

School psychology for diversity: Editorial

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The concept of student diversity has brought together issues related to at least two major categories of students whose needs are not usually adequately addressed in general educational provisions: students with disabilities and other forms of special educational needs, and students from minority cultures or disadvantaged backgrounds (UNESCO, 2009). School psychologists have long been at the forefront in helping education systems, educators and parents in developing an understanding and adequate provisions for these students. However, the main role ascribed to psychologists was generally that of individual assessment and intervention. Increasing understanding of the cultural context of development, increasing student diversity in schools, and a deeper appreciation of the principles of social justice, have put inclusive education at the forefront of educational reform, and this in turn has called for a change in the role of psychologists as promoters of whole-school healthy contexts for learning and development. These issues were addressed in the keynote papers presented at the 31st International School Psychology Association Conference in Malta in 2009 on ‘School psychology for diversity’, some of which are brought together in this special issue of SPI.

Paul Bartolo sets out the main dilemma for all psychologists and school psychologists in particular: while psychologists have long been regarded as the experts about the challenges for adaptation faced by individuals who differ from the norm, inclusive education points towards the challenge of the context, community, education system, school and classroom to be transformed to welcome and support the

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participation and learning of all students. He highlights recent developments towards assessment of, and intervention in, the structure and processes of the socioeconomic and cultural context, rather than merely at the individual level. He describes how these have been more marked through new approaches under the various terms of biopsychosocial, cultural, systemic, and community psychology and have also been reflected in the inclusion of a section on 'social responsibility' for the welfare of groups as well as individuals in the development of an international ethical code for psychologists.

The medical focus dilemma for school psychologists has a historical basis in the development of school psychologists' role around IQ testing as comprehensively described in the second article by Peter Farrell. Despite increasing critical research, the administering of IQ tests and their use for decision making about special educational provisions have provided school psychologists with 'a unique and distinctive role' from which it remains difficult to escape. Farrell gives hope for change towards a higher quality of work for school psychologists. He suggests, first of all, that they can address issues related to learning and cognitive development through use of wider and dynamic assessment of children's engagement with learning, and more use of other distinctive psychological knowledge and skills, such as of knowledge of social and organizational processes and skills in facilitating change and training personnel, as well as the use of psychologists' capacity for research.

The issue of how traditional standardized testing can be transformed 'beyond self-fulfilling prophecies in admissions, instruction, and assessment' is addressed more specifically in the article by Robert Sternberg. His Wisdom-Intelligence-Creativity-Synthesised (WICS) model is an attempt to link assessment to real life challenges. He cites evidence that the use of WICS increased predictive validity and reduced race and ethnicity differences in assessments of college students. Interestingly for challenges of the modern world, this model includes the ethical issue associated with wisdom of concern for the common good. In contrast to traditional IQ testing, Sternberg's model also has recommendations for changing teaching approaches, suggesting that we teach to the WICS test for the development of analytic, creative, and practical skills within a framework of wisdom.

The next two articles give an account of how educational psychologists in two different contexts—Hong Kong and South Africa respectively—are engaged in the challenges of educational reform towards more inclusive education. Chris Forlin describes how the reform in Hong Kong towards a more comprehensive education has led to new demands on educational psychologists for the provision of whole-school services in support of teachers and schools. She indicates that this transition is being experienced as a tension among educational psychologists with changes to their organization and employment, and also new forms of accountability.

Berenice Daniels presents another different challenge being experienced with national reform in South Africa that is addressing racial, socio-economic, language, and cultural differences. She describes how the concept of 'barriers to learning' was seen as more appropriate than 'special needs' for a school population where 50% of students were found to lack adequate accessibility and support for

education. She outlines the development and implementation so far of a 20-year plan for the building of educational capacities for a quality education for all individuals and groups since the establishment of a democratic government in 1994. As the district manager of one of the Specialised Learner and Educator Support teams that are providing services for meeting the needs of all learners, she describes the challenges experienced in the move towards more preventative and consultation services, and the search for increased networking and inter-sector collaboration.

The evidence from Hong Kong and South Africa is that inclusive education is gradually being taken up as a main agenda by governments, and that in such reform educational or school psychologists are expected to provide more consultative and in-service work to promote teachers' and schools' capacities to meet the needs of diverse learners. At the same time, both authors also report on teachers still often expecting psychologists to address children's needs directly. This set of articles provides much food for thought for psychologists as they try to balance the tension between these two dimensions of their role. It should lead to a widening of the debate among the international community of school psychology. This debate should be of particular interest to the tutors of school psychology trainees. These need to be not only made conscious of the issues of work at systems level, but also need to be provided with the skills for evaluation of learning and development contexts and for intervention for social change.

Paul A. Bartolo is the Coordinator of the MPsy Professional Training Programme for Educational Psychologists at the University of Malta. He also coordinates the Programme for Culturally Responsive Education and the MEd for School Inclusion Coordinators. He led a National Curriculum Focus Group on Inclusive Education and a recent EU Comenius Project among higher education institutions from seven European countries which produced multilingual training materials for preparing teachers to respond to diversity (www.dtmp.org). He has published widely on educational psychology and inclusive education. He set up the school psychological services in Malta and has been consultant for accredited services for children with autism spectrum conditions. He was founder member and past president of the Malta Union of Professional Psychologists, and chair of the 31st ISPA Conference in Malta.

Mark G. Borg is Professor of Educational Psychology at the University of Malta. He has served as Head of the Department of Psychology and as Dean of the Faculty of Education. Professor Borg has been engaged in teacher education and researching educational psychology for over 25 years. His pioneering research (in Maltese settings) in the area of educational psychology has been published widely. These include papers on occupational stress in teaching, age position and gender effects on scholastic attainment, teachers' perception of classroom problem

behaviour, and school bullying. He has also edited and co-edited the proceedings of three international conferences held in Malta and served on the scientific committee of several national and international conferences. Professor Borg has served on several national committees including the Ministerial Committee on Inclusive Education and on School Bullying, and on the National Curriculum Council. He is a member of all leading international psychological and educational associations. Currently he is Vice-President of the MUPP, of which he has also served as Executive Secretary and International Secretary.

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Victor Martinelli qualified as an Educational Psychologist from Manchester University (UK) in 1990 and obtained his doctorate from the same University in 1996. He worked for some time with the Education Division in Malta as an Educational Psychologist and Education Officer. He is now a Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Education of the University of Malta. He is a UK Chartered Psychologist, an Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society, a Chartered Scientist (Science Council, UK) and a founding member of the Malta Union of Professional Psychologists. As a psychologist who is committed to the area of literacy, he has just completed the standardization of two reading comprehension tests in Maltese and English normed on over 2000 representative Maltese test takers between the ages of 6 and 16 years. Other current professional interests include education services for children from minority immigrant groups.