

Assistant Professor in Educational Psychology

Chenchen Shi, PhD

Please describe the area of psychology you practice. For example, what does your day-to-day schedule look like?

I'm an assistant professor in the Department of Theatre Pedagogy at The Central Academy of Drama in Beijing, a Double First-Class Construction university and a leading institution for the arts in China. This department specializes in cultivating theatre teachers for PK-12 education, closely aligning with China's Arts Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022 Version), which for the first time, made theatre a mandatory subject in the national arts curriculum. Within China's ongoing educational reform emphasizing holistic development through "Five Domains of Education" (moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and labor education), the cultivation of theatre educators holds significant strategic importance at present.

My daily work encompasses three key dimensions: teaching, research, and student mentorship. In teaching, I deliver core courses including Educational Psychology and Psychological Foundations of Theatre Education, focusing on developing future theatre teachers' ability to apply psychological theories to theatrical pedagogy. In research, I'm leading a project titled "The Effect of Drama-Based Pedagogy on PK-12 Outcomes: A Meta-Analysis of Research From 2000 to 2025," which systematically examines the impact of DBP on PK-12 student outcomes, including academic achievement, psychosocial functioning, and 21st-century skills. During office hours, I provide academic advising, research supervision, and support for students' professional development and psychological well-being.

In my opinion, this job allows me to bridge psychology, education, and the arts, contributing to China's emphasis on well-rounded student development through the "Five-Education Integration."

Were there specific factors that led you to choose this area of psychology? Was there a critical moment that changed your career trajectory?

Yes, my career trajectory was profoundly shaped by the mentorship of Professor Robert Slavin, the late Director of the Center for Research and Reform in Education at Johns Hopkins University.

During my undergraduate studies in Education, I took several psychology courses including General Psychology, Developmental Psychology, and Educational Psychology, but I didn't develop a strong interest in psychology at that time. While pursuing my PhD through a joint

program at CRRE, JHU, my advisor, Professor Robert Slavin, gifted me a copy of his textbook *Educational Psychology: Theory and Practice* and involved me in his center's "[Evidence for ESSA](#)" research project. Initially focused on reading and math, the project later expanded to include evidence on SEL and attendance. Through my full participation in this project, I discovered that non-academic factors like SEL and attendance actually have significant impacts on students' academic achievement and overall development. This revelation sparked my genuine interest in psychology, particularly educational psychology.

In short, Professor Slavin's mentorship fundamentally transformed my perspective—from seeing psychology as a supplementary tool to recognizing it as the cornerstone of effective education.

What advice would you give to an ECP who wants to pursue a position or additional training opportunities in this area of psychology?

I would like to share three key insights from my experience:

First, deepen collaborative relationships with your doctoral advisor's research team. Completing your PhD should mark the beginning, not the end, of these academic connections. Whether you pursue a postdoc position or transition into an assistant professorship, maintaining strong ties with your advisor's network can provide access to valuable opportunities.

Second, actively engage with professional communities. Joining associations like the APA offers significant benefits for early-career development. Beyond standard resources like annual conventions and training programs, these associations often announce exclusive opportunities—such as research grants, paper awards, and career guidance tailored for emerging scholars. A practical starting point is submitting abstracts to the annual convention and gradually increasing your involvement.

Third, leverage social media strategically. In today's digital age, platforms like Twitter (now X) and LinkedIn have become essential tools for academics. Create a professional profile to systematically follow leading scholars, key journals (e.g., *Educational Psychologist*), and official accounts of major associations (e.g., APA's Division of Educational Psychology). Early on, build visibility by liking and sharing high-quality content. As you grow more comfortable, share your research updates or scholarly reflections—authentic posts about your process often resonate more than polished self-promotion.

Ultimately, the key to early-career success is making your unique contributions visible. By consistently producing distinctive work and proactively engaging with pivotal academic networks, the right opportunities will naturally emerge.

Contact us: earlycareer@apa.org

For further resources, please check out our [ECP website](#).



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