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# Comparisons of Rural and Urban School Psychologists in Nebraska

Erin Marie Boldt Reiff  
*University of Nebraska at Omaha*

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COMPARISONS OF RURAL AND URBAN  
SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS IN NEBRASKA

A Ed.S. Field Project

Presented to the

Department of School Psychology

and the

Faculty of the Graduate College

University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Specialist in Education

University of Nebraska at Omaha

by

Erin Marie Boldt Reiff

September 2004

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# ACCEPTANCE PAGE

## ED.S. FIELD PROJECT ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College,  
University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the Ed. S. degree,  
University of Nebraska at Omaha.

### Committee

*Melodie Landis, Ph.D*  
*Nah Beaman PhD*

Chairperson

Date

*Lisa Kelly Vance*  
*9/11/04*

# COMPARISONS OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS IN NEBRASKA

Erin Marie Boldt Reiff, M.S., Ed.S.

University of Nebraska, 2005

Advisor: Dr. Lisa Kelly-Vance

In 1975, Congress passed The Education for All Handicapped Children Act, Public Law 94-142. It became the driving force in the change of services that are provided by school psychologists. Rural school districts and entire states were mandated to provide and implement plans for the delivery of free and appropriate educational services to all handicapped children. There was an abundance of research that examined the differences of rural school psychologists to urban school psychologists and the services they provided. However, by the mid-1980s, the differences that were found earlier had diminished. The one exception was the approach that they used to provide services. Rural school psychologists used a generalist approach while their urban counterparts used a specialist approach. Through generalist approach, rural school psychologists were able to overcome the disadvantages that the rural setting had initially produced and therefore able to provide a wide array of services. As a result, rural school psychologists have the ability to define their role in the school and community. This study will focus on the current roles, the generalist versus specialist activities, job satisfaction, role conflicts, and the ability to define their roles as school psychologists in urban Nebraska compared to school psychologists in rural Nebraska.

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## Comparisons of Rural and Urban School Psychologists in Nebraska

Prior to World War II, there were no formal training programs in Nebraska for school psychologists. Instead, itinerant psychologists such as George Kelly and T. Ernest Newland traveled the rural areas of the country providing psychological services, educational evaluations, and professional consultation to schools, children, and parents (Helge, 1985). Nebraska, in the late 1930s, began using field clinics to meet the needs of rural schools. Contract psychologists worked for brief periods in field clinics, where cases were referred from various agencies, including schools. The first two clinics were located in western Nebraska, 100 miles apart and 250 miles from Lincoln (Guydish, Jackson, Markley, & Zelhart, 1985).

The services provided by school psychologists changed very little until 1975. In 1975, federal legislation changed the way that school psychologists were required to provide services and passed The Education for All Handicapped Children Act, Public Law 94-142. It became the driving force in the change of services that are provided by school psychologists. Public Law 94-142 mandated the right of all children to an appropriate education regardless of the nature of their handicap. Subsequent to the passage of The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (Public Law 94-142), rural school districts and entire states were mandated to provide and implement plans for the delivery of free and appropriate educational services to all handicapped children.

Distant from urban and university clinics, and hindered by their smaller size and consequent inability to support psychological services for students, many rural areas were without school psychological services as late as the 1970s (Guydish, et al., 1985; Helge, 1985; Reschly & Connolly, 1990). The appearance of school psychologists in rural settings as full-time employees of school districts is believed to be a relatively recent phenomenon, directly related to the implementation of the Federal Education of the Handicapped Act, Public Law 94-142 (Reschly & Connolly). In 1981, it was reported that these services had grown 111% in rural areas since the passage of Public Law 94-142 (Fagan, 1981). Public Law 94-142 has been the most prominent recent force in the development of more available and appropriate school psychological services in rural areas (Fagan & Hughes, 1985).

Following the implementation of Public Law 94-142, researchers (e.g., Anderson, Hohenshil, & Brown, 1984, Fagan, 1981, Goldwasser, Meyers, Christenson, & Graden, 1983, Hughes & Clark, 1981, Reschly & Connolly, 1990) were interested in the effects it would have on the services that were provided by school psychologists in rural and urban schools. They were interested in studying the changes of the services that were provided and if the services were provided differently between settings. Researchers examined the disadvantages and advantages of providing services in a rural setting compared to an urban setting. The researchers also examined the roles of school psychologists in regard to the roles they perceived themselves doing in comparison to how others in the different settings perceived their roles.



In 1977, Cook and Patterson compared the roles of school psychologists in rural Nebraska to school psychologists in urban Nebraska, and found that while school psychologist roles were similar, the amount of time spent in those roles differed between rural and urban areas. Since the mid-1980s, little research has been conducted to examine if there are differences between the roles of school psychologists in rural and urban areas, thus there remains little updated information examining different roles. The literature has instead turned its focus to examining the role of school psychologists without taking into consideration urban versus rural areas. Since 1975, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act's name has changed to Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, has been revised several times, and is currently undergoing another revision. With each change, the services school psychologists are required to provide have been impacted. Regular updates of information of the professional practices of school psychologists are essential in planning for training, professional development and role changes (Bramlett, Murphy, Johnson, Wallingsford, and Hall, 2002).

The purpose of this study is to examine the role differences between rural and urban school psychologists in Nebraska and compare their roles to the roles of school psychologists that have been discussed in the previous literature. The study will focus on the current roles, the generalist versus specialist activities, job satisfaction, role conflicts that occur, and the ability to define their roles as urban and rural school psychologists. Information gained from this research may help in the professional development of school psychologists, their training, and the changing of their roles as school psychologists.

*Defining Rural and Urban.*

When evaluating research regarding rural schools, a major theme appears: there is a lack of consensus among researchers when defining rural schools. This is because when defining rural schools for research purposes, these areas vary tremendously in terms of geography and economics (Helge, 1984, 1985). The geography of rural communities ranges from remote islands to clustered communities. Economically, rural communities exist anywhere from depressed, lower socioeconomic settlements to high-growth “boom or bust” communities (Helge, 1984). Another concern is that the population can range from high density (e.g., clustered small towns) to low density, (e.g., remote locations) and the topography of the land can vary (e.g., islands, deserts, mountains, plains, and seacoasts).

The definition of what is rural is controlled by where the research is conducted. For example, research conducted in the Midwest has categorized rural as incorporated or unincorporated areas with fewer than 2500 residents, while urban areas are incorporated areas with more than 2500 residents (Ehly & Reimers, 1986). One example of how different researchers can categorize areas comes from a study conducted in Virginia. The study categorized communities less than 10,000 as rural, communities between 10,000 and 50,000 residents as suburban, and a community of more than 50,000 residents as urban (Hughes, 1986). Regardless of the type of research approach that has been taken with rural schools, the general consensus is that rural areas are very diverse and difficult to categorize.

The most common definition used for a rural school district is a district that has fewer than 1,000 students, but figures as high as 2,500 students have also been used (Helge, 1984, 1985). Research by the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs defined rural school districts as “districts where the number of inhabitants is fewer than 150 per square mile or located in counties with 60% or more of the population living in communities no larger than 5,000 inhabitants” (Helge, 1984, p. 296). The same research mentioned previously also defined urban school districts as having “more than 10,000 students and those within a standard metropolitan statistical area as determined by the U.S. Census Bureau.” (p. 296).

For the purpose of this study, which was conducted in Nebraska, and because of the varying degrees of population, rural school districts were defined as those districts that have less than 1,000 students, with urban school districts having more than 1,000 students.

#### *Current Roles for School Psychologists.*

Two specific changes occurred as a result of Public Law 94-142 and these changes may have had negative implications on the role of school psychologists (Goldwasser et al., 1983). The first change was that there was an increased focus on handicapped rather than nonhandicapped pupils, which restricted the psychologist’s role and reduced opportunities for prevention. Psychologists' most frequent complaint was that the legislation resulted in a restricted role, overemphasizing testing and the psychometric model. Second, there was an increase in paperwork and other bureaucratic implications, which reduced the time for professional services (Goldwasser et al., 1983;

Reschly & Connolly, 1990). The passage of Public Law 94-142 forced many school psychologists to spend much of their time conducting initial psychoeducational evaluations and required triennial reevaluations of exceptional children (Anderson et al., 1984).

