

THE PROFESSIONAL BOARD FOR PSYCHOLOGY

GUIDELINES TO PREPARE FOR THE NATIONAL BOARD EXAMINATION FOR EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

This guideline is written for trainee and previously registered Educational Psychologists who are obliged to write the National Board Examination to demonstrate their command of the competencies of Educational Psychology. The guideline is divided into four parts as follows:

1. Preparing for the National Board Examination for Educational Psychology
2. The Scope of the Examination Paper
3. Recommended Reading
4. Writing the Examination

In addition to this guidance, please ensure that you familiarise yourself with the Examination Policy for Psychologists, Registered Counsellors and Psychometrists (Form 255).

Preparing for the National Board Examination for Educational Psychology

It is important that you take time to prepare for the National Board Exam and not simply rely on your learning from your academic and internship years.

To prepare adequately for the Board Examination for Educational Psychology, you should be able to demonstrate a good understanding of the professional identity of an Educational Psychologist and demonstrate that you can apply your professional knowledge to relevant cases in an ethical manner.

The format of the paper, therefore, is usually in the form of one or more written case studies followed by a variety of questions that require you to demonstrate that you can appropriately apply your knowledge. You may be asked to describe and resolve any ethical issues, provide a diagnosis and/or case formulation, and discuss how you would intervene as an Educational Psychologist. There may be other questions that test your knowledge of the scope and professional identity of Educational Psychology.

The Scope of the Examination Paper

The scope of the examination paper is determined by the Board's definition of Educational Psychology and list of competencies of Educational Psychology, both of which have been recently updated.

The definition of Educational Psychology, which should always inform your approach to psychological assessment, diagnosis, formulation and intervention, is as follows:

Educational Psychology is a specialisation of psychology concerned with assessment, diagnosis, formulation, and intervention in contexts that support the learning and development of individuals, with an emphasis on children and young people. Educational Psychologists frequently consult with children, and young people in settings such as the family, school, early childhood and development contexts, social, residential and mental health settings, as well as parents, caregivers, and teachers. Educational Psychology advocates a bio-ecological systems approach to psychological and educational intervention.

Educational Psychologists have strong foundational knowledge of learning theory, developmental psychology and developmental psychopathology across the lifespan (particularly neurodevelopment and cognitive functioning), the family life cycle, and major theoretical approaches informing the mental health and wellbeing of children, young people, and the family.

Educational Psychologists conduct individual, group and family therapy and other therapeutic interventions, demonstrate psychological consultation skills and have knowledge of a range of psychological interventions required in contexts that relate to the development and learning of individuals, families, groups, and communities. Educational Psychology requires the ability to integrate psychological theory with practice through the application of Educational Psychology theory to complex problems over the lifespan.

The Board for Psychology's mandate to protect the public means that the emphasis of the Examination should be on the areas that involve direct contact with vulnerable clients. Therefore, of the seven areas of competency, the examination will be confined to (1) Psychological Assessment, (2) Psychological Intervention, (4) Professional Practice and (8) Ethics and (9) Legislation. (For a complete list of competencies, please consult the document, [Minimum standards for the training of Educational Psychology.](#))

Psychological Assessment

- a. Assess cognitive, emotional, social, relational, behavioural, physical and neurodevelopmental functioning by using a range of psychological and educational instruments and techniques.
- b. Assessment includes interviews with stakeholders and observation in settings that impact on learning and development.
- c. Identify and diagnose psychopathology related to the mental health and well-being of children, young people and their families or caretakers.

- d. Identify severe psychopathology in individuals that impact on the well-being of children and young people (such as parents, caregivers, siblings, teachers, family members) and make appropriate referrals.
- e. Perform mental status assessment.
- f. Conduct individual, group, relational and systemic assessments that inform psychological and educational interventions.
- g. Conduct psycho-legal assessments.
- h. Write comprehensive psychological reports.

