

PROSPECTIVE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST'S ROLE

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Abstract – *Acknowledging the importance of teachers' implicit theories for the determination of school psychologist's role, this study aims to elicit prospective teachers' personal theories for the role of school psychologist. By using metaphoric pictures, 59 pre-service teachers described their perceptions of the school psychologist's role in relation to other members of the school community, the expectations of both teachers and the school psychologist in relation to the role of the school psychologist, the variability of conditions in which the school psychologist's role is undertaken as well as their feelings about the school psychologist's role. Content analysis of data indicated that prospective teachers perceived the school psychologist's role as being carried out within the school setting and as being prominent in relation to the teachers' role. The school psychologist aims to help students and teachers to achieve their goals, while teachers perceive the school psychologist as a consultant. The school psychologist's task is undertaken under continually changing conditions, depending mainly on the variability of people's needs. Finally, prospective teachers described a variety of emotional responses in relation to the school psychologist's role. These findings are discussed in terms of the expansion of the school psychologist's role, teachers' professional identity and the training programmes of both school psychologists and teachers.*

Introduction

The role of the school psychologist has been the subject of the debate and criticism since the 1954 Thayer Conference (Levinson *et al.*, 1996). Much research since then has focused on school staff and the school psychologist's perceptions of the role and the functions of school psychologists, discrepancies between actual and desired roles and the extent to which role preferences and conflicts are associated with the school psychologist's job satisfaction and the school staff's satisfaction with the school psychologist's role (Roberts, 1970; Gilmore and Chandy, 1973; Hughes, 1979; Dean, 1980; Violato *et al.*, 1981; Bowen and Dalton, 1981; Fisher *et al.*, 1986; Mucha, 1994; Watkins *et al.*, 2001). This professional obsession with identity, according to Benson and Hughes (1985), may be the result of the multiplicity of role definers and the general

character of school psychological practice. Besides the plethora of studies, however, the role of the school psychologist has been narrowly defined by legal issues and by administrators and teachers who do not understand the potential of school psychologists. Within the school environment, there is ambiguity as to the role of the school psychologist because school staff may be unaware of the duties, obligations, training and skills of the school psychologist (Peterson *et al.*, 1998; Hagemeyer *et al.*, 1998). These studies also concur that there is a desire for the psychologist to embrace alternative assessment techniques instead of traditional educational diagnostics, to develop more intervention-oriented roles and to expand consultation (Bahr, 1996). Benson and Hughes (1985) also suggested that an effective strategy for the modification and expansion of the school psychologist's role refers to the influential role of teachers and principals. In their study, they revealed that school psychologists want teachers to be more influential in determining the role of the school psychologist. Teachers may be the school psychologists' most valued ally in expanding school psychological services. Thus, informing teachers and principals about the benefits of preventive services provided by the school psychologist and then obtaining evidence that teachers and principals perceive those services as effective, adds to the reconsideration and expansion of school psychologist's role.

In Greece, school psychology has attempted to expand its role and functions and establish itself in the educational field. Teachers are often annoyed by, or misunderstand the school psychologist's role (Nikolopoulou and Oakland, 1990). The Greek Psychological Society's division of school psychology recently drew up a report concerning the role and qualifications of the school psychologist (E.Ψ.E.2000, 14). A study of Greek teachers' perceptions of the role of school psychologists revealed that teachers believe that they help and facilitate their task and perceive their co-operation as necessary. From teachers' responses however, a need arises for the clarification and definition of role limits for both teachers and school psychologists, in order to avoid conflict between these two professions in their common area of activity (Poulou, in press, a).

It follows that further research is needed to sufficiently delineate and identify the role of the school psychologist, particularly in the Greek context. The current study attempts to delineate prospective teachers' perceptions of the school psychologist's role. Adopting Benson and Hughe's (1985) assumption for the modification of the school psychologist's role, this study determines the role and functions of the school psychologist as they are perceived by prospective elementary teachers. Emphasis is mainly given to teachers' personal or implicit theories. Teachers' personal theories refer to a person's latent, private construct of knowledge, experience and values that is relevant to the practice of teaching (Meijer, 1999; Matsagouras, 1999; Papoulia-Tzelepi and Spinthourakis, 2000).

