

TRENDS IN SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY: INFLUENCES OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE ON PROFESSIONAL CHANGE

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As school psychology enters the new millennium, policy makers are demanding that steps be taken to ensure the safety of schools. This article argues that school psychology should provide a primary leadership role in this initiative based on their professional training and expertise. Furthermore, the tensions created by social expectation to implement violence-prevention and intervention programs will provide the incentive and momentum for school psychology to redefine itself in the 21st century. © 2000 John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

National Education Goal #7 states that, "By the year 2000, every school in the United States will be free of drugs, violence and the unauthorized presence of firearms and alcohol and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning" (National Education Goals Panel, 1999). As the 21st century begins, it is evident that this goal has not been achieved, although progress has been made. Recent reports summarizing data from the longitudinal Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey (YRBS; Brener, Simon, Krug, & Lowry, 1999; Kaan, Kinchen, Williams, et al., 1998; Kann, Warren, Harris, et al., 1995, 1996), show that threatening behavior, fights, and weapon possession at school decreased markedly during the late 1990s. Nonetheless, influenced by reports of school shootings that claimed multiple victims, the general public and policy makers remain concerned about the threat of violence on school campuses (Furlong, Sharma, & Rhee, in press). Given this circumstance, what is next for the nation's schools and the school-psychology profession? Do we abandon this goal as a quixotic quest? This article addresses these issues and proposes that the social forces generated by concern about school violence provide school psychology a rare opportunity to reinvent itself for the 21st century. This process of professional change or adaptation needs to occur by developing a knowledge base that is unique to our field by emphasizing the "school" aspect of school violence and by putting our efforts into reducing risk and protective factors rather than focusing solely on outcomes.

SCHOOL VIOLENCE AND SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY

Before beginning this discussion, it is necessary to address briefly school-violence definition issues. Bluntly stated, this could be a very brief article if policy makers' reactions to the tragic school shootings that occurred in the late 1990s resulted in the implementation of a definition that focuses primarily on threats of extreme physical violence. If the answer to the question, "How will we know when school violence is no longer a problem?" is that the shootings will stop, then school violence will be defined primarily as a security matter, and security hardware responses will predominate. In such a scenario, school psychologists will not play a major role. If, on the other hand, school violence is defined in a broader way that includes a continuum of harmful behaviors encompassing social and psychological harm (see Furlong & Morrison, in press; Morrison, Furlong, & Morrison, 1994), then school psychologists have much to offer.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE

More than 30 years ago, Kuhn took a reflexive look at how knowledge and information in scientific and professional communities advances (Polsby, 1998). Although every profession fancies it-

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self to be proactive, dynamic, and on the forefront of knowledge, this is not always the case. As is widely recognized, knowledge advancements in a profession do not usually progress in a linear fashion but occur in bursts at times when imaginative thought, often provided by young scholars who are not deeply invested in the theoretical and research paradigms of a profession, emerges. In the context of this article, we propose that professional research, the knowledge it creates, and how it is applied to practice also advances when external forces compel a profession to consider new issues and to reconsider old issues in new ways.

Major changes in school psychology have occurred in the past in response to external social forces. The assessment mandates of the original Education for the Handicapped Act (PL 94-142) in the late 1970s was the first time that districts were required to provide school-psychology services. It is arguable that, during the past 20 years, the profession of school psychology has been influenced more fundamentally by this landmark social-policy program than by its own internal mechanisms of research and best-practices dissemination. What has been referred to by some as the “fair employment act” for school psychologists (Goldwasser, Meyers, Christenson, & Graden, 1983) also has come to be seen by others as a yoke on the profession, one which restricts the scope of services school psychologists provide.

We mention this historical perspective because it has implications for where the profession goes in this millennium. Although school psychology has a long, rich tradition as a formal organization, the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) has existed for just 30 years. As might be expected, this period of time included advocacy for competing professional roles and debates about which paradigms hold the greatest promise. In the absence of young scholars emerging to provide revolutionary thought about the roles and functions of school psychologist, and as a public-helping profession, we, at times, find ourselves changing in response to broader social needs and forces. In California, for example, the Larry P. decision resulted in the banning of the use of intelligence tests for all students in many school districts. Such a fundamental change would be extremely difficult to effect in a short period of time without external demands and dictates.