Since 1975, the nature of psychology in the schools has been substantially altered in that school psychologists were viewed more as the gatekeepers for special education (Helge, 1985). Nowhere is this more apparent than in the rural areas. Part of this change was due to the recognition of school psychology as a separate, legitimate discipline within psychology. However, the real transformation that has taken place in rural school psychology has been the judicial decisions pertaining to the protection of handicapped children and parental rights, which have been followed by the passage of Federal and State legislation that has codified many of the principles contained in the decisions. It is clear that no other event prior or subsequent to the passage of Public Law 94-142 had done as much as this landmark legislation to ensure the existence of psychological services to rural schools. As a result, rural school psychology changed drastically between 1975 and 1985.

The passage of Public Law 94-142 also caused the number of school psychologists to increase significantly from 1975 to 1985. However, the change in rural settings may have been qualitatively different. School psychologists in rural areas were relatively unheard of prior to 1975. As a result, rural school psychology seems to be in a state of “catch up,” with many rural areas several “professional decades” behind more advanced urban areas (Fagan & Hughes, 1985). Rural schools presented unparalleled

challenges to school psychologists. First, rural school psychologists were relatively young and inexperienced. In urban settings, the new psychologists were also relatively young and inexperienced, but they had the advantage of being added to an existing staff of older and more experienced psychologists. Studies during the late 1970s and early 1980s compared new, rural school psychologists and new and old, urban/suburban school psychologists (Cook Patterson, 1977, Cummings, McLeskey, Huebner, 1985, Ehly & Reimers, 1986, Helge, 1985, Hughes & Clark, 1981). These studies resulted in extreme differences between psychologists in the different settings.

Cook and Patterson (1977) studied five functions of the roles of school psychologists in Nebraska. The different role functions of school psychologists were assessment, consultation, evaluation, administration, and intervention. It was discovered that school psychologists spent 47.7% of their time involved with assessment. Assessment included the administration of intelligence tests, personality tests, educational diagnostic tests, and group tests. It also included scoring tests, interpreting test results, researching records, conducting diagnostic interviews with children, observing children's behavior, and interviewing others for diagnostic information.

School psychologists spent 19.8% of their time doing administration-type activities. These activities included writing psychological reports, writing miscellaneous correspondences, reading correspondences, preparing for meetings, attending meetings, and preparing for testing. They spent 14.6% of their time in consultation. Consultation included meeting with teachers, principals, other supporting professionals, supervisors, and parents sharing ideas and concerns.

School psychologists spent 13.5% of their time doing interventions and 4.4% doing evaluations. Interventions included conducting individual behavior therapy, conducting other types of therapy, counseling children, counseling parents, training parents in behavior modification, family counseling, group counseling, in-class activity for behavior management of the class and informal counseling. School psychologists would then evaluate the intervention to determine if it was successful.

Even though there has been a considerable push for school psychologists to spend less time doing assessments and more time in consultation, there is evidence that suggests that this has not occurred. Researchers (Bramlett et al., 2002) have reported, from a random sample of school psychologists in the United States, who were members of the National Association of School Psychologists, that school psychologists spend approximately 50% of their time doing assessments and 16% of their time doing consultation. This suggests that over the past 25 years, there has not been a change in the amount of time that school psychologists spend in their roles. It is believed that the degree of the past involvement in assessment has limited school psychologists' ability to engage in other activities such as consultation, interventions, and prevention programs (Bramlett et al., 2002).

#### *Generalist versus Specialist.*

By the mid-1980s, many of the differences between psychologists in rural versus urban settings had diminished. However, one common trait remained that differed between psychologists in the different settings. The difference was in the way they were required to provide their services. Rural school psychologists provided services in a

generalist role within the school while urban school psychologists provided services in a specialized role (Reschly & Connolly, 1990).

In contrast to urban settings where specialization was often valued, rural settings required school psychologists to function as generalists, meaning they were able to provide a wide array of services and functions (Cummings, McLeskey, & Huebner, 1985). Practitioners who have a wide range of skills and knowledge often better serve sparsely populated and financially constrained areas (Huebner, McLeskey, & Cummings, 1984). Functioning as a generalist enabled the school psychologist to impact all levels of the organization and thereby provide the most cost-efficient strategy for benefiting the greatest number of handicapped and nonhandicapped children (McLeskey, Huebner, & Cummings, 1984).

In urban school settings, there were numerous reading specialists, counselors, consultants, social workers and other specialists, while in a rural setting, one person may have been required to fulfill all of these roles in the course of a school day. Rural settings thus required generalists rather than specialists to carry out the wide range of tasks needed to effectively maintain the operation of the setting (McLeskey, et al., 1984). Generalists were expected to be “all things to all people” (Helge, 1985).

Since rural schools frequently lacked the diverse array of specialists, school psychologists were often requested to fill a variety of traditional and non-traditional functions. Rural school psychologists and urban school psychologists spent the majority of their time conducting assessments (Cook & Patterson, 1977; Bramlett et. al., 2002). However, rural school psychologists reported significantly more diverse roles than did

urban psychologists. Rural school psychologists tended to spend less time, 49%, in traditional assessment (defined as administering tests to children, conducting diagnostic interviews, writing psychological reports, interpreting test results to school personnel and parents, and attending screening and eligibility meetings) as compared to their urban counterparts, who spent 67.23% of their time doing traditional assessment (Hughes & Clark, 1981).

In addition to skills in assessment, school psychologists in rural settings had to be prepared thoroughly for a variety of interventions skills such as consultation, group counseling, and program development (Cummings et al., 1985). Effective rural school psychologists had to be creative problem-solvers and had to be able to intervene from a variety of service delivery standpoints (direct and indirect) to help provide children with appropriate services under less than optimal conditions. Since there were often shortages of specialists in rural settings, school psychologists have had greater latitude in providing services such as consultation and program development (Huebner, et al., 1984).

Hughes & Clark (1981) found that rural school psychologists had significantly more diverse roles than urban school psychologists. Three activities that rural school psychologists are significantly more likely to perform were consulting with school board members, conducting home visits to interview parents, and designing a school-wide or system-wide program for meeting an unmet need. These three activities involved the psychologist at the system and community levels. The rural school psychologist performed a wider range of services, was more likely to be involved in activities at the



systems and school/community levels, and spent less time testing and involvement in test-related functions (Hughes & Clark, 1981).

*Job Satisfaction.*

The role of a generalist had been identified as a source of job satisfaction in providing services in a rural setting. Other sources of satisfaction were freedom and flexibility in scheduling, social service provision, co-workers, activity, helping others, associating with competent colleagues, and the challenge and importance of the psychologist's role (Ehly & Reimers, 1986; Huebner et al., 1984; Solly & Hohenshil, 1986).

Unfortunately, there were significant disadvantages for school psychologists providing services in a rural setting. The lack of resources, environmental factors such as bad roads and weather conditions for traveling, and social barriers were often driving forces for rural psychologists seeking other employment (McLeskey et al., 1984). In addition, the professional literature in school psychology contains many articles that discussed underutilization of skills, lack of appropriate supervision, disparities between school psychologists' and educators' perceptions of appropriate role and function, lack of opportunities for advancement and peer contact, as well as the demeaning effects of the repetitive assessment role as factors creating poor job satisfaction (Hughes, 1986; Jerrell, 1984; Solly & Hohenshil, 1986). Benson, Hanson, and Canfield (1982) suggested that the "fitting in" process was one of the most difficult tasks for the psychologist practicing in a rural area. It was often necessary for psychologists to repeatedly negotiate entry into the rural school. Helge (1985) found that 72% of the State Education Agencies reported

suspicion of outside interference by the rural community as a significant barrier to the effective delivery of special education services in rural areas.