Studies of teachers' implicit theories share the common idea that teachers' cognitive, emotional and actual behaviour is driven and predicted by their personally-held system of beliefs, values and attributions (Clark and Peterson, 1986; Barnes, 1992; Poulou and Norwich, 2001a). Sugrue (1997, p.214), referring to Holt-Reynolds, argued that pre-service teachers do not consciously learn implicit theories at an announced, recognised moment from a formal teaching/learning episode. Rather, lay theories represent tacit knowledge lying dormant and unexamined by the student. Sugrue further argued that the content of lay theories, the principal forces that interact in their formation and their tacit nature, have major significance for initial teacher education and ongoing professional development of teachers. Consequently, they need to be constructed, understood and be open to continuous negotiation and reconstruction in order to promote the quality of teaching. According to Tilema (1994), the reconstruction of unconscious beliefs and ideas held by prospective teachers could be a more important task in programmes of teacher education, than the presentation of the new information itself. In fact, it is student teachers' personal theories which filter the information they receive, and judge, accept or reject the educational research findings. Wubbels (1992) and Korthagen and Kessels (1999) contended that one important reason for the poor transfer of theory taught on campus to classroom teaching practice is that teacher training programmes fail to influence the conceptions which prospective teachers bring to the teacher training programme.

Acknowledging the importance of teachers' implicit theories for the determination of the school psychologist's role, it thus becomes crucial for teachers to realise their implicit theories about the specific role of the school psychologist and to examine the extent to which they comply with contemporary knowledge and research findings. Therefore, this study aims to elicit prospective teachers' personal and latent theories on the role of the school psychologist. It aims primarily to expand the school psychologist's role and secondly, to cultivate a professional landscape of co-operation and communication between school psychologists and teachers. The study of teachers' perceptions contributes to further understanding and clarification of the school psychologist's role, and at the same time constitutes a useful tool to both psychologists and teacher trainers, to be used for effective preparation of these two professionals in their common field of activity, the school. More specifically, it aims to examine prospective teachers' perceptions of:

- the role of the school psychologist in relation to other members of the school community;
- the school psychologist's and school staff's expectations of the school psychologist's role;

- the variability of conditions in which the school psychologist’s role takes place;
- prospective teachers’ feelings about the school psychologist’s role.

Methodology

The methodological study of beliefs, perceptions and values constitute a difficult undertaking for researchers (Poulou and Norwich, 2001b). Dolk *et al.* (1999) argued that introspection and retrospection are unsuitable methods for studying feelings and thoughts, because people explain their actions by rational reconstructions. Although these reconstructions may be correct in most cases, their validity is not always easily verifiable. To compensate for this drawback, several authors have suggested using metaphors to promote awareness of the non-rational aspects of teachers’ functioning (Munby, 1986; Marshall, 1988; Russell *et al.*, 1988; Tobin, 1990; Tobin *et al.*, 1990; Munby and Russell, 1990; Marshall, 1990; Wubbels, 1992; Korthagen, 1993; Dolk *et al.*, 1999). According to Smith (1999), philosophers have shown that words and sentences do not represent ideas or objects. They are, rather, connected to other words, or sentences which are really made or invented. As an inscription of a word, thing, or idea by another word, thing or idea, metaphors can be useful tools for understanding complex cultural areas. Through the mechanism of analogy, they offer people a way of relating one idea to another idea with which they are more familiar or which is more concrete. Weade and Emst (1990) argued that in the classic form of metaphor, there are two parts. A secondary subject (one part) is used to describe a primary subject (second part), implying an analogy between the two. Metaphors convey points of view and frames of reference to graphic and figurative illusions. Thus, they contribute to sense making abilities and facilitate the process of meaning construction. The combination of what metaphor is said to be able to do (express abstract concepts), and what teacher knowledge is believed to be (structured by teacher’s experiences and difficult to articulate), led Carter (1990) to use metaphors for modelling teachers’ comprehension of their work. Carter contended that the use of metaphor can facilitate dialogue between the co-operating teacher and the pre-service teacher and can simulate the kind of reflection necessary for the improvement of teaching. Carter (1990, pp.111-112) described the following functions of metaphors:

1. Metaphors communicate not only knowledge but also associated affect about the task of classroom management.
2. Metaphors helped teachers approximate more closely the realities and demands of classroom management.