SCHOOL VIOLENCE AND PROFESSIONAL CHANGE IN SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY: WHAT DOES IT PORTEND?

With respect to National Education Goal #7 and the form that it will take over the next decade, we argue that school psychology potentially is facing another watershed social force that has the potential to change fundamentally the ways that school psychologists spend their work days and the types of research they conduct. We also suggest that this is a particularly critical matter for the profession because if school psychology does not respond in meaningful ways to social expectations to address school violence, its associated drug use, and to increased school safety, then other professions will step in to fill this void. In saying this, we are not arguing that school psychology is the only profession that has a role to play in helping schools address the impacts of youth violence, but if it does not respond in constructive, proactive ways, these social needs will be provided by others. This is a potential development that has not been missed by the profession, as evidenced by the fact that Kevin Dwyer, the president bringing NASP into the 21st Century, is the lead author of “Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools” (Dwyer, Osher, & Warger, 1998), which was distributed to every school in the United States. Punctuating this point, the NASP president-elect at the beginning of this millennium is Scott Poland, a nationally recognized expert in school-crisis response and, after the Jonesboro, Arkansas shootings, a National Organization of Victim Assistance (NOVA) team leader.

With the exception of PL 94-142, at no time in the past 30 years has an issue galvanized policy maker’s interest in expanding the availability of mental-health services in the schools. It is difficult to imagine another social condition that would prompt governors to sponsor legislation mandating counseling services in all elementary schools. In addition to the obvious need for crisis

consultation and response (Poland, 1997) to address school violence, new policy initiatives are changing the responsibilities of school psychologists to include a variety of team-building and collaboration-building activities such as: (a) implementing early-screening and prevention programs; (b) counseling and intervention for high-risk youth; (c) creating and coordinating comprehensive support-service programs; (d) collaboration with public and private mental-health professionals; and (e) collaboration with juvenile probation departments. In addition, many federal- and state-funding requirements increasingly require that schools implement research-based programs and evaluate their adaptations of these programs. This focus on outcome-based program implementation provides an area for expanded professional service in the areas of conducting needs assessments, data management, program evaluation, and project-report writing. With their background in research and assessment, school psychologists are well prepared to help schools respond to these new mandates.

As society demands schools to address threats of violence on campuses, this will require school psychologists to work increasingly with youth who have conduct disorders and substance-abuse problems. This development has the potential to move the profession increasingly away from an individual pathology paradigm to one that integrates principles from human-development theories (e.g., attachment theory) and the risk and resilience literature (Miller, Brehm, & Whitehouse, 1998). Assessments of youth's social-emotional development could replace cognitive assessments as school psychologists' primary assessment function. Perhaps even the term "wraparound plans" will replace IEPs as the developmental needs of more students are recognized.

Substance use and abuse is another relevant topic that is associated highly with school violence (Cirillo et al., 1998; Ellickson, Saner, & McGuigan, 1997; Huizinga & Jakob-Chien, 1998). Research has developed this association, and suggests that the strong relationship between substance use and school violence be understood in terms of the substance abusers' participation in a social network that operates on the periphery of the school community and involves the presence of numerous risk factors (Furlong, Casas, Corral, Chung, & Bates, 1997). School-violence-prevention efforts may encourage school psychologist to be more involved in drug-prevention programs, an area that the profession has essentially ignored.