Psychological Intervention

- a. Implement psychological interventions with children, young people and their families diagnosed with a range of psychological disorders that impact on the cognitive, social, emotional, behavioural and physical development of children and young people and their families.
- b. Identify, understand and promote resilience and well-being of children, young people, their families in their interactions with others in a range of contexts that support learning and development over the lifespan.
- c. Design and implement specialized learning support for a range of individuals with special learning needs and their families/ caregivers in a variety of settings such as special schools, full service schools and residential settings.
- d. Demonstrate the ability to select appropriate therapeutic interventions that may include individual psychotherapy, group therapy, and family therapy, to support children, young people and their families to promote mental health and well-being.

Professional Practice

Educational Psychologists demonstrate:

- a. Commitment to adhere to the scope of practice when developing their competencies and when implementing their psychological knowledge and skills.
- b. The ability to refer clients appropriately to professionals in a range of contexts that include health, education, social development and labour.
- c. Sensitivity and awareness of the impact of culture, equality and diversity (including but not limited to gender, sexuality, religion, language, race and socio-economic status) on their professional practice.
- d. Advanced skills in case conceptualization, the ability to apply psychological and educational theories to inform their practice, and to evaluate the appropriateness of psychological interventions for a broad range of clients and contexts.

- e. Competence in understanding legislation relevant to understanding and promoting the best interests of children, young people and their families, and develop the skills to conduct psycho-legal assessments.
- f. Psychological consultation skills in a range of contexts that require transdisciplinary collaboration to support the cognitive, emotional, behavioural and social development of children, young people and their families.
- g. Skill in all aspects of practice management ranging from informed consent practices, contracting with clients, management of confidential information, report writing and billing.
- h. The ability to work in a non-discriminatory manner.
- i. Skills in change management and advocacy.

Ethics

- a. Knowledge of the code of professional ethics of the HPCSA and the Professional Board of Psychology.
- b. Conduct all aspects of professional practice and research in accordance with the guidelines for professional practice of the HPCSA and the Professional Board of Psychology.
- c. Conduct research and practice in accordance with these legislative parameters.

Legislation

- a. Knowledge of relevant legislative frameworks and regulations which impact on practice and research
- b. Use legislative frameworks and regulation to support and promote the mental health and wellbeing of children, young people and their families in contexts that impact on their learning and development.

Recommended Reading

You will need to consult readings that will help you to appropriately demonstrate the competencies that are listed above. Some useful ones are described below, though the list is not and can never be exhaustive:

Candidates are advised to consult relevant local and international literature that describes the history, the values and practice of Educational Psychology. If you are not well versed in this area, then some useful references, include some of the following:

- Donald, D. & Lazarus, S. (2014). Educational Psychology in Social Context: Ecosystemic applications in Southern Africa (Fifth Edition). Oxford University Press.

Eloff, I & Swart, E. (Eds) (2018). Understanding educational psychology. Juta Publishers.

Pillay, J. (2014a). The role of educational psychologists in promoting ethical research conducted with children: an exploratory study. *Journal of Psychology in Africa*, 24(6), 520-525. Taylor & Francis Publications.

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14330237.2014.997043>

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- Theron, L.C., Liebenberg, L., & Ungar, M. (Eds).(2015). Youth Resilience and Culture: Commonalities and Complexities. Cross-cultural advancements in positive psychology. Springer International.
- Landsberg, E., Kruger, D., Swart, E. (2015). Addressing barriers to learning – A South African perspective. Third edition. Van Schaik Publishers.

