these SPAA executive members also act as advocates for the speech-language pathologists and audiologists who work in the public schools within our province. As a professional association within the NSTU, we will continue to work with the NSTU to ensure our membership feels supported and represented within their schools.

The SPAA is an active, productive, successful professional association of the NSTU and hopes to continue this status into the distant future!