THE EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGIST: TRAINING AND FUNCTIONS

Juan Fernández
Complutense University of Madrid

This article presents a summary of the specificity of the educational psychologist compared to other psychologists and related specialists, as viewed from two perspectives, academic and professional. From the first perspective, the academic institutionalization and continual contributions of Educational Psychology over more than a century have been demonstrated. Because of both these facts – its institutionalization and its continuity – today it is possible to define both the goals and functions of the educational psychologist. From the second perspective, it describes all the academic, legislative and administrative procedures currently underway to incorporate the educational psychologist in schools on different levels of the formal Spanish education system. Finally, it highlights an initiative highly valued by academics, professionals and legislative authorities, but which under the present economic difficulties, has momentarily been forgotten.
Key words: Educational psychologists, Training, functions: Evaluation, Counseling and intervention.

En este trabajo se ofrece una síntesis de lo que puede constituir la especificidad del psicólogo/a educativo frente al resto de psicólogos y otros especialistas afines. Esta síntesis se realiza desde una doble perspectiva: académica y profesional. Desde la primera se constata la institucionalización académica y la continuidad de aportaciones a lo largo de más de un siglo de la Psicología de la Educación. Gracias a ambos hechos –institucionalización y continuidad-, hoy es posible definir tanto los objetivos como las funciones del psicólogo educativo. Desde la segunda, se describen las gestiones de todo tipo –académicas, legislativas y administrativas- que se están llevando a cabo actualmente para la incorporación del psicólogo educativo a los distintos centros de los diversos niveles del sistema educativo formal español. Finalmente, se reseña una iniciativa bien valorada por académicos, profesionales y autoridades legisladoras, pero que las dificultades económicas actuales la han relegado al olvido momentáneo.
Palabras clave: Psicólogos educativos, La formación, Las funciones: La evaluación, El asesoramiento y la intervención.

I n Spain until very recently, we have been talking more about the psychologist who worked in educational contexts than the educational psychologist as such In our day, fortunately, we are starting to talk and write about the figure of the educational psychologist more than the psychologist who practices in the school environment. The change is not just in name, not at all. In fact, there has been a substantial change. Below I will try to show some of the main implications of this change, from two perspectives, academic and professional.

ACADEMIC PERSPECTIVE
Historical background
I think we have sometimes not been completely aware that **Educational Psychology**, has been an essential part of Psychology and one of its major specializations for over a century, during which time a wealth of significant research and contributions have been made (Beltrán and Pérez, 2011; Zimmerman and Schunk, 2003). In fact, at the beginning of the 20th century,

Thorndike (1910) already considered it opportune to make a summary of the main contributions that psychology could make to education. That same year (1910), a journal appeared, which has not stopped publication since then, and has been a source of specialized well-grounded knowledge for researchers and professionals. From the beginning its general purpose was to show the union of psychological research on one hand and the *art of education* on the other: *The Journal of Educational Psychology* (http://psycnet.apa.org/index.cfm?fa=browsePA.volumes&jcode=edu). Likewise, the American Psychological Association (APA; http://www.apa.org/), which is structured in divisions, and is without doubt the international psychology association most important to psychologists, has two powerful divisions for Educational Psychology: School Psychology (http://www. apa.org/about/division/

Correspondence: Juan Fernández. *Facultad de Psicología. Universidad Complutense de Madrid. Campus de Somosaguas. 28223 Madrid. España. E-mail: jfernandez@psi.ucm.es*

div16.aspx) and Educational Psychology (http//www.apa.org/ about/division/div15.aspx). The number of Educational Psychology journals indexed in Journal Citation Reports (http:// thomsonreuters.com/ products_services/ science/ science_products/a-z/ journal_citation_ reports/), the publication that any researcher or professional in any area of science must consult, and therefore also educational psychologists, whether researcher or professional, is currently in the dozens, as well as the number of handbooks, books, descriptive and critical reviews or meta-analyses concentrating on this specialization (Fagan and Wise, 2007; Mayer and Alexander, 2010; Reynolds and Miller, 2003; Snow and Swanson, 1992).