To practice ethically in South Africa, you should be able to demonstrate sound knowledge of the relevant HPCSA policies. These include the following:

- The ethical code for Psychologists. This includes two documents: The first is the Ethical Rules of Conduct for Practitioners Registered under the Health Professions Act, 1974 that applies to all registered health professionals, and the second is Annexure 12 - Rules of Conduct Pertaining Specifically to the Profession of Psychology.
- It is essential that you make sure that you are very familiar with the ethical code to practice ethically in South Africa. The ethical readings can and should be complemented but never replaced by other sources. Good complementary readings include the work of Alfred Allan and others (E.g., Allan, A. (2016). Law and Ethics in Psychology: An International Perspective (3rd Ed.). Place: Inter-Ed).
- You should also be familiar with the List of Classified Tests (Form 207), and understand the purpose of test classification, which is described in the Policy on the Classification of Psychometric Measuring Devices, Instruments, Methods and Techniques (Form 208).
- Other important HPCSA policies that could be covered in the Exam include the revised Policy Document on Business Practices.
- As Educational Psychologists, you should understand and appreciate the mental health and psychological implications of the HIV pandemic and be familiar with the HPCSA Good Practice Guide (HIV).

Ethical practice should also comply with the laws of the country in which you will work. Candidates should familiarise themselves with the relevant sections of the following National legislation:

- Chapter 2 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 108 of 1996. This chapter is the Bill of Rights that enshrines the rights of all people in our country and affirms the democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom. Psychological Acts must always be conducted in a manner that is consistent with the Bill of Rights.
- Also relevant is the National Health Act, 61 of 2003 that provides a framework for a structured uniform health system within the Republic, taking into account the obligations imposed by the Constitution and other laws on the national, provincial and local governments with regard to health services.
- It is advisable that you familiarise yourself with the Health Professions Act, 56 of 1974 that established the Health Professions Council of South Africa and the Professional Boards to provide for control over the education, training and registration for and practising of registered Health Professions.
- The Children's Act, 38 of 2005 governs all the laws relating to the care and protection of children and is therefore very relevant to the practice of Educational Psychology. Similarly, the Child Justice Act, 75 of 2008 specifies the laws that apply to accused children.
- Educational Psychologists should be familiar with the South African Schools Act, 84 of 1996.
- All practising Psychologists should understand the legal aspects with regard to mentally ill offenders in South Africa, and so you should be familiar with the relevant sections of the Criminal Procedure Act, 51 of 1977.
- Section 8 of the Employment Equity Act, 55 of 1998 refers to psychological testing in the workplace, which you should know. Though written for the workplace, the requirements are applicable in many other contexts. Indeed, make sure that you appreciate the use and potential abuse of psychological instruments in our multicultural, post-apartheid era.

There are many readings that you may want to consult to prepare yourself to answer questions on psychometric assessment. The following text is a good resource and freely available:

- Psychological Assessment in South Africa: Research and applications, edited by S. Laher & K. Cockcroft (Eds.) and published by Wits University Press in 2013. The text is open access and can be freely downloaded <http://oopen.org/search?identifier=1004362>

You should be able to demonstrate very good knowledge of the major diagnostic system:

- The Fifth Edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM–5)

Diagnostic questions will have to do with psychological problems that fall within the scope of practice for Educational Psychology. Of the mental and behavioural disorders, ensure that you are very familiar with the diagnostic criteria for (i) neurodevelopmental disorders, (ii) disruptive, impulse-control and conduct disorders, (iii) trauma- and stressor-related disorders, (iv) anxiety and (v) depressive disorders.

Educational Psychology is also concerned with the spectrum of psychological challenges that may or may not meet diagnostic criteria for the mental and behavioural disorders. Issues of adjustment, conflict, bullying, stress, disability and change are issues educational psychologists working in schools and other settings frequently deal with.

You are free to use any recognised psychotherapeutic approach in answering questions to do with case conceptualisation / case formulation and intervention. You will not be expected to provide an in-depth description of any therapeutic approach, but you may well be asked to comment on the diagnostic, clinical and treatment implications of the case from a bioecological perspective and you may have difficulty answering this question without a solid foundation in a range of therapeutic approaches.