Another problem that has frequently been associated with the delivery of psychological services in rural areas relates to social-cultural factors that are present within the community (McLeskey et al., 1984). Rural populations have been characterized as individualistic, traditional, family oriented, and person-centered in their social relationships and entry into them as very difficult.

School psychologists in a rural setting are however, at an advantage of overcoming these obstacles that lead to poor job satisfaction. If the school psychologist is to overcome social-cultural barriers and become assimilated as an accepted part of a rural community, he or she must become aware of the particular characteristics and social dynamics that exist within the community (McLeskey et al., 1984). This assimilation process may be facilitated by involvement in both school and community activities. Ideally, these activities should be high-visibility functions such as presentations in school social gatherings. The ability to effectively communicate and problem-solve with a variety of clients is essential under the condition of high visibility and the initial “mistrust” frequently reported in rural areas (Huebner et al., 1984). Psychologists who move into rural settings must become knowledgeable about communication patterns and social roles to be able to respond sensitively to the goals and needs of their clients (McLeskey et al., 1984).

An understanding and appreciation of community values, attitudes, behaviors, and resources in a rural setting is an essential component in establishing oneself in the rural

setting. Given the generalist role of the rural school psychologist and the importance of personal relationships in rural communities, the rural school psychologist is most likely to be a successful change agent if he or she has established a high level of referent power. Applied to consultation, referent power is the influence the school psychologist has with another person based on that person's identification with the school psychologist. When a person admires the school psychologist and identifies with his or her values, attitudes, and behaviors, the school psychologist has referent power with that person. Referent power is built and maintained through empathic listening, conveying respect for the consultee, emphasizing commonalities, accepting the consultee, and being approachable and engaging in informal social contacts with consultees (Fagan, 1985). The importance of person-to-person communication in rural communities has implications for rural school psychologists in building and maintaining referent power. The rural school psychologist, compared to his or her urban counterpart, relies more on his or her referent power than expert power (Fagan & Hughes, 1985). Expert power is the influence that school psychologist has with a person based on the person's attribution of expertise to the school psychologist.

For the school psychologist, a role in public information and relations is essential (Fagan, 1985). Rural school psychologists have an increased accessibility to individuals at all levels of the organization (Huebner et al., 1984). Since the school often acts as the "hub" of the rural community, school psychologists are provided with the opportunity to affect community-wide changes of both a preventative and remedial nature. In being the hub of the community, the rural school serves as a meeting place for a variety of

functions. Given these close school/community ties, school psychologists are afforded access to both school and community systems (Cummings et al., 1985; Huebner et al., 1984).

The numerous close contacts with parents, school personnel, and community members also necessitate that rural school psychologists have highly developed relations skills and a sound understanding of social roles (Huebner et al., 1984). The importance of developing relationship skills and an understanding of social roles is exemplified by Jerrell's (1984) study of boundary-spanning activities of rural school psychologists. Boundary-spanning was defined as the processing of information about environmental dynamics or trends to better allow adaptation of the organization, representing the organization to a community, and facilitating a flow of resources to and from the organization. Jerrell's study points out that rural psychologists must be concerned with systems other than just the public school. System analysis and consultation are critical tools for the psychologist. Consultation skills should be utilized within the organizational boundaries of the public school setting. The focus is changed from a diagnostic approach to one emphasizing both prevention and intervention.

#### *Role Conflicts.*

The evidence gathered by Cook and Patterson (1977) suggests that role conflicts existed among school psychologists in Nebraska. It was believed that principals, teachers, and supervisors influenced the importance of these roles to the psychologist. Even though psychologists believed that consultation was the most important function they performed, it was shown that they spent most of their time doing assessment. Ahrens (1977) studied

the effects of internal role conflict on the overall job satisfaction of psychologists in school, institutional, private practice, and administrative settings, and found that school psychologists had the highest levels of role conflict and lowest levels of job satisfaction. Ahrens proposed that school psychologists experience incongruence between what they actually do on the job and what they were trained to believe they should be doing, ultimately leading to job dissatisfaction and termination of employment. A major factor is a lack of understanding on the part of parents and school personnel concerning the role of the psychologist and inappropriate use of the practitioner's time, such as when the function of the psychologist is viewed primarily or solely as an administrator of tests to determine eligibility for special education services (Helge, 1985). This type of attitude inhibits the use of a comprehensive service delivery and allows inadequate periods of time for counseling, consultation, in-service education, evaluation services and other follow-through functions of a well-trained psychologist (Helge, 1985). Generally, the skills of rural school psychologists have been particularly misunderstood. Fagan (1981) notes that many rural administrators continue to view school psychologists as "Binet jockeys" (p.2) whose exclusive function is to administer psychological tests to determine eligibility for special education.

*Ability to Define Roles.*

An important implication of working in a rural school setting compared to an urban school setting is that it offers more opportunity for school psychologists to define their own roles. Since rural settings were the last to receive extensive school psychological services, these school psychologists perhaps had greater opportunity to

define and develop their roles in less limited fashion as compared to non-rural settings (Huebner et al., 1984). While school psychologists continue to have a reasonably broad view of their role in the school, they apparently have not yet developed the organizational and political sophistication to ensure that these services are implemented (Goldwasser et al., 1983).

Thus, school psychologists who enter a rural school setting, while having the opportunity to shape their roles to a greater extent than usual, must also be prepared to function as a generalist to most effectively meet the needs of the setting (Huebner et al., 1984). It is possible that school psychologists can develop planned, systematic change strategies to shape their roles, provided that they are adequately trained to offer alternative services and are able to document the efficiency and efficacy of alternative procedures (McLeskey et al., 1984).

Prior to attempting such a role change, rural psychologists may have to acquire more support from the school and the community. First, school psychologists may also profit from making special efforts to align with building principals, who are perceived as key sources of power in rural settings. Second, school psychologists may wish to take advantage of the frequently-reported direct contact with superintendents for supervision and consultation. A direct line to high-level administration affords great opportunity to influence decisions regarding role and function. Such efforts should enable rural school psychologists to more effectively create their own futures.

Critical to the school psychologist's success is his or her ability to spark awareness of needs for change within the rural school and community. An effective rural

school psychologist must possess the ability to design change strategies that maximize rural strength, are congruent with the particular rural culture, and are consistent with the community's perceptions of needs (Fagan & Hughes, 1985). While superintendents are well intentioned, they are not able to provide the appropriate technical expertise necessary to cope with unique problems of psychologists (Cummings et al., 1985). School psychologists many thus need to "train their supervisors." The administrative supervisor must be made aware of the dimensions of school psychological services that go beyond psychoeducational assessment (Cummings et al., 1985). Fortunately, there are useful documents published by the National Association of School Psychologists, which address standards for the delivery of service. These documents should be provided and discussed with the administrative supervisor. School psychologists must develop the skills to influence public policy so that they can practice with professional autonomy that is necessary in order to realize psychology's vast potential to help children and schools (Goldwasser et al., 1983).

#### *Summary and Proposed Study*

To summarize, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) that was passed in 1975 changed the way that school psychologists provided services to schools. After EAHCA was passed, schools were mandated to provide services to all children regardless of their handicap. EAHCA became the driving force in the change of services that were provided by school psychologists. Rural school districts and entire states were mandated to provide and implement plans for the delivery of free and appropriate education services to all handicapped children. In the late 1970s and early

1980s, school psychologists in rural school districts was a relatively new concept. As a result, there was an abundance of research conducted to determine the differences between the services provided by school psychologists in rural areas versus the services provided by school psychologists in urban areas.