In this respect, we have followed similar steps in Spain to those taken abroad, although it has certainly been much delayed, at least with respect to the USA. Specifically, when psychology studies were institutionalized in the fifties, Educational Psychology was an integral part of it. From that day to this, there has always been a specialization in Educational Psychology. The most developed and well-structured curriculum is the one which has been taught at the Complutense University of Madrid in the 4th and 5th years of Psychology, from the mid-eighties to date -2013-. The main scientific contributions in this area were compiled in a summary devoted to the major lines of research developed by professors in all the Universities in Spain where psychology is taught (Fernández, 1001; Sánchez-Miguel and García-Sánchez, 2002). The 67 lines of research analyzed were classified in the following five groups: cognitive and linguistic development, personal and social development, development and educational contexts, cognition and instruction, and development and learning difficulties.

Current situation

Building on this century-long history, what would a synthesized view of this area's specificity be with respect to other specializations in psychology and other disciplines, and therefore, specific to the educational psychologist? In keeping with our latest developments (Fernández, 2001, 2011), and as already collected in the Wikipedia (http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psic%C3% B3logo_educativo), there are three main cores of interest in educational psychology (this denomination necessarily includes school psychology): teachers, students and curricula. In all three cases, the literature on the multiple facets of the two agents

of the teaching-learning process, teachers and students, is very long. And therefore, they always have to be pluralized, like the umbilical cords that join them: the curricula – always plural – obligatorily open, given the unending progress in scientific knowledge and in historical and social change (Cochran-Smith and Zeichner, 2005; Harris and Sass, 2011; Rice, 2003; Wayne and Youngs, 2003).

More than ever, today – something which did not happen in the past – a good part of the information necessary is on the Internet, so the idea of teachers as mere transmitters of information is not valid, even though it was before the appearance of printing, and even up to the startup of the Internet. That information has to be transformed into theoretical and practical knowledge. The functions of teachers basically consist of stimulating and helping students carry out that transformation of the abundance of information (present on the Internet) into academically valid knowledge useful for both professional and daily life. Making the transformation of this plentiful information into both theoretically and practically relevant, significant knowledge is and will be practically impossible without the help of teachers (who definitely do not become unnecessary in the era of the Internet), especially during the non-university, although by no means excluding it, school years.

Students in our day are *digital natives* (Prensky, 2001). Not assuming this basic condition, this *uniqueness*, has a high probability of condemning any educational system to failure. Furthermore, today we know all too well that students show enormous variability, whatever the facet it is evaluated in: intellectual, affective, social or personality. Curricular adaptation is therefore indispensable.

Just as there are three basic cores of interest in educational psychology, the three most basic functions that must be exerted in the various educational areas are evaluations, counseling and interventions. Insofar as evaluations are concerned, they have to be clinical (early diagnosis of any dysfunction) as well as educational: detecting problems (not dysfunctions), typical of the educational and learning contexts (curricular, social, family climate, learning, etc.)

In the area of evaluation, the educational psychologist must know the meaning and implications of the concept of evaluability assessment (Rutman, 1980; Trevisan, 2011). In his specific area of education he is often going to find educational projects and programs or curricular designs loaded with the best intentions of their creators, but which, unfortunately, we can state from the beginning that they

are not going to be able to be evaluated, so we can hardly know anything relevant about their possible future usefulness. Avoiding such risks and such waste of time should be one of the basic tasks of any good educational psychologist. Similarly, with respect to evaluation, the educational psychologist should try to assert the argument that the opposition so bandied around between quantitative and qualitative evaluations should give way to something substantially more relevant: the quality of the evaluation, whether qualitative or quantitative. When quality is discussed it seems obligated to refer to the concept of meta-evaluation (Cooksy and Caracelli, 2005; Stufflebeam, 2001). Because of this, it is possible to apply a series of criteria accepted by the international community of evaluators for different types of evaluation. This way there is a guarantee that our judgment in any evaluation goes beyond merely spontaneous, well-intentioned opinion. Another extremely important aspect in the field of clinical and educational evaluation is its effects. Any education or instruction is by definition intentional: we want something definite to be learned. The educational psychologist must clarify whether that learning was successful. Specifically, make it known whether the effect is stable or, on the contrary, it vanishes, or whether it appears and disappears — or whether it gradually leads the students to become distanced from people who have not participated in the teaching and learning process. Doing this requires as a prerequisite, the practice of *follow-up* (Bradshaw, 2002; Campbell and Ramey, 1994).