PROFESSIONAL APPROACHES TO SCHOOL VIOLENCE

There were three major early influences on the evolution of interest in school violence as a topic of research, none of which were promoted by school psychologists. First, school violence was a law-enforcement issue that focused on factors that contributed to the development of antisocial behavior in children (Gottfredson, 1997; Patterson, DeBaryshe, & Ramsey, 1989). Second, it was a public-health matter that focused on reducing injury to youths, particularly as it is related to the increase of homicide and violence-related incidents (Guerra, Tolan, & Hammond, 1994; Prothrow-Stith, 1995; Rivara, 1995; Sosin, Koepsell, Rivara, & Mercy, 1995). Third, it was a research focus that grew out of a broader interest in the effects of exposure to violence as a developmental risk factor (Kellerman, Rivara, Rushforth, Banton et al., 1993; Morrison et al., 1994; Walker, Stieber, & O'Neill, 1990). These three perspectives merged, and researchers began to examine school violence because they shared an interest in youth violence—its origins, its consequences, and its prevention. Moreover, schools serve as an ideal setting in which to access many youths for violence-prevention programs, as well as an appropriate setting, given the rash of homicides that have occurred on school campuses. Given these historical trends, it is legitimate to ask what role school psychology will play in violence prevention.

As far as school psychology's role in relationship to these concepts, Bracken (1999) discusses how the role of school psychologists has expanded during the past 30 years. He points out that school psychologists have made theoretical contributions to psychology in areas such as adaptive behavior, burnout, intelligence, and motivation, but none of these are unique to the discipline of school psychology. Along these lines, a striking review article by Frisby (1998) reported that school-psychol-

ogy journals display a low rate of self-citation compared to related journals in other fields. School-psychology journals tend to “store” citations from other journals to a greater degree than they “feed” them. By not including references that draw on the same journal in which the contribution appears, the implication is that our field is not developing a self-identified cohesive body of knowledge.

If there is one topic that should fall solidly within the domain of school psychology, it is the study of school violence, but this has not been the case. We examined the PSYCHINFO literature database for the years 1980 through 1999 for evidence that school-psychology journals (*School Psychology Review*, *Psychology in the Schools*, *Journal School Psychology*, and *School Psychology Quarterly*) contained articles pertaining to school violence. A literature search on all school-psychology journals from 1980 to the present produced only three citations for “anger management,” 25 citations for “school violence,” and 17 for “conduct disorders.” It is encouraging that in recent years school psychology has increased its attention to issues related to aggression and behavioral disorders. Nonetheless, the profession will need to increase its attention to school violence to be an equal partner with delinquency, mental-health, and public-health researchers who dominated the school-violence literature during the 1990s.

A ROLE FOR SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS: FOCUS ON VARIATIONS IN INDIVIDUALS AND CONTEXTS

In the coming decade, school psychologists will assume an increasingly important role in schools’ efforts to minimize the effects of school violence. This effort, however, will be most effective if it builds upon already well-established school psychology traditions and skills. These efforts will require a relevant organizational theme to avoid the implementation of hodgepodge, off-the-shelf programs. There is a need to vary interventions across individuals and circumstances. The following studies represent the importance of examining individuals and contexts.

Furlong, Sharma, and Rhee (in press) have taken the approach of empirically defining school-violence-victim subtypes using cluster-analysis procedures. They examined the responses of more than 9700 California students (screened for unreliable response patterns) in grades 6 to 12 to a comprehensive school-climate and safety survey. Using composite scores to assess four types of victimization at school in the past month—verbal threats, physical attacks, sexual harassment, and weapon exposure—they found that just 22% of all students reported experiencing no victim incidents at school in the previous month, and an additional 45% reported experiencing 1 to 3 incidents. Evidence was found for seven victim subtypes: (a) Low Victimization—Verbal Threats, (b) Low Victimization—Physical Attacks, (c) Moderate Victimization—Sexual Harassment, (d) Moderate Victimization—Weapon Threats, (e) High Victimization—Sexual Harassment and Physical Attacks, (f) High Victimization—Verbal Threats and Physical Attacks, and (g) High Victimization—Weapon Threats. Furlong et al.’s (in press) findings show that some students do not experience chronic victimization at school, and those who do have varying experiences. If victimization occurs, it often is only in the form of verbal threats. However, other students only report experiencing sexual victimization (harassment and inappropriate touching) in a given month. A small group reported high levels of victimization including verbal threats, physical altercations, and exposure to weapons. These highly victimized youths also provide responses suggesting that they are not well connected to school, are more likely to be involved in gangs, and have poor school performance. This emphasizes the need to address the context when evaluating school-violence needs and when designing intervention. Clearly, broad violence-prevention programs cannot target all of these victim subtypes equally well. Schools need to learn more about the types of victimization that occur on their campuses and then implement programs targeted for their students’ predominant needs.

