

THE EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGIST

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Introduction



The theme of the VII *Infocop* Breakfast Meeting, which took place in October 2009, was *The Situation of Spain's Education System and the Role of Psychology*. The aim of the meeting was to promote reflection upon the different lines of work in Educational Psychology and to provide a boost to their development.

An analysis of the issues addressed at that *Infocop* meeting reveals the urgent need to meet certain challenges that still remain for the Spanish education system. Among the most serious problems are the high rates of school failure and dropout, closely bound up with the high prevalence of behaviour problems in students and with the scarcity of personnel suitably qualified and trained for dealing with such problems in our schools. Indeed, the debate generated reflects the extent to which the educational community working in schools are crying out for initiatives to address these behaviour problems.

With the aim of providing a response to the numerous problems currently facing schools, some general initiatives have been launched. Such is the case of programmes for improving better relations in schools, for the prevention of drug addiction, for the improvement of study systems and strategies, and for the prevention of eating disorders (anorexia, bulimia, etc.). However, although all these programmes are essential, they are not sufficient, as there is also a need for individualized attention, in terms of both diagnosis and intervention. And it is here where Educational Psychologists become invaluable, given their capacity to fulfil a role for which no other professional is qualified.

Therefore, proposals for improvements include, as matters of urgency, the consolidation of the role of Educational Psychologists, through the definition of their functions, as well as the adaptation of counselling departments to the current demands of the education system. In this regard, September 2010 saw the signing of a global agreement reached between the university community, the Spanish Psychological Association (COP), the unions and public (state) school head teachers, calling for, among other aspects, the creation of a Masters in Educational Psychology, which would take into account the criteria of quality and practical training required for effective and specialized interventions in schools.

Today, as we enter the final term of 2011, we find ourselves at a crucial time for the definition of the role of Educational Psychologists, of their functions within the education system and of the procedure of access to the profession. *Papeles del Psicólogo* has set out to contribute to this task with

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the publication of the scientific articles in this special section, aimed at providing theoretical support to the drawing up of the new regulations.

The special section comprises four works by different specialists in this area, addressing four key aspects in the definition of the Educational Psychologist's specific role. The first article offers a well-documented overview of more than a century of Educational Psychology. As the authors point out, throughout this period there have been ups and downs, but they conclude that the outlook is a hopeful one for the discipline and for its specialists: Educational Psychologists, who remain distinct from other psychologists, and of course from other specialists, such as educationalists (*pedagogos*). In the second article, its author, focusing more on strictly professional aspects, argues robustly for the importance, in the educational context, of specially trained and highly qualified professionals, as opposed to "pseudo-professionals or interlopers." The Educational Psychologist is a specialist whose particular functions are indispensable to the proper development of teaching and learning processes in the classroom. The authors of the third article present a

new initiative of enormous interest to this area, and which will play an essential part in the functioning of education systems in the near future: an academic and professional psychology network in the field of education. Such a network will not only link up all of Spain's Educational Psychologists, but will also embrace parents and teachers. Finally, in the fourth paper, the author identifies those aspects which set Educational Psychologists apart from other psychologists and educational agents: the three core contexts in which they work (those of teachers, students and curricula) and their three essential functions (assessment, counselling and intervention). In order to fulfil these functions it would seem necessary for them to have obtained, in addition to their Psychology degree, a specialist Masters qualification in Educational Psychology.

On a final note, I should like to express my gratitude, both personal and professional, to the authors of these four articles, who have spent a long time reflecting and working on this issue – the essential qualities of the Educational Psychologist – and who, as the reader will see, have made considerable efforts to summarize their contributions here for the benefit of the educational community.