Psychological, and only psychological, counseling (not educational or any other kind, so as not to get into subjects other than professional), has to concentrate on the main agents of the education system itself: students, teachers, parents and school authorities. At the beginning of the 21st century, we have enough knowledge derived from the psychology of cognitive development, social development and personality for the educational psychologist to be a great help in orienting the student about his doubts and typical or atypical problems in the stages of his development (Baltes, Reese and Lipsitt, 1980; Lerner, Easterbrooks and Mistry, 2013; Saxe, Carey and Kanwisher, 2004; Wrzus, Hänel, Wagner and Neyer, 2013). With respect to parents and teachers, dyadic and triadic models have shown considerable efficiency in a good part of the subjects that concern and worry students, teachers and parents (NASP, 2010). Consulting to authorities has to be based on all the information

collected validly and reliably, which the psychologist is continually compiling, both on different types of contexts – microsystems, mesosystems and macrosystems (Bonfenbrenner, 1979), as well as different agents of the educational community (Erchul and Sheridan, 2008).

Interventions must include the three best known types: corrective, preventive (primary, secondary and tertiary prevention) and optimizing, on the various levels of action: personal, group, community and social (Brock, Lazarus and Jimerson, 2002; Christenson, 2004; Luiselli, Putnam, Handler and Feinberg, 2005; Nelson, Martella and Marchand-Martella, 2002). Today there are a multitude of intervention programs for dysfunctions as well as for the most diverse educational problems, and for optimization of academic and intellectual achievement (Alonso-Tapia, 1987; Chipman, Segal and Glaser, 1985; Nicerson, Perkins and Smith, 1985; Núñez, Rosario, Vallejo and González-Pienda, 2013; Segal, Chipman and Glaser 1985; Sternberg and Bhana, 1986). Programs are usually presented under at least three types: unstructured (their essential core is usually made up of a series of very general principles or norms: stop smoking, do physical exercise every day, eat a balanced diet, etc.), semi-structured, (with a relatively good theoretical basis which is structured and materialized depending on the specificities of the circumstances: rather variable implementation), and well-structured (the entire implementation is strictly programed and founded on a solid theoretical basis). Although all of them should have been prepared to satisfy the needs felt and expressed, be theoretically well-grounded, show coherent and united preparation, be correctly implemented and duly evaluated, the reality shows that there is enormous variability in all these facets, so much so that in some cases, unfortunately, some programs do not produce significant positive effects, and negative effects can even surpass the positive (Chen and Macredie, 2004; Newmann, Smit, Allensworth and Bryk, 2001).

Recently, two journals have dedicated a monographic issue to the educational psychologist, and therefore, to developing the three core interests and three basic functions: *Psicología Educativa* 2011, 17(1) and *Papeles del Psicólogo* 2011, 32(3).

PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVE

To date in Spain, in order to be able to practice as a psychologist in educational contexts, more specifically in what is today called secondary education, it was

necessary to have passed the CAP (Course/Certificate of Teaching Aptitude) or what is now the Master in Teacher Training, and more specifically, specialization in Education Orientation. This is something that does not match elementary logic, since it does not seem that a course intended to prepare future teachers can be useful at the same time for training a psychologist whose purpose it is to practice as an educational psychologist. Following this thread of the most elementary logic, what seems minimally coherent at the present time is for the unspecialized psychologist (graduate in psychology) to specialize precisely by taking a master's degree prepared *ad hoc*, based on Educational Psychology.