Even when subcategories of student-violence perpetrators and victims are considered and variations in their individual characteristics enumerated, it also is important to consider the circum-

stances surrounding these incidents. For example, Morrison and D’Incau, (1997) and Morrison, D’Incau, Couto, and Loose (1997) describe groups of students who were recommended for expulsion from school. While a common vision of students who find themselves in disciplinary proceedings is one that incorporates troubling and socially maladjusted adolescents, in fact, only about 25% of students recommended for expulsion could be described with that profile. The other 75% included students, who ranged in age from 5 to 18, fell into negative situations such as an isolated event or “accident.” These “one-time-incident students” exhibited a pattern of passive alienation from school, were experiencing emotional and family difficulties, or had histories of special learning and behavior needs that schools were attempting to accommodate and remediate. In parallel, the situations that led to recommendations for expulsions also varied in terms of their severity or risk to self and others in terms of the nature of the expulsion offense and in terms of the extent to which the behavior was precipitated by specific contexts.

EMPHASIZING *SCHOOL* IN SCHOOL-VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Given the importance of examining individuals and contexts, we propose that a starting point, school-safety planning, should consider three distinct intervention approaches for three distinct groups of students. The groups of students include those who are well connected to the mission of the school, those who show signs of alienation, and those who are at risk for leaving or removal from school. These groups will be further defined below.

The three intervention foci, using the theme of school bonding, are to reaffirm, reconnect, and reconstruct. This formation links school violence to the skill base of school psychology in terms of counseling, consultation and social-skills training. Therefore, there is a need to adapt rather than reinvent our skills to meet new service demands. This is a resiliency-based approach that is based on Hawkin’s social development model (Hawkins, Catalano, et al., 1992). It identifies three conditions that facilitate bonding to school: (a) the opportunity to contribute to the school community or be a member of a group, (b) gaining the skills necessary to experience success in this contribution, and (c) a system of consistent recognition and reinforcement for positive contribution. The school’s responsibility is to ensure that all students have opportunities, gain skills, and receive recognition; however, the mechanisms for ensuring these will vary depending on the students and their interactions with the various contexts of the school. Walker et al. (1996) refer to primary, secondary, and tertiary approaches to student variation in risk status. We are suggesting a further level of consideration; that is, the explicit attention to outlining the contexts of school environments.

The following discussion attempts to address the student groups whose linkages with school need to be reaffirmed, reconnected and reconstructed in light of schooling contexts and mechanisms of bonding (opportunities, skills, recognition). We suggest that this model, or others like it, provides a way to reframe concerns about school violence that clearly draws upon the professional skills of school psychology.

Reaffirmation

The majority of students in schools are well connected to school and do not behave in violent ways. Violence-prevention efforts have typically not been addressed to these students. For this group, the mechanisms of bonding (opportunities, skills, and recognition) are in place and generally functioning for them in a positive fashion. However, there is always some risk that these students may be the victims or the perpetrators of more subtle forms of violence, such as social rejection, failure to meet expectations, or lack of opportunity for positive involvement. For this type of situation, education potentially can enhance the student’s ability to cope with violent situations; i.e., (a) understanding, evaluation, and reframing the problem situation; (b) choosing competent action; and (c) keeping powerful emotions, such as anger or fear, from becoming debilitating (Straus, 1994).

