

EDITORIAL.
SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES
FACING ECONOMIC CHALLENGES

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Listening to Psychologists in the Educational Systems (here abbreviated as School Psychologists) of various European countries, you hear the same serious complaint nearly everywhere: Shrinking budgets in public administration risk School Psychologists to disappear from educational systems. Education International (2009) concluded from a study in 43 countries that the total expenditure in education has been reduced by 5-10% due to the global economic crisis. In 2013 France closed 3 university units educating School Psychologists. Instead of the internationally recommended proportion of 1 School Psychologist per 1000 students, The ESPIL Project found that the 'statistically average School Psychologist' in Europe:

- Serves 10-30 schools with 2100 students and 180 teachers
- Is female
- Aged 40+
- Works in public administration
- 37-40 hours per week
- Has a salary equivalent to a secondary school teacher
- Finalizes 5 years of psychology study with a master degree
- Has rarely professional experience outside home country
- Gets hardly any incentives for continued professional development.

The critical situation in Europe raises the question: Is it economically and politically wise to cut jobs of School Psychologists in times of economic downturn? The answer is not easy as we hardly have any comparable data in Europe on School Psychological Services including their impact. We still need to create the evidence that Psychologists in the Educational System contribute efficiently to prosperity and well-being in society, especially in times of crisis, when also the health conditions of

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citizens are decreasing with long term effects on themselves and their families. For example, Stuckler et al. (2009) studied 26 European countries 1970-2007 in regard to health and economic challenges. The study concluded that 1% increase in unemployment was associated with a 0.8% increase in suicides among citizens below the age of 65, and a similar increase in homicides. It was also found (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development - OECD, 2013) that increased unemployment above 3% was associated with a higher death rate from alcohol abuse.

Starting with the *field of work* of School Psychologists: What can an employer expect to get from a School Psychologist across Europe? It is difficult to say precisely what School Psychologists are doing as their work is based on the needs of societies. Thus professional activities vary across time, countries, culture, and availability of resources. Nevertheless EFPA has developed a matrix of a professional profile of psychologists in education covering all EU Member States. Accordingly European School Psychologists have functions mainly in the three areas of prevention, evaluation, intervention and work at different levels, individual, group, system and society. Some examples are listed below:

Most well-known among the population is the School Psychologist assessing individual children (Evaluation/individual). But there is much more (see Figure 1), e.g.:

- Dr. Jean-Claude Guillemard (F) – Representative of ISPA at UNESCO in regard to the Rights of the Child and Prof. Maria Rita Parsi (IT)- Member of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child;
- Claire Leconte (F) has researched the biorhythm of humans and the school rhythm resulting in a major debate in France on school schedules;
- Hundreds of School Psychologists in Europe have been trained by the European School Psychology Centre for Training to implement crisis intervention management in schools;
- Several programs have been developed to train teachers managing job related stress;
- Prof. Carmel Cefai is the Director of the European Centre for Educational Resilience & Socio-Emotional Health in Malta. He has developed school based programs to enhance social emotional learning and he has founded the European Network for Social Emotional Competence in Children and Young People (ENSEC)
- The evidence based Kiva program has been developed by psychologists to reduce bullying in schools and is now implemented with support of School Psychologists in nearly 90 % of Finnish schools.

School Psychologists play a particular role in society as they are covering a broad area of knowledge related to child development. They have a similar position in the educational system as general medical doctors in the health system. They are *generalists with a role of primary prevention* on the basis of a holistic approach. The role of a generalist allows School

Psychologists to fill a key position as a coordinator bridging the educational, health and social sector. According to Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological model of human development, School Psychological Services are part of the mesosystem. They connect within this system, i.e. schools, parents, child, peers and the community (see Figure 2).