To manage that transition from Master in Teacher Training (Specialization in Education Orientation) to the specific Master in Educational Psychology, as an indispensable condition to be able to practice as an educational psychologist, is the reason for the Interinstitutional Commission on Educational Psychologists (CIPES), which groups the Conference of Deans of Psychology of Spanish Universities, the General Council of Official Associations of Psychologists, the Psychology and Education Associations, the academic world and the professional world. The work done by CIPES has given fruit, but it must be considered unfinished until it achieves the transition mentioned. In the first place, an agreement was signed in 2010 with the *Federación de Asociaciones de Directivos de Centros Educativos Públicos* (Federation of Associations of Principals of Public Schools – FEDADi), *Confederación Española de Asociaciones de Madres y Padres de Alumnos* (Spanish Confederation of Parents and Teachers Associations – CE-APA) and the *Confederación Católica Nacional de Padres de Familia y Padres de Alumnos* (National Confederation of Catholic Parents of Families and Parents of Students – CONCAPA) on "Insertion of Educational Psychologists in the Spanish non-university education system." Several aspects of this agreement should be mentioned: 1) Psychological needs must be satisfied by educational psychologists; 2) they must concentrate on at least three basic functions: diagnostic and educational evaluations, psychological counseling to students, parents, teachers and academic authorities, and psychological corrective, preventive, and optimizing interventions; 3) their specific training as an educational psychologist must be by an *ad hoc* Master's Degree in Educational Psychology; 4) he must be a non-teaching professional integrated in the school's organization.

This agreement formed the basis for a proposal for government action presented to the *Congreso de Diputados* (House of Representatives). Later, an agreement was reached among the political parties in Parliament (PP, PSOE, IU, UPyD, CIU and PNV) to push through the pertinent legislation on the educational psychologist. On February 19, 2013, members of parliament met with the MECD and the CIPES to make a final push for the legal change corresponding to the transformation from one master's degree to the other, as mentioned above. Both representatives of the MECD and the Member of Parliament for the PP declared their complete agreement with the CIPES proposals, except for the request to make the Master in Educational Psychology professionalizing, since it involved having to apply for a ministerial reserve (economic). They were told in writing the next day that no new reserve was necessary beyond what already existed for the Master in Teacher Training (Specialization Education Orientation). So the only thing that was really being attempted to be replaced, in the case of the psychologists, was a master that was not working, since it did not train the psychologist to become an educational psychologist, with another for which the basic purpose was precisely that training.

The pertinent Master's degree in Educational Psychology is now fully prepared and pending approval in the *Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación* (National Agency for Evaluation of Quality and Accreditation - ANECA). An outline is shown in Table 1. As it is easy to infer from the outline, this Master's was already agreed by consensus by all those who signed the Agreement of 2010 and has also enjoyed a first positive evaluation by qualified representatives of the academic world in the area of Educational Psychology. A detail that may be worth mentioning is that it refers to its double condition of being a master to be taken in person at universities that have sufficient human resources and materials, and at the same time online at those universities where human resources and materials are very limited. In turn, in addition to this common denominator of the core program, the various universities could develop their own specific professional or research subjects as derived from their particular contexts.

COMPLEMENTARY FUTURE PROJECT

For that educational psychologist with a profile clearly differentiated from any other professional, both in Psychology and any other similar professionals, we had

designed an academic-professional network (see Martín-Babarro and Fernández, 2011, for a summary). With this network, the psychologist could be permanently connected to the rest of educational psychologists, and to parents and teachers throughout the Spanish territory. Of course, the network would provide several types of forums for parents, teachers, psychologists, etc., but above all, resources on learning disorders, school failure, development of multiple intelligences, etc., selected or designed by those specialists with an accrediting background.

This, without doubt, would have been a step toward considerable modernization for both the profession of educational psychologist and for non-university schools, but the crisis we are going through has relegated this extremely interesting initiative to better times, as claimed by academics, professionals and legislative authorities, both in Spain and in other countries, when the network was presented to the *Congreso de los Diputados* and to the 4th International Congress on Psychology and Education, held in Valladolid in 2011.

REFERENCES

Alonso-Tapia, J. (1987). *¿Enseñar a pensar? Perspectiva para la educación compensatoria* (Teaching thinking? Perpective for compensatory education). Madrid: CIDE.

Baltes, P. B., Reese, H. W., and Lipsitt, L. P. (1980). Lifespan developmental psychology. *Annual Review of Psychology, 31*, 65-110.

Beltrán, J., and Pérez, L. (2011). Más de un siglo de psicología educativa: valoración general y perspectiva de futuro (Over a century of educational psychology: General evaluation and future perspective). *Papeles del Psicólogo*, 32, 204-231. http://www.papelesdelpsicologo.es/pdf/1981.pdf

Bonfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bradshaw, L.K. (2002). Technology for teaching and learning: Strategies for staff development and follow-up support. *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education, 10*, 131-150.

