THE ROLE OF THE EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGIST

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The purpose of engaging an Educational Psychologist is generally to obtain an appraisal of an individual's abilities and potential so that his/her education and career can be appropriately managed.

The primary reason why an Educational Psychologist's services are obtained is a concern about academic progress i.e. potential underachievement. It is important to ascertain whether there are learning disabilities that may be compromising academic performance, or whether there is an unrecognised intellectual Giftedness that may be causing disengagement from academia. There may also be unrecognised or recognised intellectual Giftedness together with a specific learning disability.

The central role of an Educational Psychologist is the assessment process. It is critical that when looking for an Educational Psychologist to ascertain that they are experienced in the administration and particularly the interpretation of psychometric tests such as SB5, WPPSI-III, WISC-IV, WAIS- III and WAIS-IV. These tests, whilst IQ based, provide valuable diagnostic information identifying a person's cognitive strengths, learning disabilities and learning style. It is critical to ascertain that they are able to interpret individual sub-test scores, Index scores, IQ's and the implications for significant differences between Index scores and IQ's.

The Educational Psychologist would be expected to administer appropriate achievement tests in literacy ie reading and spelling as well as numeracy and be able to look at these tests diagnostically, together with neuropsychological testing eg short-term auditory and visual memory.

The Educational Psychologist must have knowledge of the various learning disabilities and the appropriate specialist/s that are qualified to address these disabilities. It is the responsibility of the Educational Psychologist to refer to therapies/programs that have a true and proven track record with significant research to support the effectiveness of the therapy/program.

With respect to intellectual Giftedness, the Psychologist should have extensive experience and knowledge of Giftedness and the associated overexcitable behaviours that can be connected with it. Together with the understanding that individuals can present as both intellectually gifted as well as learning disabled in specific area/s.

A report from the Educational Psychologist should provide detailed developmental background and previous and/or current intervention that has occurred at school and externally. The report should explain in detail the psychometric test, description of what the individual sub-tests measure and the implications for low and high scores, the Index scores and the IQ score. If there is a highly significant difference across the Index scores the calculation of a General Ability Index, particularly on the WISC-IV should be calculated. This is particularly useful for the Gifted/Learning Disabled individual who is accessing a Gifted and Talented program.If an individual equals or exceeds an IQ of 150 on the SB5 an Extended IQ should be calculated. A Gifted Composite score with respectto individuals who have undertaken the SB5 and present with specific learning disabilities should be calculated by the Educational Psychologist, particularly if the individual is accessing Gifted
and Talented programs.

The report should also outline recommendations that will assist the individual with referrals to appropriate professionals, school support that will be required, organisations that can provide further support and learning styles. Specific reading and spelling programs that will address the needs of the individual should be provided eg some reading/spelling programs do not cater very well for individuals with auditory processing and short-term auditory memory difficulties.

The Educational Psychologist can provide counselling/ mentoring with respect to the management of behavioural problems, learning disabilities, giftedness, learning styles, study skills, anxiety management, depression, self-esteem, academic subject selection, and career planning/tertiary guidance.

The Educational Psychologist can provide testing and reporting for applications for Special Provisions at the School Certificate and Higher School Certificate examinations, as well as tertiary institutions – University and TAFE.

The role of the Educational Psychologist is to advise in the management of an individual's academic progress and career and be able to provide a complete picture and action plan that will address the individual's needs.

An Educational Psychologist should be initially consulted to ensure that an appropriate intervention plan is undertaken. Unfortunately many people go directly to specialists without an overall picture of what the individual's needs are.

It is likely that many Educational Psychologists would act as an advocate for the individual to schools and other educational institutions and to provide advice with respect to disadvantage schemes that assist learning disabled individuals to access University.

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