Thus, there are tasks to be accomplished at all levels of schooling to reaffirm the existing bonds to school that these students have. These efforts include:

1. School Organization and Management
 - Provide opportunities to be involved in positive community service activities
 - Expand leadership opportunities
 - Allow meaningful student input into the organization of the school
2. Curriculum and Instruction
 - Provide education about being a citizen in a violent society
 - Provide education about being a witness of violent acts
 - Provide education about the incidence of family violence (avoid in own families)
 - Provide information about date rape/violence
 - Provide information about hate crimes and intolerance
 - Educate about the reality of violence and crime in society
 - Educate about being a consumer of media with violent content and themes
3. Climate/Relationships
 - Provide opportunities to participate and be involved in school cohesion activities
 - Provide opportunities to reaffirm connections with teachers
 - Provide sources of support when troubles arise
 - Emphasize the importance of developing and maintaining positive relationships with all school participants
4. Individual Development
 - Provide training in avoiding potentially dangerous situations
 - Provide social skills with which to recognize and deflect opening moves that might lead to violence
 - Provide opportunities to explore attitudes and values related to the use of violence as a means to right a wrong
 - Enhance coping skills

Reconnection

Some students, while not involved in violent activities are at risk because of their brewing alienation from school. Morrison and D’Incau (1997) identified a group of students who were showing behaviors of disengagement from school such as truancy, declining grades, lagging in earning high-school graduation credits, and multiple contacts with school authorities for these behaviors. This group of students shows a distancing of the mission of schooling from their own lives. To the extent that these students fail to complete academic tasks, their academic failure may signal potential development of antisocial behavior (Kazdin, 1995; Walker & Gresham, 1997). Some proportion of this group is likely to include students who have disabilities. Fink (1990) notes that students with learning disabilities or mild mental retardation may be less bonded to school, feeling alienated and exhibiting less commitment to school rules.

For these students, the bonds to school already have become somewhat fractured; thus, the job of educators is to reconnect these students to school, requiring a somewhat different approach than that taken with the “reaffirming” group. We need to reach out to them. It is unlikely that they will come to us. The opportunities provided, skills developed, and recognition provided must be matched to the nature of this group. The opportunities provided may be different from those that attract the reaffirmation group. Educators may need to make concerted efforts to solicit and listen to the thoughts and interests of this group of students. The places and circumstances under which this group of students may shine may not be in typical mainstream-core-content areas. Talents in art, music, and physical abilities need to be recognized and supported.

1. School Organization and Management
 - Provide educational alternatives when more personal attention is needed
 - Get them involved in school activities and programs that match their interests

- Ensure that these students are provided with leadership opportunities and that their opinions are solicited
 - Avoid total exclusion as a disciplinary tactic
2. Curriculum and Instruction
 - Provide curriculum that is directly relevant to student's lives
 - Ensure that instruction is matched in difficulty to the student's abilities
 - Provide and value learning in noncore areas such as art and music
 - Provide opportunities to view role models in a variety of careers
 3. Climate/Relationships
 - Match these students with adult and peer mentors and partners to encourage meaningful involvement
 - Maximize contact with teachers who have a respectful and caring attitude toward this type of student
 4. Individual Development
 - Provide close monitoring of credit attainment
 - Provide additional opportunities to make up for lost credit

Reconstruction.

These youths may be involved in antisocial, delinquent behavior and disproportionately involved in school violence, both as victim and perpetrator. There are very good reasons to extend assistance to these youths. The group of students who are most at risk for committing violent acts on school campuses are those who already are identified as exhibiting antisocial behaviors or having conduct disorders. Walker et al. (1996) suggests that students who display at-risk and antisocial forms of behavior at an early age are deficient in many of the critically important behavioral competencies associated with schooling. These are students who are most likely to be excluded from school through suspension or expulsion based on their behavior and/or major rule violations. However, this behavior is rarely found in isolation from other major stressors in the lives of these students, such as family disruption, school failure, and negative peer associations. Thus, in addition to an emphasis on skill building of prosocial skills, these students need assistance with their family and community associations and with their ability to engage in and succeed in their academic endeavors.