By the mid-1980s, the differences that were previously found had diminished with few exceptions. One difference that remained were that school psychologists in rural areas continued to be seen more as generalists, while school psychologists in urban areas were viewed as specialists. Through the generalist approach, rural school psychologists were able to overcome the disadvantages the rural setting initially produced, and they had the ability to define their roles more so than their urban counterparts. The ability for school psychologists to define their roles in the school setting has led to higher job satisfaction (Jerrell, 1984). Unfortunately, little research has been conducted over the last 20 years to determine if there are any differences between school psychologists in rural areas and school psychologists in urban areas. Given that the role of school psychologists has been modified with subsequent revisions of EAHCA, the question has resurfaced, "What is the difference, if any, between rural and urban school psychologists delivery of services?"

The purpose of this study was to update the research and compare school psychologists in rural Nebraska school settings to school psychologists in urban Nebraska school settings. The comparison examined the current roles of school psychologists, the concept of specialist roles versus generalist roles, job satisfaction, role conflicts that



occur, and the ability for school psychologists to define their roles. The roles examined were assessment, consultation, intervention, prevention, and administration.

As in previous studies addressing this issue, it was hypothesized that the job satisfaction and current roles would be similar between rural and urban school psychologists and that both experienced similar role conflicts. However, it was believed that rural school psychologists would report functioning more as generalists and having more opportunities to define their roles in comparison to urban school psychologists.

## Methods

### *Participants*

Members of the Nebraska School Psychologists Association and Omaha Metro School Psychologists Groups were asked to participate. The names and e-mail addresses of Nebraska School Psychologists Association members were obtained. Metro School Psychologists Group members were asked to participate via e-mail by the group president. Members of both groups were sent a cover letter (see Appendix A) via e-mail asking for their participation in the study. The questionnaire (see Appendix B) was also sent via e-mail as an attachment. Only members who were currently involved as a school psychologist in a school were asked to complete the questionnaire. School psychologists from rural and urban school districts, who were members, were sent a questionnaire. Since some of the members of the Omaha Metro Group were school psychologists in Iowa they also received the questionnaire.

Questionnaires were sent to 199 people. Of the 199 questionnaires sent out, 42 responded “not employed in a school.” Eighty-eight questionnaires were returned with a response rate of 44%.

Of the 88 responses, 67 were sent back via e-mail, while 19 were printed and sent via mail. Two of the respondents asked for the questionnaire to be mailed to them. There was a total of 72 questionnaires received from school psychologists in Nebraska and 16 questionnaires from school psychologists in Iowa.

Out of the 88 responses, one questionnaire from Nebraska and one questionnaire from Iowa were received that could not be used for analysis because the respondent did not indicate the district’s student population, and thus could not be categorized into rural or urban settings. Rural school districts were defined as school districts that have less than 1,000 students, while urban school districts were defined as school districts having more than 1,000 students.

There were 16 questionnaires that were completed by school psychologists from Iowa and their responses were considered separate from the responses of the school psychologists from Nebraska.

### *Materials*

A questionnaire was developed specifically for this study to examine job satisfaction, current and ideal roles, and the ability to define roles for school psychologists. After its development, it was reviewed by the Director of the School Psychology Program at the University of Nebraska at Omaha and initial revisions to the questionnaire were made. The questionnaire was then evaluated with revisions being

made by a graduate Program Evaluation class at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, by graduate students, and a professor who specializes in questionnaire development. The review process included clarifying questions, adding relevant questions, deleting non-relevant questions, and reformatting the questionnaire to make it more appealing. Finally, the questionnaire was presented to committee members who made additional revisions.

The questionnaire was used to obtain demographic information from the participants. Demographic information included how long they have been a school psychologist, how many other school psychologists are employed by the school district, and a description of the schools they work in. In addition to describing the schools, they were asked how many schools they work in, the population of students they serve, and how many students are in the school district they serve.

The questionnaire covered a broad spectrum of topics related to school psychology. The questionnaire asked participants to respond about their current job roles, ideal job roles, job satisfaction, conflicts in perceived roles to actual roles that occur, and the ability for school psychologists to define their roles. School psychologists were also asked to rate themselves as a generalist or a specialist on a continuum of 1 to 10. Additionally, participants were asked what they liked most about their job, what they liked least about their job, and what they would change about their job.

The roles examined were assessment, consultation, intervention, prevention, and administration. Assessment included administration of intelligence tests, administration of personality tests, administration of educational diagnostic tests, group test administration, scoring tests, interpreting test results, researching records, diagnostic

interviews with children, observing client's behavior, and interviewing others for diagnostic information. Consultation included meeting with teachers, principals, other supporting professionals, supervisors, and other individuals or groups. Interventions included conducting individual behavior therapy, conducting other types of therapy, counseling children, counseling parents, training parents in behavior modification, family counseling, group counseling, in-class activity for behavior management of the class, and informal counseling. Prevention included presenting information that may reduce the chance of academic, social, emotional, or behavior problems from occurring. Administration included writing psychological reports, writing miscellaneous correspondence, preparing for testing, preparing for meetings, attending meetings, and reading correspondence.

### *Procedure*

Questionnaires were e-mailed to school psychologists who were currently working in rural and urban school districts in Nebraska and western Iowa. Follow-up e-mails were sent one month after the initial e-mail as a thank you and a reminder for participants to respond if they chose. Participants were asked to either open the attached questionnaire, complete it, save it, and forward it back to the provided e-mail address, or they had the option of receiving the questionnaire via U.S. Mail if they preferred. The questionnaire was sent to them and a self-addressed, stamped envelope was provided to return the completed questionnaire. Individuals who received the questionnaire via e-mail who were not employed by a school district were asked to reply to the e-mail with the message, "not employed in a school."

*Data Analysis*

Statistical analysis was conducted using the statistical computer software SPSS. The statistical analysis compared rural school psychologists to urban school psychologists in regard to roles, the idea of specialist versus generalist roles, job satisfaction, role conflicts that occur, and the ability for school psychologists to define their roles for school psychologists in Nebraska. Since the purpose of this study was to compare school psychologists in rural versus urban settings in Nebraska, the data analysis focused primarily on responses from Nebraska.

As an additional comparison, data from rural Iowa and rural Nebraska was examined. Only rural school psychologists from Iowa and Nebraska were compared to each other because the sample size of urban school psychologists from Iowa was too small to be compared to urban school psychologists from Nebraska. The comparison of rural school psychologists from Iowa and Nebraska examined the percentage of actual time and ideal time school psychologists spend doing different activities such as consultation, interventions, preventions, assessments, and administration. It also examined what school psychologists like most about their job, what they like least, and what they would change about their job.

The data analysis consisted of computing the means and standard deviations for each item on the questionnaire for school psychologists in rural and urban areas. School psychologists from rural and urban areas were compared using a one-way ANOVA comparing the mean of each item. To examine the current role, job satisfaction, role conflicts, and the ability for school psychologists to define their role, several items on the

questionnaire that used the Likert scale were averaged together and the averages were compared using a one-way ANOVA. Using the Likert scale section of the questionnaire, statements 9, 10, 18, 21, 22, 23, 24, and 25 were averaged to examine current roles of school psychologists. Statements 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 19 were used to examine job satisfaction. Prior to averaging the results, statement 19 was reversed coded. Statements 7, 8, 15, 16, and 17 were used to examine role conflicts. Statement 17 was reversed coded before being averaged. Statements 11, 13, and 14 were averaged together to examine the overall ability of school psychologists to define their roles (See Appendix B for statement details). Levels of statistical significance was set at  $p < .10$ .

The responses of what school psychologists liked most about their job, what they liked least about their job and what they would change about their job was also analyzed. This analysis consisted of recording the different responses along with of the number of times a response was stated by the participants.

## Results

### *Demographics*

Comparisons were made in regards to the gender of the respondents between school psychologists from rural and urban areas (See Table 1). From Nebraska, 15 questionnaires were received from school psychologists that provided services in rural areas. Of these respondents, 40% (n=6) were male and 60% (n=9) were female. All but one of the respondents were Caucasian. In the urban setting, 56 questionnaires were received, 18% (n=10) were male and 82% (n=46) were female. As in the rural setting, all but one of the respondents were Caucasian.