3. Metaphors were useful in describing the mental activity required of teaching; activity that is difficult, if not impossible to communicate via literal means.
4. Co-operating teachers used metaphors to show how conceptions of teaching are reflected in teachers' actions.
5. Metaphors illustrated how teachers reasoned about problems that presented themselves daily in classrooms.

Moreover, Morine-Dershimer and Reeve (1994), in their study of prospective teachers' metaphoric language, concluded that firstly, some metaphors or images of thinking are more appropriate than others in contributing to effective teaching practice, secondly, that teacher trainers have some knowledge which helps them to identify a more or less appropriate metaphor for teaching and thirdly, a change in metaphors for teaching will influence teachers' underlying beliefs and eventually their behaviour. Finally, based on the assumption that metaphors can encapsulate and bring teachers' perceptions and underlying beliefs to the surface, the current study made use of this methodological tool to investigate prospective teachers' perceptions of the school psychologist's role.

Sample

Fifty nine prospective students participated in the study (52 female, 3 male and 4 did not indicate their sex). Twenty five of the prospective teachers came from Patras University, 17 from Crete University and 17 from Athens University. All of them were in the fourth year of their studies in the Pedagogic Department. Prospective teachers were asked to describe the role of the school psychologist, by using a metaphor. More specifically, they were given the following instructions:

By using a metaphoric picture (i.e., people following a leader), describe the way you perceive the role of the school psychologist. In your description, mainly answer the following questions:

- who is the school psychologist, in your metaphoric picture?
- what is (s)he doing?
- are there any other people with him/her and what are they doing?
- what is taking place in your picture?
- what does the school psychologist want?
- what do the person or people who are with him/her want?
- does your metaphoric picture remain static?
- how do you feel when confronting this picture?

Clarifications were given to participants when necessary. It was also emphasised that the selection of metaphoric picture would be personal and unbiased from the example given in the instructions.

Results

The school psychologist's role in relation to members of the school community

The content analysis of prospective teachers' metaphors by 3 educational researchers, revealed a differentiation in the way in which the school psychologist initiates his/her intervention. On the one hand, prospective teachers perceived the school psychologist as an active member of the school community, co-operating with pupils, teachers, parents and other school members in a continuous process of accomplishing common goals (51 students, 86.4%). On the other hand, prospective teachers perceived the school psychologist as being isolated from the school community, as somebody who, even though (s)he attends closely, does not participate in school events (8 participants, 13.5%). S/he is however alert and ready to respond to any request for his/her intervention made by school members.

The school psychologist as a member of the school community

More specifically, when the school psychologist was perceived as an active member of the school community, there was a distinction in teachers' perceptions, in relation to the degree of power and authority exercised over school staff. In this case, the majority of prospective teachers (46 participants, 77.9%) perceived the school psychologist to be leading members of the school community, either in an atmosphere of mutual reciprocity and co-operation or in a more prescriptive way.

Seen as a leader, according to 30 prospective students (50.8%), the school psychologist guides students or other members of the community in a context of communication, mutual interaction and co-operation. More explicitly, 9 participants (15.2%) perceived the school psychologist as a dance teacher, shepherd, guide, conductor, team leader, adult and mother. In the teachers' words '... the school psychologist is the guide of a crowd of people (the students). S/he is friendly and sociable towards students, helps them to solve their problems, and talks with them, trying to be objective. The students ask for his/her advice and oppose his/her views when they disagree with them.' In these metaphoric pictures, the school psychologist plays a pivotal role as somebody who talks, consults and helps students satisfy their needs, get to know themselves and plan their future, in