Brock, S. E., Lazarus, P. J., and Jimerson, S. R. (Eds.).

TABLE 1 MASTER'S DEGREE - IN EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY: 90 CREDITS (ECTS)*				
	Essential/CORE Program**			
	Units	**Areas**	**Specific Subjects**	**Credits**
First year: 60 ECTS credits	**Psychoeducational evaluation**	*Diagnostic evaluation*	Differential diagnosis, psychoeducational reports, selection criteria and preparation of evaluation instruments	12
		Evaluation of Educational Quality	Evaluation: Schools, climate, programs, etc.	6
	Psychoeducational orientation	*Psychological counseling*	Students, parents, teachers, authorities	6
		Psychology of diversity	Psychology of special education	6
	Psychoeducational intervention (community)	*Corrective*	Development and learning disorders	6
		Preventive	Prevention programs: drugs, aggressiveness, school failure	6
		Optimizing	Intervention programs: improving intelligence, social skills, etc.	6
	Psychoeducational methodology	*New technologies*	ICT in educational contexts	6
		Data collection, analysis and interpretation	Database creation and management6	6
Second year: 30 ECTS credits	**Traineeships**			20
	TFM (Master's Thesis)			10

*ECTS= European Credit Transfer System
*The core program would be common to all Master's degree programs in any Psychology Department/School in Spain, while the subjects, including their titles, would be conditioned, among other differentiating factors, by undergraduate coursework, which could vary quite a lot depending on the Department/School.

(2002). *Best practices in school crisis prevention and intervention*. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

Campbell, F.A., and Ramey, C. T. (1994). Effects of early intervention on intellectual and academic achievement: A follow up study of children from low income families. *Child Development, 65*, 684-698.

Chen, S. Y., and Macredie, R. D. (2004). Cognitive modeling of student learning in web-based instructional programs. *International Journal of Human-Computer, 17*, 375-402.

Chipman, S. F., Segal, J. W., and Glaser, R. (Eds.).(1985). *Thinking and learning skills. Vol II: Research and open questions*. Hillsdale, NJ: LEA.

Christenson, S. L. (2004). The family-school partnership: An opportunity to promote the learning competence of all students. *School Psychology Review, 33*, 83–104.

Cochran-Smith, M., and Zeichner, K. M (Eds.).(2005). *Studying teacher education: The report of the AERA panel on research and teacher education*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Cooksy, L.J., and Caracelli, V. J. (2005). Quality, context, and use: Issues in achieving the goals of metaevaluation. *American Journal of Evaluation*, *26*, 31-42.

Erchul, W., and Sheridan, S. (Eds.).(2008). *Handbook of research in school consultation: Empirical foundations for the field*. New York: Erlbaum.

Fagan, T. K., and Wise, P. S. (Eds.). (2007). *School psychology: Past, present and future* (3rd ed.). Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

Fernández, J. (2001). La evaluación dentro del contexto educativo (Evaluation in the educational context). In J. Fernández (Coord.), *La psicología, una ciencia diversificada* (pp. 77-99). Madrid: Pirámide.

Fernández, J. (2002). Líneas de investigación en la psicología española (Lines of research in Spanish psychology) (1989-1998). *Papeles del Psicólogo, 81*, 3-10. http://redalyc.uaemex.mx/redalyc/pdf/778/77808102.pdf

Fernández, J. (2011). La especificidad del psicólogo educativo (The specificity of educational psychology). *Papeles del Psicólogo, 32*, 247-253. http://www.papelesdelpsicologo.es/pdf/1984.pdf

Harris, D. N., and Sass, T. R. (2011). Teacher training, teacher quality and student achievement. *Journal of Public Economics*, *95*, 798–812.

Lerner, R. M., Easterbrooks, M. A., and Mistry, J. (Eds.).(2013). Handbook of psycholog.Vol.6: *Developmental psychology* (2nd ed.). New York: Wiley.