In Iowa, 11 questionnaires were received from school psychologists who worked in a rural setting, 18% were males and 82% were females. Only four questionnaires were received from school psychologist that worked in urban settings in Iowa. Of the respondents, 50% were female and 50% were males.

School psychologists from rural settings differed from school psychologists from urban settings in several different ways (See Table 2). The first significant difference was in the number of schools they serve. On average, school psychologists in rural areas serve eight schools, while their urban counterparts serve three schools. Another significant difference was the time spent in each school. School psychologists in rural settings spent approximately one day per week in each school while school psychologists in urban settings spend 2 1/2 days per week in each school.

The percentage of time school psychologists spent working directly with general education students was also significantly different. Overall, school psychologists in rural settings spend 14% of their time working with general education students compared to 34% of school psychologists' time in urban settings. There was not a significant difference in the amount of time school psychologists from rural and urban spent working with students who were in special education. On average, they both spent approximately 65% of their time working with students from the special education population. It is unsure where school psychologists in rural areas spend the remainder of their time.

School psychologists from rural areas worked in more school districts than school psychologists in urban areas. School psychologists in rural areas worked, on average, in six districts, though the responses ranged from one school district to 14 different school

districts. Urban school psychologists worked, on average, in one school district. School psychologists in rural areas were many times the only school psychologist providing services to those school districts, while the number of school psychologists in each school district in urban areas ranged from one to 40 other school psychologists, with the average equaling 13 school psychologists per school district.

Another significant difference between school psychologists in rural areas compared to school psychologists in urban areas was the number of students that are located in each school district. In school districts located in rural areas, there was an average 519 students in the district, while school districts in urban areas were made up of an average of 15,130 students per district. However, there was no significant difference in the total number of students that the school psychologists serve. School psychologists in rural areas had an average ratio of one to 1046 while school psychologists in urban areas had an average school psychologist to student ratio of one to 1091.

#### *Current Roles for School Psychologist*

School psychologists were asked to rate themselves using a Likert scale on 25 statements that examined their current role as a school psychologist, their job satisfaction, the ability to define their role and role conflicts that occur. Of the 25 statements, seven of the responses yield significant differences between school psychologists in rural areas compared to school psychologists in urban areas (See Table 3).

School psychologists differed significantly on several statements using the Likert scale when the current roles of school psychologists were examined (See Table 3).

School psychologists from rural areas are less likely to assist teachers in designing,



implementing and monitoring interventions prior to a student being referred for special education. School psychologists from rural areas are more likely to spend their time concentrating on accurate and thorough diagnosis than their urban counterparts.

However, when items that were examining current roles, such as designing, implementing, and monitoring intervention, and conducting diagnosis, were combined for an overall score on current roles, there was no significant difference found between school psychologists in rural areas compared to school psychologists in urban areas (See Table 4). This suggests that school psychologists from urban areas may focus more time on interventions than those in rural areas, while school psychologists in rural areas may focus more on assessment, thus, overall they spend the same general time in those activities when combined. The percentage of time spent in activities may be used as a construct to validate the trend of school psychologists in regards to statements about assessment and interventions.

When asked about the percentage of time they spend in the areas of consultation, interventions, preventions, assessments and administration activities, there were no significant differences in the percentage of time between school psychologists in rural versus urban areas (See Table 5a). When considering school psychologists from rural and urban areas together, on average they spent 19% of their actual time doing consultation, but felt that 26% of their time doing consultation would be ideal. School psychologists spent an average 13% of actual time designing, implementing and monitoring interventions, but said that 20% of their time spent on interventions would be more ideal. Preventions took an average of 7% of the school psychologists' actual time but they said

that 18% would be ideal. School psychologists spent most of their actual time doing assessments, in which they spent 47% of their time conducting assessments. However, they said that 26% of the time doing assessments would be ideal. School psychologists spent an average of 14% of their time in administration type activities and said that 10% would be more ideal.

Significant differences were noted on the percentage of time school psychologists from rural Nebraska spend in consultation and assessments in relation to their actual and ideal times compared to school psychologists from rural Iowa (See Table 5b). In rural Nebraska, school psychologists spent 49% of their time conducting assessments compared to 18% of their time for school psychologists in rural Iowa. While both groups believed less time conducting assessments would be ideal, school psychologists in rural Iowa believed 15% of their time would be more ideal compared to school psychologists in rural Nebraska who believed spending 28% of their time would be ideal conducting assessments. Another significant difference was the percentage of time actually spent doing consultation. School psychologists in rural Nebraska spent a significantly lower percentage (16%) of their time in consultation than their rural Iowa colleagues (39%).

#### *Generalist versus Specialist*

There was no significant difference in the way school psychologists perceive themselves as being a generalist or a specialist. When asked to rate themselves on a 10-point scale, with one being more of a generalist and ten being a specialist, school psychologists from rural areas ranked themselves as 5.9, while school psychologists from urban areas ranked themselves 5.8. Even though school psychologists in rural and urban

areas ranked themselves similar, they see themselves doing different activities as similar. For example, school psychologists in urban areas may view themselves as a generalist in interventions, while school psychologists in rural areas view themselves as generalists in assessment.

### *Job Satisfaction*

When asked what they liked about their job, respondents from both urban and rural areas indicated that they enjoyed the freedom, flexibility and diversity that working as a school psychologist provided them (See Table 6). In addition, school psychologists from rural and urban areas also indicated that they enjoyed working with students. One difference to note was that 13% (n=7) of school psychologists from urban areas reported that they liked interventions the most about their job, while no school psychologists from rural (Nebraska) reported this.

The majority of school psychologists from rural and urban areas both indicated that report writing and paperwork were what they liked least about their jobs (See Table 7). The second factor that school psychologists from urban areas indicated that they did not like about their job was the political and bureaucratic issues they face when working with the schools. This was not mentioned by any of the respondents from the rural areas in Nebraska, however school psychologists from rural areas did not like the fact that they did not feel like they were a part of the school.

Even though 56% (n=31) of school psychologists from urban areas stated that they liked report writing and paperwork least about their job, only 16% (n=9) of school psychologists from urban areas stated that they would change the report writing and

paperwork aspect of their job. In comparison, 25% (n=4) of school psychologists from rural areas indicated that they liked report writing and paperwork the least about their job, yet only 13% (n=2) said that they would change this aspect of their job (See Table 8).

When asked to rate statements about job satisfaction there was no significant difference found between school psychologists in rural areas to school psychologists in urban areas (See Table 3). Even when the items were combined to form an overall job satisfaction score there was not a significant difference (See Table 4). School psychologists from rural areas had an overall score of 4.37, while school psychologists from urban areas had an overall average score of 4.15. However, there was a significant difference between school psychologists in rural areas and school psychologists in urban areas, in that school psychologists in rural areas rated higher that on most days their job was challenging (See Table 3).

#### *Role conflicts*

When asked to rate about knowing exactly what to do in their job, there was a significant difference between rural and urban school psychologists (See Table 3). School psychologists from rural areas had an average score of 4.67, while school psychologists from urban areas had an average score of 4.25. However, when the scores from the items that were measuring role conflict were combined, no significance was found (See Table 4).

#### *Ability to Define Role*

When asked to rate statements examining the ability to define their role, there was a significant difference between school psychologists in rural areas compared to school

psychologists in urban areas on two of the items (See Table 3). Overall, school psychologists in rural areas had more of an ability to define what needs to be done, as with referrals, and were able to enjoy the ability to define their role within a school. When statements examining the ability to define the roles of a school psychologists were combined, a significant difference remained between school psychologists in rural areas compared to school psychologists in urban areas (See Table 4). School psychologists in rural areas had an overall mean score of 4.60, while school psychologists in urban areas had an overall mean score of 4.19.