a friendly and relaxed manner. It is worth mentioning though, that the protagonists in these nine pictures were solely the school psychologist and the students. Moreover, 21 prospective teachers (35.5%) described a conciliatory interaction between the school psychologist, pupils, parents and teachers, with the school psychologist having the central role. Thus, the school psychologist could be a basketball coach, guide, school bus-driver, mother, big brother, film director, or students' assistant. '... In a forest there are pupils, parents and a pupils' assistant. The forest has pathways which are easier or more difficult to follow. The forest symbolises school life. Pupils aim to pass through the forest along the easy paths, or to successfully negotiate the difficult paths. In the middle of the forest, in an easily accessible place, there is a pupils' assistant, the school psychologist. S/he works with students' parents, or with the students themselves. His/her goal is to inform the students about the alternative paths, or the means of overcoming the obstacles, so that they can continue their walk in the forest.' Another prospective teacher perceived the school psychologist as a guide. '... A guide who is not authoritative though, and who allows people to take their own decisions. S/he works with them, asks for their opinion and guides them to action without direct interference.'

On other occasions however, in the eyes of the 16 of the prospective teachers (27%) the school psychologist seemed to control students or members of the school community in a prescriptive and fixed manner. Ten prospective teachers (16.9%) attributed to the school psychologist the role of coach, sergeant, conductor, doctor, farmer, guide, grandfather, or duck. In these metaphors, prospective teachers described a rigid relationship between the school psychologist and students without the interference of teachers, parents or other members of school staff. For instance, '...the school psychologist is the sergeant who commands his soldiers. The latter are obliged to execute his orders. The sergeant wants to train his soldiers in the event of a national emergency', or '... the ducklings follow the mother duck step by step' and further '... the guide is the school psychologist. He guides students into raising their hands, exactly as he does. All but a few students imitate his movements'. In addition, 6 of the participants (10.1%) perceived the school psychologist as a co-ordinator, inspector, government minister or guide who strictly controls and directs a crowd, '... the school psychologist is a government minister who moves around his employees' offices and supervises whether they are conducting their jobs as they should. There is much tension in the picture. Phones ring, employees answer the phones, while the minister exhorts everyone to take care in carrying out their jobs and to try and do their best, in a commanding and strict tone.' In these metaphoric images, pre-service teachers did not specify the people who constitute the crowd. Although they refer to 'employees' or 'other people with

him', they do not clarify whether these people are students, teachers or other members of the school staff.

Three participants (5.08%) perceived the teacher as the guide of school community members and the school psychologist as contributing to the teacher's task. 'A volleyball team is chatting with the coach and his assistant, during a time-out of a match. The teacher is the coach and the school psychologist is the assistant. Also present are the players who are listening to both of them carefully. The coach consults and encourages the team, while his assistant gives further instructions to each player individually, if necessary.' Another metaphoric picture illustrated the role of the school psychologist as '... a dog who is watching a flock of sheep. The students are the sheep, their teacher is the shepherd.'

One participant (1.6%) perceived the school psychologist's and the teacher's roles as being equal. 'In this picture we have two people (the teacher and the school psychologist), who work together towards a common goal: the resolution of problems and better functioning of the team (the metaphorical picture refers to a sports team). Both people need each other and on condition that they are willing to co-operate, the team will function effectively.'

One participant (1.6%) perceived students to be the leaders of the school community. 'In this picture, a crowd of people (the school psychologist, specialists, parents, teachers) follow a guide (a student). By watching his/her behaviour and the conditions in which it is manifested, they try to find the causes and coping strategies for his/her behaviour.'

The school psychologist isolated from the school community

Eight participants (13.5%) perceived the school psychologist as being isolated from the school community, in a place which, however, is easily accessible to the members of the school community. Analytically, 3 participants described the school psychologist as a '... priest who preaches about moral values and teaches his flock the way to correct their mistakes and improve themselves,' or as '... a confessor who listens to people's thoughts and feelings, contributes to the relief of their soul and creates bonds of trust'. One participant perceived the school psychologist as an observer who watches the members of the school community carefully and intervenes whenever s/he considers it appropriate. 'A group of children are on a campus, near a lake. The school psychologist is the campus lifeguard. He is watching the children playing, ready to intervene in the event of an emergency'. For the prospective teacher who described a picture of a basketball game, the school psychologist is the '... the referee, who has no direct contact with the players (students). On the contrary, his mission is to remain unnoticed and intervene only when necessary for the smooth running of the game.' For another

