

The Role of Educational Psychology

Why educational psychology?

We are experts in helping people solve complex, persistent problems that interfere with a young person's learning.

Educational psychologists have a minimum of six years' university education. All educational psychologists have at least a Master's degree, and most have additional qualifications and experience. We are all registered with the New Zealand Psychologists Board¹ and required to maintain a high standard of ethical practice² with regular supervision and yearly audit of our practice.

How can we help you?

We understand the learner in natural settings

Educational psychologists look at what is happening for the child as a whole person. We work anywhere that learning takes place. That includes early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary education, but also family homes, marae, workplaces and many community organisations. In this way, we gain a comprehensive view of the different settings in which a young person is living.

We support those who are often the most disadvantaged and have a special concern for the wellbeing and learning of Māori and Pasifika.

We help people solve their own problems

Educational psychologists help people understand situations differently so they can resolve their problems.

We often take the lead in facilitating meetings with a variety of professionals in multi-disciplinary teams, as well as with children, whānau and caregivers. This allows us to elicit the expertise of others. Educational psychologists are trained in listening and managing conflict, and are especially skilled at getting everyone to participate and contribute to a successful outcome.³

The parents and teaching team at a school planning meeting were at a loss how to help a 9 year old boy learn to read, despite delivering a very intensive sight recognition and phonics programme. Parents were open about their inability to read but wanted better for their son. An assessment from the educational psychologist confirmed that he had a baseline reading age of approximately 6 years and there was no evidence of any language or intellectual impairment. A joint paired reading programme was devised to be monitored by school staff and delivered by a neighbour at the parent's suggestion. He was reassessed by the educational psychologist 6 months later and the boy was now reading at the level expected for a 9 year old.

¹ New Zealand Psychologists Board. (2015). Scopes of Practice and Qualifications for Psychologists Registered under the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003. Retrieved from <http://www.psychologistsboard.org.nz/scopes-of-practice2>

² Code of Ethics Review Group. (2012). *Code of Ethics for Psychologists Working in Aotearoa/New Zealand*. Retrieved from http://www.psychologistsboard.org.nz/cms_show_download.php?id=237

³ Miller, A. (2003). *Teachers, Parents and Classroom Behaviour: A Psychosocial Approach*: Open University Press.

We look for patterns

Educational psychologists use a variety of quantitative and qualitative tools including observations, interviews and assessments such as cognitive or attainment tests, to understand what is going on in the child's life. This way we gather comprehensive, diverse perspectives to identify patterns. We analyse all the information we gather to design a support plan using:

- best available research evidence
- characteristics, values and context of the young person, their whānau and educational environment, and
- our practitioner knowledge and professional judgement.

We help in crises

Educational psychologists help resolve high risk situations quickly, e.g. a teacher threatened by a pupil with a knife; a young person abused in school; advice as part of a traumatic incident team after a suicide; a young person with autism who is biting.

Tama is a five year old boy who was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress and attachment disorder. School staff did not feel able to meet his needs and they were challenged by some of Tama's behaviour when he started school. Tama frequently hit other children, ran away from the classroom and climbed the roof and trees in order to escape. Tama's family were suspicious of the school and did not feel that anyone understood their needs. The educational psychologist offered training for the class teacher and the staff team on attachment and nurture, embedding positive expectations, routines, social skills lessons and acknowledgements in class. The educational psychologist also worked directly with Tama to improve his perceptions of himself and others so he could be included within his school.

We help prevent difficulties

Educational psychologists have extensive research training. We are well placed to design preventative programmes because of our research and evaluation skills, and knowledge of the New Zealand education system. Many of us have additional training in therapeutic approaches, counselling skills and organisational psychology. Where we are able to respond quickly, early in the life cycle of the person or in the life of the problem we can reduce risk, create savings to free up resources for others.⁴

The educational psychologist provided Early Intervention services for a young child who had long periods of glue ear during the first three years of his life. His whānau's priority was to teach their tamaiti to listen and co-operate. They also requested assistance to access a range of health services and iwi social services. His teaching team were concerned about his unsafe behaviour. The educational psychologist worked collaboratively with the whānau and his teaching team to plan, implement and review plans, monitor and celebrate his progress at home, at his early childhood centre and at school.

This document was developed by field and academic staff in cooperation with the New Zealand Psychological Society and the Institute for Educational and Developmental Psychology (version 31 October 2016).

⁴ The New Zealand Productivity Commission. (2015). More effective social services. Retrieved from www.productivity.govt.nz/sites/default/files/social-services-final-report-main.pdf