### Discussion

As the results have indicated, few differences exist between school psychologists in rural areas compared to school psychologists in urban areas. In regards to the demographics, the differences between school psychologists in rural areas compared to school psychologists in urban areas were not surprising. Since school psychologists in rural areas work in more schools, cover more school districts, and are usually the only school psychologist employed by the school district, it is not surprising that they are not able to spend as much time in each building than school psychologists in urban areas. Even though the number of students school psychologists serve in each building differs between school psychologists in rural areas and school psychologists in urban areas, and because school psychologists in rural areas serve more schools, school psychologists from both settings serve just as many children. This suggests that school psychologists in rural settings are not able to provide as much support per student than school psychologists in urban settings, because of the number of schools they serve. However, it

is important to remember when interpreting these results that the sample size for school psychologists in rural areas was small (n=15).

### *Current Roles*

This study has indicated that there are no significant differences in the percentage of time school psychologists in rural areas compared to school psychologists in urban areas are involved with consultation, interventions, preventions, assessments, and administration. In fact, little has changed in regards to the time spent in these activities since the study conducted in 1977 by Cook and Patterson examining the percentage of time that school psychologists in Nebraska were involved in activities of assessment, consultation, administration and interventions. The only real difference that has occurred is that school psychologists are starting to focus on spending time doing prevention activities. School psychologists in Nebraska do not differ from a random sample of school psychologists, who were members of the National Association of School Psychologists, in the amount of time they spend doing assessments or consultation (Bramlett et.al., 2002). School psychologists in Nebraska report less time should be spent doing assessments and administrative activities such as report writing, and more time should be spent on consultation, interventions, and preventions.

School psychologists from rural areas also spent less time than school psychologists in urban areas assisting teachers in developing, implementing and evaluating interventions. Possible reasons that school psychologists in rural areas do not work as much with interventions are that they spend more time doing assessments, are only in their buildings one day per week, and do not work as much with the general

education population as school psychologists from urban areas. Thus, it is not surprising then that school psychologists from rural areas spend more time conducting assessments than school psychologists in urban areas.

It is important to note that not all of the respondents replied to this section of the questionnaire. There were two respondents from urban areas and one respondent from a rural area who did not respond to the percentage of actual time spent in the various activities. In addition, four of the respondents from urban areas and three respondents from rural areas did not respond to what their ideal percentage of time would be spent in the various activities. When you take into account the small sample size it is important to interpret these results with caution.

#### *Generalist versus Specialist*

The differences that were apparent in the mid-1980s between school psychologists in rural areas and school psychologists in urban areas were that those in rural settings functioned more as generalists while those in urban settings functioned more as specialists. This study suggests that school psychologists in both rural and urban areas no longer view themselves as functioning as generalists or specialists. There was no significant difference in how school psychologists in rural areas viewed themselves in comparison to school psychologists in urban areas. Instead, school psychologists viewed themselves as being both generalist and specialist.

#### *Job Satisfaction*

School psychologists from rural and urban areas both stated that the freedom and flexibility as well as the diversity of being a school psychologist were factors that they

liked about their jobs. These factors were also reported to have been identified as a source of job satisfaction for school psychologists in the 1980s (Ehly & Reimers, 1986, Huebner et al., 1984, Solly & Hohenshil, 1886).

School psychologists from both rural and urban areas reported that report writing and paperwork were factors that they liked least about their job. School psychologists from rural areas also reported travel, and not being part of the school, as factors that they did not like about their job. It was interesting because three school psychologists from urban settings stated that they did not like having to serve multiple roles which also suggests that a few school psychologists in urban areas are functioning more as generalists.

Findings from this study suggests that school psychologists from rural settings found their jobs more challenging than school psychologists from urban settings. Possible reasons may be that they have to work harder to gain entrance and acceptability into the schools, have to coordinate their services to more schools, and have the daily stress of traveling school to school. When asked about what they liked least about their job, two of the respondents from rural areas reported nothing, suggesting that they have high job satisfaction. In comparison, all respondents from urban areas reported that there was at least one aspect of the job they disliked.

### *Role Conflicts*

When asked the percentage of time school psychologists spend doing consultation, interventions, preventions, assessments and administration activities, school psychologists from both rural and urban areas reported a difference in the actual time



they spend in comparison to the ideal percentage of time they feel they should be doing each activity. School psychologists said that it would be ideal to spend the same amount of time doing consultation as assessments. This suggests that school psychologists in both rural and urban settings do not feel that much time they spend is ideal.

### *Ability to Define Roles*

School psychologists from rural areas reported having more of an ability to define their role and had the ability to decide what needs to be done with referrals than school psychologists in urban areas. School psychologists from rural areas may feel that they have this ability because they are not constrained by political and bureaucratic issues of the schools in which they are working compared to school psychologists in urban areas. Even though school psychologists in rural areas reported having more of an ability to define their role and had the ability to decide that needs to be done, there still appears to be a discrepancy in the percentage of time they spent doing activities and what they felt would be ideal.

Although it is clear that the actual time school psychologists spend doing activities such as consultation, interventions, preventions, assessments, and administration activities does not match what they believe the ideal amount of time, it is unclear why this discrepancy exists. One possibility may be the model in which school psychologists in Nebraska work under. If one were to analyze the actual amount of time respondents from rural Iowa spent in activities such as consultation, interventions, preventions, assessments, and administration activities and their ideal amount of time spent in those activities, their responses would not be equivalent to the respondents from

Nebraska. This discrepancy between school psychologists in Nebraska and school psychologists in Iowa, in the actual time and the ideal amount of time school psychologists are engaged in activities, may be the result of the model in which school psychologists work under. School psychologists from Nebraska and Iowa work under different models when qualifying students for special education services. This study does suggest that school psychologists from Iowa may be spending their time the way they see fit since their ideal and actual time spent in activities is closer.

When ordered by rank with one being the lowest (strongly disagree) to five being the highest (strongly agree), school psychologists from rural and urban areas both reported their ability to define their role as highest, followed by job satisfaction, role conflict, and current roles. Even though school psychologists in both rural and urban areas have a high ability to define their role, a discrepancy remains between the actual time spent in activities in comparison to ideal amount of time in activities, but according to the school psychologists, this discrepancy does not overly bother them because they still report high job satisfaction.

#### *Implications for Practitioners*

Practitioners could use the information from this study to become more aware of their role as a school psychologist in addition to the role of other school psychologists. It still appears that there are some differences between school psychologists in rural settings and those in urban settings. Findings from this study may address some of the issues that school psychologists need to be aware of when employed in the different settings.

It appears that school psychologists in both rural and urban areas enjoy having the ability to define their role but there is little evidence that they are using their ability to determine how to spend their time. This study could provide information to practitioners in making them more aware of why they are doing what they are, possible places where changes should occur, and ways they could go about making changes. For example, school psychologists indicated that paperwork and report writing are factors that they disliked and would like to change about their job, and with the reauthorization of IDEA one possible suggestion is it for less paperwork. It could be that school psychologists could work together to lobby for changes in the special education paperwork requirements. There may also be new and improved ways of writing reports that contain all of the essential information they need but would not be as time consuming.

Another implication this study may have is in addressing issues school psychologists could have in regards to the reauthorization of IDEA. Changes made from the reauthorization of IDEA will have direct implications on the way that school psychologists are required to provide services. School psychologists may be required to determine eligibility for special education services on responses to intervention. For those school psychologists who do not spend time working with interventions they may experience difficulties when providing services. The upcoming reauthorization process is an opportunity for school psychologists to rethink the current model they use for the identification of students for special education. It is a time to enhance their current approaches and models and to assess what they are doing to meet the needs of all children who are failing academically and socially

Information obtained from this study could also be used in training of school psychologists. If school psychologists want to change, it may be essential to educate them how to be a change agent. In addition, the percentage of time spent doing activities could be used as a guideline to determine how much time should be devoted to training that activity.

### *Limitations*

One of the limitations to this study is in the way rural and urban areas defined were defined. By limiting rural areas as school districts with less than 1,000 students it may have limited the number of respondents who do serve schools in areas that would potentially be considered a rural area. Since rural areas are not only dependent upon population but also on geographic location and economic regions it became difficult in determining what is rural and what is urban.