For this group, the opportunities provided may consist of continued participation in an educational environment. Skill development may require making up ground lost because of previous difficulties with engaging in the tasks of schooling. Recognition may be a particular challenge within a system where the demands are well above where these students are functioning. Therefore, extra effort should be expended at providing recognition contingent on smaller steps for smaller accomplishments, which include:

1. School Organization and Management
 - Provide educational alternatives when more personal attention is needed
 - Get them involved in some school activities and programs
 - Connect with community resources that will assist with family difficulties
2. Curriculum and Instruction
 - Provide curriculum that is directly relevant to student's lives
 - Ensure that instruction is matched in difficulty to the student's abilities
 - Instruct in smaller groups
 - Provide for a shorter day
3. Climate/Relationships
 - Match these students with adult and peer mentors and partners to encourage meaningful involvement
 - Rebuild trust through contact with caring teachers and support personnel
4. Individual Development
 - Provide close monitoring of credit attainment

- Build social skills
- Identify disabilities in need of remediation and alternative learning pathways

With these complex issues comes the opportunity for our field to redefine our role. We assert that, just as America requires teachers to get a specific credential for elementary and secondary education, it is time for school psychologists to specialize as well. The issues that our students face are becoming more and more complex, and they are demanding more and more services from schools. Changes in public policy and educational practice, as well as advances in applied research, underscore the need for school psychologists with expertise in providing services to children with diverse needs. Fagan (1993) suggests that school-psychology training should offer different levels of credentialing and practice. In fact, in some states, such as California, legislation has been passed mandating training in school-violence knowledge and skills. This is particularly critical because practicing school psychologists report that they did not receive training to address school violence and that they feel unprepared to respond meaningfully to its demands (Furlong & Babinski, 1996).

However, it is unrealistic to expect that school psychologists can gain the appropriate and in-depth training in this multitude of issues. Farrell and Lunt (1994) question whether trainees are being adequately prepared for the rapidly changing demands that face them. It may be that the skills required to respond to severe forms of school violence and the crises it spawns will require specialty training. A move in this direction is noted in the creation of crisis-response teams in major school districts.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Due to the efforts of a number of wide-scale data-collection efforts in the past few years, we now have a fair idea of the nature and extent of violence that occurs on school campuses. We have proposed that now it is time for school psychologists to join fully the conversations and discussions about these problems and to assist their fellow educational professionals also to do so. School psychology's unique contribution lies in its ability to help schools own and modify the conditions that are inherent on school campuses that may cause distress or harm to students in ways that could lead to school violence. Similarly, they are in a position to help administrators provide safe and effective schooling practices that will enhance the safety, development, and resiliency of students. We have proposed that individual and contextual variation increasingly will be recognized during the coming decade. In terms of individual variation, we have described three groups of students who may need different approaches to enhancing the extent to which they are bonded or connected to school (reaffirmation, reconnection, and reconstruction). These enhanced connections will contribute to creating safe and successful schools, and it is through social and psychological influences, such as enhancing student connection to school, that school psychology has the most to offer violence-prevention efforts.

Although past research predominantly has defined school violence in juvenile-justice and public-policy language, it now is known that the patterns of perpetuation and victimization of school violence are unique. Violence that takes place on school campus has unique characteristics to the violence that is evident off campus in the community. It is known that different groups within the school community (e.g., boys vs. girls, teachers vs. students, aggressive vs. nonaggressive youth) view violent school events in different ways. Therefore, each group focuses on different aspects of the physical and social context related to the violent event. Research from school-violence literature suggests that violence is associated closely with specific subcontexts within the school (Astor, 1998). We also know that there are very different patterns of predictors and victims' reactions to violence by gender (O'Keefe & Treister, 1998). These pathways, risk and protective factors to school violence are different, and these differences have implications for how we conceptualize this issue. It is our expect-

tation that school psychology's efforts to become more involved in reducing risk factors that lead to violence has the potential to help the profession garner support to move into areas that it has long sought: early prevention, services for all students, and coordination of comprehensive pupil-support programs (Ysseldyke et al., 1997).

In conclusion, recent school shootings have challenged school psychologists to redetermine their role. Out of these tragedies comes the potential to use this energy to expand beyond narrow theories, definitions, and outcomes and focus on risk and protective factors. By gaining a better understanding of these elements, we can redefine not only our roles in the 21st century, but also the ways in which we conceptualize successful future educational goals.

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