Luiselli, J. K., Putnam, R. F., Handler, M. W., and Feinberg, A. B. (2005). Whole-school positive behavior support: Effects on student discipline problems and academic performance. *Educational Psychology, 25*, 183–198.

Martín-Babarro, J., and Fernández, J. (2011). Red académicoprofesional de la psicología en la educación (Academic/profesional network of psychology in education). *Papeles del Psicólogo, 32*, 242-246. http://www. papelesdelpsicologo. es/pdf/1983.pdf

Mayer, R., and Alexander, P. A. (Eds.).(2010). *Handbook of research on learning and instruction*. New York: Routledge.

NASP (2010). In http://www.nasponline.org/publications/cq/pdf/V39N1_ Improving Student Outcomes.pdf

Nelson, J. R., Martella, R. M., and Marchand-Martella, N. (2002). Maximizing student learning: The effects of a comprehensive school-based program for preventing problem behaviors. *Journal of Emotional and Behavior Disorders*, *10*, 136–148.

Newmann, F. M., BetsAnn Smith, B., Allensworth, E., and Bryk, A. S. (2001). Instructional program coherence: What it is and why it should guide school improvement policy. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 23*, 297–321.

Nickerson, R. S., Perkins, D. N., and Smith, E. E. (1985). Enseñar a pensar (Teaching thinking). Barcelona: Paidós/MEC.

Núñez, J. C., Rosario, P., Vallejo, G., and González-Pienda, J. A. (2013). A longitudinal assessment of the effectiveness of a school-based mentoring program in middle school. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 38*, 11-21.

Prensky, M. (2001). Digital natives, digital immigrants. En http://www.marcprensky .com/writing/prensky% 20-%20digital%20 natives,%20digital%20immigrants% 20-% 20part1.pdf

Reynolds, W. M., and Miller, G. J. (Eds.).(2003). *Handbook of psychology. Vol. 7: Educational psychology.* New Jersey: Wiley.

Rice, J. K. (2003). *Teacher quality: Understanding the effectiveness of teacher attributes*. Washington: Economic Policy Institute.

Rutman, L. (1980). *Planning useful evaluations: Evaluability assessment.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Sánchez-Miguel, E., and García-Sánchez, J.N. (2002). La década 1989-1998 en la Psicología española: un análisis de las Investigaciones en Psicología Evolutiva y de la Educación (The decade 1989-1998 in Spanish Psychology: an analysis of Research in Evolutionary and Educational Psychology). *Papeles del Psicólogo, 82,*3-24. http://redalyc.uaemex.mx/pdf/778/77808202.pdf

Saxe, R., Carey, S., and Kanwisher, N. (2004). Understanding other minds: Linking developmental psychology and functional neuroimaging. *Annual Review of Psychology, 55*, 87-124

Segal, J. W., Chipman, S. F., and Glaser, R. (Eds.).(1985). *Thinking and learning skills. Vol I: Relating instruction to research.* Hillsdale, NJ: LEA.

Snow, R. E., and Swanson, J. (1992). Instructional psychology. *Annual Review of Psychology, 43*, 583-626.

Sternberg, R.J., and Bhana, K. (1986). Synthesis of research on the effectiveness of intellectual skills programs: Snake-oil remedies or miracle curses? *Educational Leadership, 44,* 60-67.

Stufflebeam, D.L. (2001). The metaevaluation imperative. *The American Journal of Evaluation, 22,* 183–209.

Thorndike, E. L. (1910). The contribution of psychology to education. *The Journal of Educational Psychology, 1,* 5-12.

Trevisan, M.S. (2011). Evaluability assessment from 1986 to 2006. *American Journal of Evaluation, 32*, 199-226.

Wayne, A. J., and Youngs, P. (2003). Teacher characteristics and student achievement gains: A review. *Review of Educational Research, 73,* 89–122.

Wittrock, M. C. (1992). An empowering conception of educational psychology. *Educational Psychologist, 27,* 129-141.

Wrzus, C., Hänel, M., Wagner, J., and Neyer, F. J. (2013). Social network changes and life events across the life span: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin, 139,* 53-80.

Zimmerman, B. J., and Schunk, D. H. (Eds.). (2003). *Educational psychology: A century of contributions.* Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.