Since this study only examines the role of school psychologists in rural and urban settings in Nebraska, it is difficult to generalize to other school psychologists. As was indicated by the differences between school psychologists in rural Nebraska compared to school psychologists in rural Iowa not all school psychologists spend their time the same way. However, the number of responses from Iowa was not large enough to generalize to the rest of the population. Another possible limitation is the way that the data was collected. The return rate of questionnaires was not 100%; those that did not respond may be different from the population that did. Another additional limitation of this study is that there were an uneven number of subjects in the groups and the small sample size from rural school psychologists in Nebraska.

*Suggestions for Future Research*

It would be interesting to reexamine the role of a school psychologist after the revisions to IDEA are finalized to determine if that has had an impact on the roles of school psychologists. School psychologists in both rural and urban areas indicated that the percentage of actual time spent in activities varied greatly than their ideal amount of time. Another suggestion for possible study is to examine how school psychologists go about making changes in their roles as school psychologists. Since this study only focused on Nebraska, an additional study that compared Nebraska to other states would be interesting.

*Conclusion*

In conclusion, in Nebraska, there still appears to be some differences between school psychologists in rural areas and school psychologists in urban areas. School psychologists in rural areas are often the only people delivering psychological services to their school districts, work on average in six districts, find that on most days their job as a school psychologist is more challenging, feel as though they have more of an ability to define their roles, and enjoy being able to define their role more so than their urban counterparts.

In comparison, school psychologists in urban areas reported that they had more bureaucratic and political issues to overcome, they work with, on average, 13 other school psychologists in their district, spend more time working with the general education population, and were more likely to assist teachers in designing, implementing, and monitoring interventions than their rural counterparts.

School psychologists from both rural and urban areas reported that they view themselves in the middle of being a specialist and a generalist, and that there was no difference between the two groups in the way they viewed themselves. There was no difference in the actual amount of time they spend in their activities or in what they perceived to be the ideal amount of time.

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## Appendix A

Dear School Psychologist,

I am a third-year school psychology student attending the University of Nebraska at Omaha. I have completed my Masters of Science degree in school psychology and am in the process of completing my Education Specialist Degree. Part of the requirements required for the Ed.S. program is the completion of an Ed.S. project. The purpose of my study is to learn more about school psychologists who are employed in rural areas versus urban areas.

Little research has been conducted in the last 20 years on the differences in the way school psychologists function in rural versus urban areas. As part of the research process I am asking for your help. If you are not a school psychologist employed in a school or ESU please reply to this email with the message "not employed in a school." **If you are currently employed by a school district or ESU please complete the attached questionnaire. After completing the attached questionnaire, please save it and then send it back to me.** The questionnaire will ask you about the school(s) in which you are employed, the student population you work with, your current roles as a school psychologist, your ideal role as a school psychologist, and your job satisfaction. Your responses will be kept confidential.

I would be extremely grateful if you would complete and return the questionnaire to me (if you are employed by a school). If you would prefer a hard copy of the questionnaire via U.S. mail please notify me. If you have any questions please call me at (402) 884-0733 or e-mail me at [eboldt@mail.unomaha.edu](mailto:eboldt@mail.unomaha.edu).

Thank you for your assistance. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Erin Boldt Reiff  
19071 U Street  
Omaha, NE 68135

## Appendix B

**School Psychology Questionnaire**Personal Demographics:

1. Male \_\_\_\_\_ or Female \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is your ethnicity?
3. How long have you been a school psychologist? \_\_\_\_\_ Years
4. How many years have you worked in the school(s) in which you are currently employed?  
\_\_\_\_\_ Years

Your Current Assignment:

5. In how many schools do you currently work?
6. Are you employed with early childhood, elementary, middle, or high schools?
7. Approximately how long do you spend in each building/assignment per week?
8. How many children do you serve in each building?
9. Describe the students with whom you work (e.g., their disabilities, their activities in which you participate, their ethnicity, etc.):
10. Number of school districts in which you work. \_\_\_\_\_
11. How many school psychologists are employed in each school district(s) you serve?  
Please give specific numbers for each district.
12. Approximately how many students are enrolled in each school district(s) you serve?

**Please rate each of the statements listed below using the following scale:**

1=Strongly Disagree   2=Disagree   3=Neutral   4=Agree   5=Strongly Agree

1. \_\_\_\_\_ I am satisfied with the respect I receive from people with whom I work.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ I am satisfied with my position as a school psychologist.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ I have a sense of accomplishment through my work.

4. \_\_\_\_\_ My colleagues work well together.

1=Strongly Disagree 2=Disagree 3=Neutral 4=Agree 5=Strongly Agree

5. \_\_\_\_\_ On most days my work is challenging.

6. \_\_\_\_\_ My work is satisfying.

7. \_\_\_\_\_ I feel like I am part of the school staff.

8. \_\_\_\_\_ The school(s) I work in welcome me

9. \_\_\_\_\_ Teachers feel that my input is important in educational decisions.

10. \_\_\_\_\_ School administrators value my input.

11. \_\_\_\_\_ My supervisor supports my beliefs and practices as a school psychologist.

12. \_\_\_\_\_ I feel that my input is important in educational decisions.

13. \_\_\_\_\_ In general, I have the ability to decide what needs to be done, (e.g., with referrals).

14. \_\_\_\_\_ I enjoy the ability to define my role within the school.

15. \_\_\_\_\_ Most of the time, I know exactly what to do in my job, (i.e., what is expected of me).

16. \_\_\_\_\_ My current role as a school psychologist conforms with my initial expectations of the role of a school psychologist.

17. \_\_\_\_\_ The role I am asked to do conflicts with what I think I should be doing as a school psychologist.

18. \_\_\_\_\_ I work collaboratively with other school personnel when making educational decisions regarding the students with whom I work.

19. \_\_\_\_\_ My job doesn't offer much opportunity for developing my skills and abilities.

20. \_\_\_\_\_ I plan to continue to work as a school psychologist in a school setting.

21. \_\_\_\_\_ I assist teachers in designing, implementing, and evaluating pre-referral interventions before students are considered for special education classification.

22. \_\_\_\_\_ As a school psychologist I concentrate on accurate and thorough diagnosis rather than assisting with or carrying out interventions.

23. \_\_\_\_\_ I assist regular education teachers in designing, implementing and monitoring interventions prior to consideration for special education eligibility.

24. \_\_\_\_\_ I spend the majority of my time concentrating on accurate and thorough diagnosis of learning and behavioral problems.
25. \_\_\_\_\_ I work collaboratively with teachers and parents to determine the most effective way to help children succeed in school.

What percentage of your time do you spend working with **special** education students?

What percentage of your time do you spend working with **general** education students?

What school activities are you involved in that you are not directly working with children?

The chart below contains general activities that many school psychologists may do on a regular basis. In the first column, fill in the percentage of time that you find yourself involved with each activity. In the second column, fill in the percentage of time that you feel would be ideal to be involved in each activity. In the third column, provide examples of what you do during each activity.

Activity	% of Actual Time	% of Ideal Time	Examples of Activities
<b>Consultation</b>			
<b>Interventions</b>			
<b>Preventions</b>			
<b>Assessments</b>			
<b>Administration</b>			
<b>Other</b>			

What do you **like most** about your job?

What do you **like least** about your job?

What would you **change** about your job?



Table 1

## Gender of Respondents

Gender	Nebraska (N=71)		Iowa (N=15)	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Females	60% (n=9)	82% (n=46)	82% (n=9)	50% (n=2)
Males	40% (n=6)	18% (n=10)	18% (n=2)	50% (n=2)

Table 2.