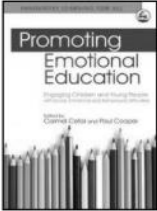





Professional Profile European Psychologists in Education				
Level/Function	Society	System	Group	Individual
Prevention	 <p>Ed. Psych. Prof. Maria Rita Parsi (IT) UN Committee Rights of the Child http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/CRC/CVMembers/MariaRitaParsi.pdf</p> <p>Dr. Jean-Claude Guillemard (F) – Representative of ISPA at UNESCO in regard to the Rights of the Child http://www.nepes.eu/?q=node/840</p>	 <p>European School Psychology Centre for Training www.espct.eu</p>  <p>Prof. Salmivalli (FI) Bullying prevention program in schools http://www.kivaprogram.net/</p>	 <p>Health Promotion Program for Teachers</p> <p>http://web.spi.pt/stressless/docs/Brochure.pdf</p>	<p>Individual career counseling in Luxemburg in an multidisciplinary and multiprofessional setting http://www.anelo.lu/fr/maison-de-orientation</p>
Intervention	<p>Creating nets of relevant partners to improve child development, i.e. Ed. Psych. Dr. Ursula Wilhelm promotes an information platform in Austria http://www.lsr-t.gv.at/sites/lstsn.at/files/upload_schulpsychologie/Kindlerplattform-IBK%202007.pdf</p>	 <p>Prof. Carmel Cefal (MT) European Network for Social Emotional Competence in Children and Young People (ENSEC) http://www.enseceurope.org</p>	 <p>Ed. Psych. Dr. McKay (UK)– Multidimensional School Intervention Program – West Dunbartonshire Literacy Initiative 1997 – 2007 http://www.nepes.eu/files/Tommy%20MacKay%20Literacy%20Initiative.pdf</p>	<p>Individual online counseling (D) https://schulpsychologische-beratungsstelle.beranet.info/</p>
Evaluation	 <p>Prof. Claire Leconte (F) http://www.amazon.fr/Des-rythmes-de-vie-aux-scolaires/dp/2757402188</p>	 <p>Dr. Ludwig Bilz (D) Evaluation of risk factors in school for mental health of students</p>	 <p>Tiina-Naartits-Linn (EST) Evaluation of interventions to prevent early school drop out http://fbsc-net.eu/eng/PPT/Naartis.pdf</p> <p>Evaluation of work of counseling teachers in schools (A) http://www.lsr-t.gv.at/sites/lstsn.at/files/upload_schulpsychologie/Evaluation-SB%202007.pdf</p>	 <p>Individual assessment</p>

Figure 1. European Psychologists in Education - professional profile

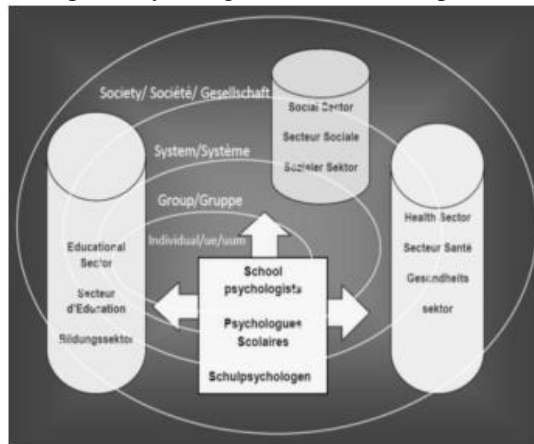


Figure 2. Connections of school psychologists to social, health, and educational sectors

The following example will illustrate the bridging position of School Psychologists, not only among various persons, but also among different sectors as education, social affairs or health.

Hannah, student of a 1st primary class in Belgium has difficulties learning to read and write. The School Psychologist will assess Hannah and talk to her parents to identify barriers to her academic performance. He finds out that she has visual perceptual difficulties as well as low self-esteem. Thus he refers Hannah to an ophthalmologist for further assessment and treatment. Hannah's parents are unemployed and do not have sufficient financial means to pay Hannah's treatment. Thus the School Psychologist works together with the social assistant to figure out available financial support by the state. He would also talk to Hannah's teachers to explain the background of her learning difficulties and to organize together with the school team a learning support program and also the implementation of a social emotional learning program in the classroom. The School Psychologist would then evaluate after a reasonable period of time the impact of the interventions and will act accordingly.

