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Lewis Polsgrove by Angela Vedro

Dr. Lewis Polsgrove is an educator who has significantly contributed to the field of special education. As a youth he became fascinated with human behavior, especially as it related to causes and individual belief systems. He was thus naturally drawn to the field of psychology and

chose it as his major field of study at the University of North Texas. He completed his Bachelor of Arts degree in this area in 1963 and under the mentorship of Merl Bonney at that institution, his master's degree the following year. His thesis investigated the relationship between visual perception and ethnocentrism. Upon graduation Dr. Polsgrove worked for several years as a clinical psychologist primarily with institutionalized and later out-patient adult populations. These experiences led him to realize that early detection and intervention was essential in ameliorating the incidence of these disorders. His career interests then turned to abnormal child psychology, in particular how children's emotional and behavioral disorders develop and how these might be abated or reversed.

Lewis Polsgrove

Field Special Education
Psychology

Institutions [University of Indiana Bloomington](#)

Alma Mater [University of Kentucky](#)
[University of North Texas](#)

Educational and Professional Development

To further his new career interest, Dr. Polsgrove took a position as a school psychologist and instructor at the [University of Southwest Louisiana in Lafayette](#). In attempting to advise his students—professional teachers-- how to deal with problems

they encountered in their classrooms he recognized that the “ego psychology” of the time was sorely deficient in both accounting for children’s cognitive, emotional, and behavioral difficulties and providing solutions for these. Seeking practical experience with troubled children and youth Polsgrove worked two years as a counselor and evaluative psychologist with the Kentucky Department of Child Welfare. His experiences in this capacity, to which he refers in his career-perspective paper in *Behavioral Disorders*, solidified his belief that the most effective interventions with this population must be based on *sound science*, conducted in natural settings, and provided by competent professionals and knowledgeable care providers. These insights led him to seek additional training as a researcher, classroom teacher, and specialist in ecological interventions. He rounded his formal preparation by earning his master’s degree and doctorate in special education at the University of Kentucky in 1972 under the guidance of Dr. Michael Nelson, Dr. Judith Worrell, Dr. Edward Blackhurst, and Dr. Joseph Melnick. In addition he served as a day teacher-counselor in the Lexington Re-Ed program for children with severe EBD. It was during this period that he realized the end-goal of therapy with children was to teach them behavioral self-control rather than foster their reliance on external sources such as teacher guidance, parental limits, token reinforcement, or structured environments. His doctoral dissertation compared goal-setting, self-evaluation, and self-reinforcement practices of children identified as having behavioral disorders and those not identified.

Research and Teaching Contributions

Polsgrove is best known for his work at the [University of Indiana Bloomington](#) where he was a Professor of Education from 1974 to 2003. During this period, he developed master’s and undergraduate degree programs that focused on providing working and pre-service teachers with skills required for providing effective instruction, classroom management, and improving services for children with learning,

emotional, and behavioral disorders. He was responsible for developing courses in applied behavior analysis, instructional methods, testing and curriculum-based assessment, assistive technology, computer applications, school consultation, vocational counseling, and cognitive behavior modification. Dr. Polsgrove in his career trained over 2,000 professionals—educators, psychologists, administrators, and counselors. In addition to his teaching and program development duties he served as principal investigator and director on a number of research projects. His research interests have focused on reducing the gap between research and practice, developing effective evidence-based interventions, increasing practitioner knowledge and competence, and using instructional and assistive technologies.

Over the course of his tenure, Dr. Polsgrove has published approximately 96 articles, books, and chapters on various issues in psychology, special education, and [emotional behavioral disorders](#) (EBD). His contributions to the literature and teaching were recognized by his peers through various awards including the President's plaque from the [Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders](#) (CCBD), CCBD Leadership Award, Midwest Symposium Leadership Award, [Indiana University Trustee's and Faculty Teaching Awards](#).

In addition to his students, Dr. Polsgrove influenced a number of colleagues in the field of children's emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD). These were recognized by Dr. Robert Gable, a professor in the department of special education at [Old Dominion University](#). In an article which appeared in *Behavioral Disorders* (Gable, 2003) Dr. Gable described Dr. Polsgrove's career as being committed to removing barriers to ensure the success of children with emotional behavioral disorders. He stated Polsgrove's work showed a positivistic perspective on special education, a relatively new field of study. Dr. Polsgrove's doctoral students whom he most

influenced include; Drs. Cynthia Jackson, Tony Wu, Mary Beth Janes, George Haus, Richard Cohen, Sarah Hindman, Mary Beth Fisher, and Steve Axelrod.

Service Contributions

In addition to his varied contributions to research, teaching, Dr. Polsgrove is recognized for his multiple service activities. At the national level he served as principal investigator and project director for a number of research, training, and innovation grants funded by the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). He was frequently invited to serve as a panelist/reviewer of grant proposals submitted to that agency. He was elected to the offices of Treasurer of CCBD and President-Elect, Vice President, President, and Past-President of the organization. In addition he fulfilled numerous service roles as panelist, strand leader, session leader, presenter, and key note speaker at various national and international conferences.

Dr. Polsgrove's professional career also includes various editorial service activities. He held posts as consulting, assistant, and issue editor for Behavioral Disorders, Journal of Special Education, Journal of Special Education Technology, Special and Regular Education, Journal of Learning Disabilities, Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, and Exceptional Children. He also was a frequent reviewer of textbooks and various other publications.

In keeping with his goal of training competent professionals Dr. Polsgrove made significant service contributions to his field at local and state levels. He established the first comprehensive master's degree in special education at Indiana University and the first dual certification (special/regular) undergraduate degree education. He also founded the first assistive technology laboratory at Indiana University which was first

to offer assistive technology consultancy services for the Bloomington campus and local agencies. In addition he served as Director of the Center for Innovation for Teaching the Handicapped, Director of the Electronic Resource Center, Chair of Programs in Special Education, Chair of the Master's Program in Special Education, and Chair of Undergraduate Programs in Special Education. His training programs provided the State of Indiana with its first vocational-educational and assistive technology consultants.

Personal Information

Dr. Lewis Polsgrove was born in Galveston, Texas and graduated from La Marque High School. There, in addition to his studies, he devoted much of his time to team sports, summer employment, and musicianship in various local orchestras. After serving as a professor of education at Indiana University, Bloomington for 29 years he retired in 2003 and resides with his wife in Bloomington. He currently occupies himself in reading, gardening, studying jazz saxophone and playing with his bands at various local venues.

Dr. Polsgrove and his wife, Sue, who served as an administrator at Indiana University authored two children: Myles and Kiz Polsgrove. Myles earned a Ph.D. in educational psychology from Indiana University and is currently an assistant professor at the University of Southern Indiana at Evansville. Kiz Polsgrove, who holds an MBA in Informatics from the London School of Economics is employed as a project director for Citrix Corporation in Santa Barbara, California.

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