Demographics for School Psychologist in Nebraska	Mean		Range		F, Significance
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	
Years as a school psychologist	9.00	9.27	1-16 (4.93)	0-28 (7.23)	.02, .893
Years in current assignment	4.93	4.15	1-15 (3.58)	1-28 (6.30)	.81, .371
Number of Schools Served	7.53	3.10	2-18 (5.14)	1-18 (2.81)	19.87,.000**
Days Spent in School	1.14	2.40	.5-2.5 (.69)	.25-5 (1.35)	11.30,.001**
% of Time with SPED	69.00	60.80	20-95 (27.98)	5-95 (23.31)	1.33, .253
% of Time spent with General Education	14.33	33.64	5-60 (16.13)	5-95 (21.20)	10.70,.002**



Table 2 (continued).

Demographics for School Psychologist in Nebraska	Mean		Standard Deviation		F, Significance
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	
# of Districts	5.87	1.02	1-14 (4.40)	1-2 (.13)	70.38,.000**
# of Students/District	518.67	15,129.71	200-1000 (245.12)	1150- 50,000 (15,500)	13.19,.001**
Generalist vs Specialist	5.93	5.82	3-10 (2.02)	2-10 (2.18)	.032, .858
# of School Psychologists in Each District	1	13.14	1-1 (.00)	1-40 (12.05)	15.08,.000**
Total Number of Students Served	1045.71	1090.55	60-3000 (912.90)	90-4000 (817.54)	.032,.859

Note. \*\*  $p < .05$

Table 3  
Responses on Questionnaire Using a Likert Scale

Item Number	Mean		Standard Deviation		F, Significance
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	
1.	4.47	4.21	.52	.82	1.26, .265
2.	4.27	3.98	.88	1.05	.92, .341
3.	4.40	4.21	.83	.76	.69, .410
4.	4.27	4.07	.70	.83	.70, .407
5.	4.60	4.25	.51	.74	2.93, .091*
6.	4.40	4.16	.63	.73	1.33, .253
7.	3.67	3.91	1.11	.98	.70, .407
8.	4.47	4.34	.52	.77	.67, .548
9.	4.13	4.25	.99	.79	.23, .633
10.	4.47	4.34	.52	.79	.35, .558
11.	4.53	4.31	.64	1.00	.68, .413
12.	4.47	4.36	.52	.70	.32, .573
13.	4.60	4.07	.51	1.06	3.49, .066*
14.	4.67	4.18	.49	.97	3.50, .066*
15.	4.67	4.25	.49	.77	3.95, .051*
16.	4.07	3.61	.70	1.09	2.39, .127
17.	2.33	2.50	1.45	1.22	.20, .653
18.	4.67	4.41	.49	.70	1.73, .193

Table 3(Continued).

Item Number	Mean		Standard Deviation		F, Significance
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	
19.	2.07	2.07	1.10	1.14	.00, .99
20.	4.53	4.29	.64	.87	1.06, .307
21.	2.87	3.96	1.19	.76	19.04, .000**
22.	2.87	2.98	1.19	1.01	.14, .707
23.	2.93	3.84	1.28	.83	11.07, .001**
24.	3.87	3.13	.99	1.11	5.49, .022**
25.	4.27	4.30	.88	.69	.03, .86

Note. \*\*  $p < .05$ , \*  $p < .10$ .

Table 4

Factor / Item #s from Questionnaire	Mean		Standard Deviation		F, Significance
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	
Current Role (9,10,18,21,22,23,24, & 25)	3.47	3.66	(.60)	(.39)	2.33, .132
Job Satisfaction (1,2,3,5,6, & 19*)	4.37	4.15	(.52)	(.67)	1.42, .238
Role Conflicts (7,8,15,16, & 17*)	4.11	3.92	(.49)	(.68)	.97, .329
Ability to Define Role (11, 13, & 14)	4.60	4.19	(.42)	(.89)	3.02, .087**

Note. \* These items were reverse coded when added with the other items

\*\*  $p < .10$ .

Table 5a

## Average Percentage of Time Reported for Activities

Activity	% of Actual Time			% of Ideal Time		
	Rural	Urban	F, Sign.	Rural	Urban	F, Sign
Consultation	15.47	22.06	2.45,.122	26.00	26.96	.04,.839
Interventions	14.40	13.23	.15,.701	18.58	20.14	.22,.638
Preventions	4.54	9.8	2.68,.107*	16.50	20.24	1.19,.280
Assessments	49.33	43.77	.80,.374	27.70	25.69	.22,.639
Administration	14.00	10.85	.89,.349	10.00	9.37	.04,.836
Other	11.43	8.77	.34,.562	7.00	8.5	.08,.779

Note. \*\*  $p < .05$ , \*  $p < .10$

Table 5b

## Average Percentage of Time Reported for Activities

Activity	% of Actual Time			% of Ideal Time		
	Rural	Rural	F, Sign.	Rural	Rural	F, Sign
	Nebraska	Iowa		Nebraska	Iowa	
Consultation	15.47	39.09	15.96, .001**	26.00	32.00	1.18, .289
Interventions	14.40	18.64	1.04, .317	18.58	22.00	.70, .415
Preventions	4.54	10.64	4.57, .044	16.50	19	.23, .640
Assessments	49.33	17.55	19.72, .000**	27.70	14.50	8.78, .007**
Administration	14.00	8.89	.90, .354	10.00	6.67	.59, .455
Other	11.43	15.00	.29, .602	7.00	13.75	1.09, .331

Note. \*\*  $p < .05$

Table 6

What School Psychologists Reported Liking Most About Their Job.

	Urban	Rural (Nebr.)	(Rural Iowa)
Diversity of the job	22% (n=12)	25% (n=4)	9% (n=1)
Freedom/Flexibility of the job	16% (n=9)	25% (n=4)	55% (n=6)
Working with students	42% (n=23)	25% (n=4)	9% (n=1)
Working with other staff/professionals	22% (n=12)	19% (n=3)	-
Working with families	16% (n=9)	13% (n=2)	-
Making a difference for a student/teacher	16% (n=9)	19% (n=3)	9% (n=1)
Consultation	13% (n=7)	19% (n=3)	-
Assessments	9% (n=5)	-	9% (n=1)
Interventions	13% (n=7)	-	9% (n=1)
Being able to define role/job	4% (n=2)	6% (n=1)	33% (n=1)
Problem Solving	7% (n=4)	-	-

Note. Items do not equal 100% because some questionnaires had several responses.

Table 7

## What School Psychologists Reported Liking Least About Their Job.

	Urban	Rural (Nebr.)	Rural (Iowa)
Paperwork/Report writing	56% (n=31)	25% (n=4)	73% (n=8)
School politics	15% (n=8)	-	9% (n=1)
Time restraints	13% (n=7)	6% (n=1)	9% (n=1)
Facing resistance to change	7% (n=4)	6% (n=1)	-
The referral process	9% (n=5)	13% (n=2)	-
Overwhelming Demands/Caseloads	7% (n=4)	13% (n=2)	18% (n=2)
Input not taken into consideration	4% (n=2)	-	
Having multiple roles	5% (n=3)		
Pay	4% (n=2)	-	-
Travel	2% (n=1)	13% (n=2)	9% (n=1)
Not being part of the school	-	13% (n=2)	9% (n=1)
Nothing	-	13% (n=2)	-

Note: Items do not equal 100% because some questionnaires had several responses



Table 8

## What School Psychologists Report Wanting to Change About Their Job.

	Urban	Rural (Nebr.)	Rural (Iowa)
More interventions	15% (n=8)	25% (n=4)	
More time	11% (n=6)	25% (n=4)	9% (n=1)
Delivery of services	16% (n=9)	19% (n=3)	27% (n=3)
Less paperwork/report writing	16% (n=9)	13% (n=2)	-
More consultation	2% (n=1)	6% (n=1)	-
Nothing	11% (n=6)	6% (n=1)	11% (n=2)
More pay	5% (n=3)	6% (n=1)	9% (n=1)
More school psychologist in the district	7% (n=4)	-	9% (n=1)
Smaller caseloads	7% (n=4)		9% (n=1)
More Prevention	11% (n=6)		-
Less testing	9% (n=5)	-	
Travel	-	13% (n=2)	
Role	-	-	-

Note. Items do not equal 100% because some questionnaires had several responses