participant, the school psychologist is ‘... a member of a medical team, who visits an encampment for sick and hungry children. He moves among them continuously in order to gain a clear picture of the conditions, watches people’s reactions and tries to resolve the awful situation’. One teacher perceived the school psychologist as ‘... an acrobat who is balancing on a rope without a safety net. He wants to reach the end of the rope and satisfy the expectations of the audience. At the end of the rope, there is another acrobat, standing on a safe platform, who is encouraging him. This is the teacher.’ Finally, one pre-service teacher used the metaphoric expression of ‘God’ or ‘higher’ power who provides spiritual piece and the balance of heart and mind’, to describe the role of the school psychologist.

The school psychologist’s and school staff’s expectations of the school psychologist’s role

According to prospective teachers’ metaphors, the school psychologist wishes to ‘... diagnose pupil’s problems and try to remedy them’ and ‘... guide, consult, help and motivate pupils’. S/he also wishes to ‘... create appropriate learning conditions for students’ and ‘... approach pupils in an integral and honest way to help them achieve a spiritual and psychological balance.’ The school psychologist anticipates that each pupil will ‘... explore and expose his/her feelings about him/herself and others. S/he wants to guide pupils to a better understanding of themselves, in order to accept themselves, become mature and solve their problems.’ In addition, the school psychologist anticipates ‘... helping teachers with topics related to school psychology, which s/he is well aware of’, ‘...solving the problems which school staff might have and satisfying their needs’ and word for word ‘... contributing to the moral, emotional and mental development of people who ask his/her advise.’ In one prospective teacher’s words ‘... the conductor (the school psychologist) wants to achieve musical harmony through his/her directions. A mistake s/he might make or the wrong note from the musicians will destroy the music. Moreover, in case of a wrong note s/he will help the ‘solo’ musicians to remedy their mistakes.’

At the same time, school staff want ‘... a consultant who will make them feel safe and secure’ and ‘...a person who will give them guidance on matters which trouble them.’ They need someone to ‘... work with them to achieve common goals,’ and ‘... a person who behaves in a socially acceptable way and becomes a paradigm for others.’ School members ‘... want to trust the school psychologist and act on his/her guidance. The school psychologist will help them to understand themselves, to release themselves from their constraints, face and solve their problems’ and ‘... learn how to improve themselves and others.’ On the other

hand, two participants argued that ‘... people who co-operate with the school psychologist might not understand his/her actual role.’ ‘Pupils approach the school psychologist because they have been referred to him/her, while teachers and parents are curious about his/her recommendations.’

Variability of the conditions in which the school psychologist’s role is undertaken

The pictures which prospective teachers described were characterised by silent power, mobility and energy, implying the variability of conditions in which the school psychologist functions. Regardless of the topic, pictures were full of life and a constant shift between intensity and tranquillity. All but four participants perceived their metaphoric picture as changing constantly. ‘The picture is full of passion, power, mobility and a variety of emotions’. The picture changes ‘in a stable and careful way’. ‘Change is continuous and developmental’. The variability is encountered depending on who is in charge – the school psychologist or another person. ‘Sometimes the school psychologist is the leader, while at other times someone else plays this role, depending on the situation.’ It is also encountered in the school psychologist’s instructions, ‘... the picture changes according to the effectiveness of the school psychologist’s intervention and its reflection of his/her response to the children’ and lastly, in people’s needs and the variability of people and conditions, in general. For one pre-service teacher the picture is ‘...not exactly static. It is as though the record player has got stuck, and is playing the same song over and over again, without ever managing to reach the end.’