This cross-sectorial support of academic achievement and mental health promotion is a powerful prevention strategy to interrupt the vicious circle of poverty: academic underachievement and health comprising behavior, unemployment, social exclusion and again poverty. "Psychology has the potential to help bring about a significantly better world, in keeping with its ethical mandate to promote human welfare. Yet too often we settle for too little" (Fox & Prilleltensky, 1997, p. 4).

From the European Union health studies we know that about 10-20% of European young people suffer from mental health issues. Only 10-15% of these young people received help from existing psycho-social services. This is a missed chance since we know that early intervention is efficient in

preventing the development of serious mental health problems in adulthood. This is not a minor issue:

- Mental illness caused in 2010 costs of 450 Billion € for the EU health system (Olesen et al., 2012);
- The costs due to mental illness represent 3-4% of the EU gross domestic product (World Health Organization, 2003);
- By 2030 depression will be the most common disease among EU employees (World Health Organization, 2004).

With regard to health promotion, a UK study stated that one invested Pound Sterling in the prevention of conduct disorders at the age of 10 through school-based social - emotional learning programs returns after 6 years 34 Pound Sterling to society. The main gains happen in the social justice system due to the reduction of crimes (Knapp, McDaid, & Personnage, 2011; Romeo, Knapp, & Scott, 2006). According to these results we can conclude that the application of evidence based social-emotional learning programs like Mind Matter (n.d.) and Kiva (n.d.) developed, implemented and evaluated by School Psychologists contributes to well-being, social stability and prosperity of societies and saves at the same time a lot of money to society.

Coming back to Hannah's case – What happened to her in real life is as follows: her form teacher called in a speech therapist (whom she knew personally), which assessed Hannah and recommended speech therapy. Despite no major progress in Hannah's reading and writing skills by the end of school the term, the teacher wrote a very positive report about Hannah's development as she felt responsible for the provision of extra help and for Hannah's learning results. The speech therapist also confirmed a positive development as a result of her work. Can we learn from this example?

The position of a School Psychologist is rather weak, if responsibilities in schools are not clarified and if a coordinating role is not assumed. In case the School Psychologist is seen as one professional among others in the educational system - as in the Hannah example - then the work of psychologists in schools is very competitive. A Belgian study by the Liege University on "What are typical professional activities of psychologists" confirmed the highly competitive role of School Psychologists by documenting that nearly 70% of School Psychologist's activities are also provided by other professionals (Hansez, Côte, & Mormont, 2008).

As a coordinator, the position of a School Psychologist is strong in promoting well-being in children. This will only be possible if schools and society recognize the global approach, the neutral position, the need of independency from school authorities as well as the value of coordination.

I would like to mention another school psychological example, which shows the trend towards *systemic work*. Dr. MacKay, a UK-based School Psychologist, ran a 10-year early multidimensional intervention

study, known as the West Dunbartonshire Literacy Initiative (MacKay, 2007). The aim was to address social inclusion, underachievement and illiteracy in this socially disadvantaged area of Scotland. In 1997, 21 % students left secondary school functionally illiterate. In 2007, only 0.5 % students remained to have low scores in reading. Keeping these figures in mind, it is useful to look at European Policies.

One benchmark of the EU Agenda in 2020 is to achieve having less than 15% low achieving 15 year old students in reading, math and science by 2020 (European Commission, n.d.).

How does the situation in Europe look like? In 2009 the reading performance with a 25.9% share of low achieving boys is about twice the share of low achieving girls (13.3%). On average, the reading levels of students with migrant background lagged far behind those of native-born, even when taking the socio-economic status into account. We are not there yet! As it may be seen in Table 1, there is room for improvement in Romania as in other European countries in regard to the 2020 Agenda benchmark, raising the question regarding the need of more School Psychologists in order to help students succeed, like in the example of Dr. McKay in Scotland illustrates.