As already stated, the list of readings and legislation above is far from exhaustive. You should also consult your own course readings and material that address these core competencies of Educational Psychology listed above in the broad areas of assessment, diagnosis, formulation and intervention in educational settings, particularly school settings.

If asked to provide a case formulation (or case conceptualisation), you should do so in such a way as to describe and explain the clients' psychological functioning in terms of diagnostic hypotheses, understanding of the clinical context of the presenting problem, and treatment/intervention options. A client could be an individual, family, group, school, community or organisation. Educational psychologists always provide a systemic understanding of presenting problem that draws on their expertise in education and psychology.

Writing the Examination

Though you will by now have successfully written many exams in your life, it is always good to be reminded to approach the paper carefully and systematically. Arrive early, so that you do not put yourself under any unnecessary stress. Check that you have been given the correct paper (it has happened that candidates have written the paper for another category). Make sure that you read the instructions, case studies and the questions very carefully. Examinations are stressful, and it is easy to misread a question or miss an important detail in the case study.

Manage your time carefully. Often when candidates fail the exam, it is because they did not manage to complete all the questions. Allocate time to each section according to their proportional values; If, for example, a question is worth 25 marks out of 100, you should spend no more than a quarter of your time on it, which for a three-hour exam, is 45 minutes.

Spend a few minutes to structure your answers rather than immediately responding and always try to leave enough time at the end to review your answers carefully.

The below pointers need to also be considered:

1. Candidates need to analyse the questions they are being asked. In the question on legal and ethical dilemmas they need to discuss what the educational psychologist's role is relating to a specific case study and not the generic role of the educational psychologist as being to assess, diagnose, intervene.
2. Difficulty applying legal and ethical principles to the facts of the case study. Candidates need to know how to take various bits of information in the case study and interpret it using either Annexure 12, or the Children's Act to inform their thinking and to also apply the facts to the case study.
3. A question on formulating a therapeutic management plan, entails the need for family therapy and not only aspects such as abuse and harassment by the teacher as well as filling Form 22 and recommending individual family therapy.
4. Therapeutic plan need not be confused with clinical case conceptualisation and the need for clear techniques.
5. Candidates need to refrain from repeating themselves often in one question, and across questions. So they need to know how to separate their analysis of the case on different aspects of the questions.
6. With respect to the legal/ethical issues, candidates need to recognise the most important ethical issues in relation to the question/ case, for instance ethical issues around multiple relationships, confidentiality and when to disclose, informed consent and from whom it must be obtained, and basic idea of their duties as a psychologist when called as a witness of facts in relation to the question/ case and not just respond in a general format.
7. Candidates need not waste time and space writing down general facts they can think of which is not asked by the question. Below are the general examination guidelines to be considered by the candidates:
 - Read the question, analyse it and be clear about what is asked and answer only what it asks.

- If the question asks you to apply certain legal or ethical principles to a case study, only apply the principles or legislation that is asked. Don't refer to other statutes or documents that are not asked.
- Please number the questions clearly and make sure that the number for the question is the same as the number on the examination paper.
- Read the case study carefully and know that ALL the facts that are mentioned must be considered carefully. Don't focus only on the big issues and forget about small issues.
- The questions will generally always require you to demonstrate your competence in applying your knowledge to the case study. It is not helpful to merely state ethical facts or regulations to show you know them. You have to apply them in the context of the case study.
- If you have to consider your role as an educational psychologist, you must do so in the context of the case study. It is not helpful to merely write down what educational psychologists do. Show that you know how to apply it in relation to the case study.
- The case study generally cannot provide complete information. While it can be valuable to point out what you don't know and what steps you will take to get certainty about certain aspects, the case study will generally give you enough information to enable you to formulate a competent course of action if you use apply your knowledge.
- You can assume if nothing specific is mentioned about issues of confidentiality and consent, that those processes will be in place, so your answer should not focus too much on describing what must happen if it was not the case. Where nothing is mentioned, assume those processes were conducted ethically and competently”

Good luck.

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