Prospective teachers’ feelings about the school psychologist’s role

The question related to prospective teachers’ feelings when confronting their metaphor, elicited a variety of emotional responses concerning the school psychologist’s role, his/her responsibilities and the outcome of his/her intervention with pupils. Specifically, pre-service teachers described feelings of:

- *happiness and safety*: ‘... a picture without a school psychologist produces feelings of concern. The school psychologist’s presence in the picture enhances balance and harmony, and evokes feelings of safety.’ ‘... Knowing that the school psychologist, teacher and students can co-operate and help each

other makes me happy.’ ‘... The friendly atmosphere and the absolute cooperation make me feel sure of the outcome.’ ‘... It is nice to know that there is someone (the school psychologist) who intends to help, inform and get to know these people (students and teachers)’ or ‘... that students can talk to a person (the school psychologist), whom they can trust’;

- *deep emotion*: ‘... it is comforting to know that there are people who can help you’;
- *desire*: ‘... to participate in that team of people (students and the school psychologist) someday’;
- *satisfaction*: ‘... the school psychologist works hard and tries to do his/her best and complete his/her mission’;
- *surprise*: ‘... at the school psychologist’s energy, education and effectiveness’;
- *hope and optimism*: ‘... for the resolution of problems in the future’;
- *pleasure and fulfilment*: ‘... since the situation described in the picture is ideal for me’; but also
- *fear and concern*: about the effectiveness and the outcome of the school psychologist’s intervention ‘...to bring about the restoration of calm in the soul’. ‘... Sometimes the school psychologist’s task is meaningless and does not actually reach the heart of the problem.’ ‘... I realise how difficult the task of both the school psychologist and the teacher is, since they have to face a group of people with different destinations in life’. Furthermore, students expressed their concern about the real picture in Greek schools ‘... the metaphoric image is nice. The question is whether there is such a picture in Greek schools. Most of the time, the school psychologist is the dominator and students are under his/her influence.’

Discussion

This study revealed that the majority of prospective teachers (86.4%) perceived the school psychologist as being a member of the school community, who actually participates in school life, aiming to achieve common educational goals. There were however 13.5 percent of teachers who perceived the school psychologist as being isolated from the school community, yet ready to intervene and contribute to the school’s welfare, when necessary. When the school psychologist was perceived as interacting with school staff, the majority of pre-service teachers (77.9%) considered the school psychologist’s role to be prominent and central, while 3 teachers considered the teacher’s role to be fundamental and one participant considered both roles to be equal. The findings

concerning both the school psychologist's function within the school setting, and his/her role being perceived as more prominent than that of the teacher's, congruent with previous research; where 50 percent of prospective psychologists perceived the school psychologist to function in conjunction with school personnel, maintain the central role in the school community (Poulou, in press, b). This conclusion seems rather optimistic on the surface, since prospective psychologists and teachers share similar views about the central role of the school psychologist. It also seems to overturn past research findings concerning the differentiation in teachers' and psychologists' perceptions of the school psychologist's role (Roberts, 1970; Fenn, 1977; Bowen and Dalton, 1981). However, the identity of the teachers' and the school psychologist's role and the clarification of their limits of action, may be a cause for concern. The perception of the school psychologist's prominent role might erroneously lead to the conclusion that teachers play a secondary or passive role, while they exercise no authority or power in the school setting. As one prospective teacher accurately stated '... the school psychologist's role seems to be central and dominating in the picture. The people surrounding the school psychologist should be more active.' Concerning the quality of relationships, the majority of prospective teachers who perceived the school psychologist as leader of the school community (50.8%) described a picture of mutual interaction and co-operation between school psychologists and school staff.

There was however, a relatively high percentage of prospective teachers (27.1%) who described the school psychologist's role as authoritative and prescriptive, exercising control over pupils and school staff. It is obvious that such a belief held by prospective teachers might undermine their future co-operation and communication with school psychologists. In addition, there was a percentage of 32.3% of prospective teachers who included only the school psychologist and the pupils in their metaphorical picture, with no reference to teachers or to other school staff. When other people were added to the picture, which is true in the case of 27 of the pre-service teachers (45.7%), it was not always clear whether these people were teachers, parents or other members of the school staff. This result causes further concern, since teachers actually excluded themselves from psychologist- pupil interaction, assuming a strict dyadic relationship between the school psychologist and the children. Moreover, it is consistent with the result of Duis *et al.*'s (1995) research, in which 85 percent of pre-service teachers examined, had never spoken to a school psychologist, and many felt they needed a better understanding of their role in consultation. It is also congruent with Mucha's (1994) survey, which revealed the need for better personal communication among school psychologists and teachers during consultation.