Table 1. Low achieving 15 year olds (European Commission, 2009)

	Reading 2009	Maths 2009	Science 2009
EU 26	19.6	22.2	17.7
Belgium	17.7	19.1	18.0
Bulgaria	41.0	47.1	38.8
Czech Rep.	23.1	22.3	17.3
Denmark	15.2	17.1	16.6
Germany	18.5	18.6	14.8
Estonia	13.3	12.7	8.3
Ireland	17.2	20.8	15.2
Greece	21.3	30.3	25.3
Spain	19.8	22.5	19.3
Italy	21.0	24.9	20.6
Cyprus	:	:	:
Latvia	17.6	22.6	14.7
Lithuania	24.3	26.2	14.7
Luxembourg	26.0	23.9	23.7
Hungary	17.7	22.3	14.1
Malta	36.3	33.7	32.5
Netherlands	14.3	13.4	13.2
Austria	27.5	23.2	21.0
Poland	15.0	20.5	13.1
Portugal	17.6	23.7	16.5
Romania	40.4	47.0	41.4
Slovenia	21.2	20.3	14.8
Slovakia	22.3	21.0	19.3
Finland	8.1	7.8	6.0
Sweden	17.4	21.1	19.1

	Reading 2009	Maths 2009	Science 2009
UK	18.4	20.2	15.0
Croatia	22.5	33.2	18.5
Montenegro	:	:	:
Iceland	16.8	17.0	17.9
MK	:	:	:
Serbia	:	:	:
Turkey	24.5	42.1	30.0
Liechtenstein	15.6	9.5	11.3
Norway	14.9	18.2	15.8

Note: “:” = data not available

Economic studies concluded that if Europe achieves this benchmark of less than 15% of 15 year old low achievers - the aggregate gains for the EU economy are around 21 Trillion €! (Hanushek & Woessman, 2011). Imagine, how much money Dr. Mac Kay saved for the Scottish Government reducing the percentage of illiterate students from 21% to 0.5% and how much he has promoted well-being and academic achievement among the Scottish youth. Kathleen is one of the 30.000 students who participated in the Literacy Initiative. She said “When all this started I couldn’t read. I was a failure. Now I have a cupboard full of books at home. My favorite authors are Roald Dahl and J.K. Rowling. Now I am a success” (MacKay, 2007).

Due to economic challenges, we can currently see two main trends at the political level having an impact on the profession of School Psychologists:

- Investment in primary prevention in order to save long term cost in health, education and social affairs, and
- Pooling resources in public administration by developing cross-sectorial service integration.

A brand new reform project from Belgium – which is 100% in line with the European policy recommendations for future developments - illustrates these trends: The Educational, Social and Health Ministry of the German Speaking Community Belgium are developing together an innovative integrated service for youth (9 months to 20 years of age), including former services of School Psychologists, in order to improve the healthy development of young people. N.E.P.E.S. has been asked to help coordinate this project as School Psychologists are the only professionals able to bridge the three sectors of education, health and social affairs due to their broad education and their global approach. The service will start in September 2014 working on the basis of the UN Convention regarding the Rights of the Child and will promote a participatory and community based approach. Members of this service will be nurses, social assistants, psychologists, public health experts, medical doctors and ICT experts (Network of European Psychologists in the Education System - NEPES, 2013).

Preventive work, as well as systemic work with schools as an organization, is becoming more important in the professional spectrum under the condition that less posts are available. Thus, due to the decrease of posts of School Psychologists, the work focus changes from individual to systemic work. Future work in multidisciplinary and multi-professional services makes it inevitable to strengthen the professional identity of School Psychologists (National Association of School Psychologists - NASP, 2010). They need to develop:

- Core areas of the above EFPA matrix of professional profiles, so that common basic professional competences and activities can be described, which each School Psychologist in Europe will provide;
- EU Quality Standards of School Psychological Services;
- EU Quality Standards of the education and training of School Psychologists according to the EFPA benchmark “Europsy” based on professional competences (EuroPsy, n.d.);
- Increased European collaboration among School Psychologists including study visits, job shadowing, common EU projects, exchange of best practices, linking research and practice.

Summarizing the work of School Psychologists in Europe we can answer the one million Euro question: *Investing in school psychology during times of financial crisis* - as the German Speaking Community in Belgium is promoting - is:

- Cost effective prevention to improve resources in at least three sectors (education, health, social affairs), saving important evitable long term costs for society and evitable suffering of citizens;
- An investment in the present and future healthy development of our youth and later adults;
- An investment in social and economic stability of Europe over the coming decades.

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Received
November 2013

Accepted
November 2013