At this point, the role of teacher training programmes becomes apparent. These programmes aim to enhance teachers' professional identity on the one hand, and to inform prospective teachers about the roles and services of other professionals who also function within the school, on the other. Moreover, both teacher and school psychologist's training programmes aim to create an atmosphere of healthy communication and co-operation between teachers and psychologists, in order to achieve their common educational goals successfully, through their different but equally important roles. As Oakland and Saigh (1987) stated, the organisation of education is analogous to a family, whose members differ in knowledge, responsibilities and authority. These members convene at an irregularly shaped table, providing them with different degrees of power.

Furthermore, according to teachers' perceptions, the school psychologist anticipates helping students to solve their problems and to achieve mental and psychological development and at the same time, facilitating teachers in completing their task. On the other hand, members of the school community regard the school psychologist as a consultant, a person whom they can trust and co-operate with to achieve improvement in both themselves and their students.

In addition, the school psychologist's task is carried out under continually changing circumstances. The mobility and variability of the school psychologist's working conditions depend on the degree of his/her power in the educational setting, the effectiveness of his/her intervention and the endogenous variability of people's needs, in general.

Confronted with their metaphoric picture, prospective teachers described a variety of emotional responses, ranging from feelings of safety and satisfaction underpinned by the school psychologist's presence at school and his/her co-operation with school staff, to feelings of fear and concern about the outcome of his/her intervention.

Certain limitations of this research should be mentioned before discussing the implications of the study. Random sampling was not used in selecting the prospective teachers, because their availability influenced their selection as participants. Taking into consideration the small sample, we can argue that this study only consists of an indicative report of prospective teachers' perceptions of the school psychologist's role. Additional studies are needed to explore psychologists', teachers', students' and school staff's views on this topic. Furthermore, the methodological tool used in the study resulted in the use of only one particular form of analogy, which only involved people instead of other analogical systems. Although metaphor enhances awareness of prospective teachers' latent perceptions, it is no panacea. In Perrin's (1987) words, 'Metaphor opens us to experience in certain ways and closes us in others. It invites us to

participate in the constitution of reality, while at the same time, barring us from the consideration of rival alternatives.’

This study attempted to give an insight to prospective teachers’ perceptions of the school psychologist’s role, by using their own language. As prospective teachers begin to become aware of their beliefs and expectations through the metaphors they use, a foundation of reflection is provided. Tobin (1990) asserted that through reflection, teachers can better understand the conflicts between and within their roles and beliefs, and where change is most needed. Tobin further continued that reconceptualising a role in terms of a new metaphor activates an entirely different set of beliefs and perceptions. Apparently, the alteration of tacit beliefs or implicit theory is not an easy task (Matsagouras, 2001). Beliefs and practice cannot simply change through exhortation, technology or a series of workshops (Papoulia-Tzelepi, Spinhourakis, 2000). Teacher educators can however assist prospective teachers in making their private belief system and their cognitive frames of reference explicit. They are in the unique position of being able to discover the images prospective teachers use to conceptualise their role and their professional identity in relation to the school psychologist. Teachers educators can then trace potential problems in prospective teachers’ metaphors and help them generate alternative ways of viewing their roles and the roles of other professionals as well.

On the other hand, school psychologists’ awareness of prospective teachers’ perceptions may be an important component of perceived effectiveness of their own role, and may add to the expansion of their professional identity. It is crucial that school psychologists be aware of these perceptions, particularly when there are discrepancies in the determination of roles. In that case, school psychologists and teachers would find it prudent to negotiate their responsibilities and activities, in order to reach a common understanding and an effective plan of action. After all, teachers perceive the school psychologist’s role as essential in the completion of their task and they consider co-operation between the two as beneficial to the educational process (Poulou, in press, b). At the same time, provided that they are appropriately trained, school psychologists are in a unique position for helping teachers, students and their families (Burden, 1994).

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