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ABSTRACT

This paper offers an historical perspective on the practices of school psychology. It briefly describes the mechanism currently in place to assess the competency of professional psychologists. Then, the beginnings of the American Board of Professional Psychology (ABPP) are reviewed along with information on related school psychology developments. It recounts how the American Psychological Association (APA) accepted doctoral school psychology programs for accreditation in 1968, the same year school psychology was recognized as a new examination area by the ABPP. School psychology has prospered as a specialty in APA and ABPP. However, currently the status of school psychology as a specialty in good standing within ABPP is in jeopardy since it is not processing a sufficient number of diplomate candidates annually to need ABPP requirements. Making the diploma a dominant feature of doctoral school psychology in the years ahead will be a challenge for all school psychologists who work for the future of the profession. (JDM)

ABSTRACT

School Psychology's Place in the History of Specialty Recognition

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It is argued that the emerging realities of practice by doctoral school psychologists are such that their skill level should be greater than entry level. It is further argued that the American Board of Professional Psychology (ABPP) provides an appropriate credentialing model for increasing the number of doctoral school psychologists who are particularly qualified for an expanded and more complex practice. The history and current perspective of ABPP, and the American Psychological Association, in regard to the recognition and credentialing of doctoral school psychologists, is then examined. Finally, problems in ABPP certification of increasing numbers of doctoral school psychologists in the years ahead are addressed.

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School Psychology's Place in the History

Of Specialty Recognition¹

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Members of this panel, board members of the American Board of School Psychology (ABSP) and the American Academy of School Psychology (AASP), and all other school psychologists who are diplomates in the American Board of Professional Psychology (ABPP), are “keepers of a vision.” Doctoral school psychology ultimately IS what the majority of doctoral school psychologists BECOME, and, my fantasy, in looking at the distant future, is that, by the year 2025, a majority of practicing doctoral school psychologists will have earned this certificate. This is important because the practice of doctoral school psychologists will increasingly occur in a variety of professional settings, settings that include frequent interaction with and collaborative relationships with other professional psychologists. In addition, the practice of doctoral school psychologists will become more complicated and complex. As a

result of these, and related, developments, there is an increasing need for eminently good doctoral school psychologists, i. e., who exemplify a high level of professional competence.

Mechanisms to Assess Competence

There are various mechanisms in place in American psychology to assess the competence of professional psychologists. These are shown in Table 1, which is reproduced from an article by Drum (1997). Three levels of competence and scope are listed in the left hand column. The nature of individual evaluation, i. e., credentialing, for each of these levels of competence and scope is briefly described in the right hand column. What is especially noteworthy, in the context of this schema, is that the Diploma received by doctoral school psychologists from ABPP is “advanced and specialized” in competence level and scope, and that the certificate is provided through an individual examination in the specialty practice.

Table 1 About Here

Beginnings of the American Board of Professional Psychology, and Related School Psychology Developments

In 1997 ABPP celebrated its 50th Anniversary. It was established, not as ABPP, but as the American Board of Examiners in Professional Psychology (ABEPP), on April 23, 1947 (Bent, Goldberg, and Packard, 1999). The original fields of certification were clinical, counseling, and industrial/organizational psychology, and more than a thousand of the approximately 1500 candidates for the Diploma in these fields were “grandfathered.” Written and oral examinations didn’t begin until 1949. ABEPP initially received financial support annually from the American Psychological Association (APA), and this support continued through the 1950s (Bent, Goldberg, and Packard, 1999).

After doctoral school psychology programs were accepted for accreditation by the APA in 1968, school psychology was recognized that same year by the (now) ABPP as a new examination area. As was the case for candidates in the original three recognized fields, school psychology candidates were “grandfathered” for the Diploma. The “grandfathering” of at least some school psychology candidates continued into the early 1970s, and those “grandfathered” back then still constitute a majority of the school psychologists who currently have ABPP Diplomas.

Impact of ABPP’s Transition Years,
and Related Developments in the APA, on School
Psychology’s Recognition as a Specialty

The need for a revitalized ABPP became increasingly apparent in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In 1983, a dues structure, changed later to a service fee, was established, and the Central Office was moved to Columbia, Missouri (Bent, Goldberg, and Packard, 1999). In the 1980s, ABPP decided to grant Diplomas in a number of

emerging specialty areas, including Clinical Neuropsychology, Forensic Psychology, Health Psychology, and Family Psychology. Later, other specialty areas were added: Behavioral Psychology (in 1991), Psychoanalysis Psychology (in 1996), and, more recently, Group Psychology and Rehabilitation Psychology. Currently, school psychology is one of the eleven specialty boards affiliated with ABPP (the I/O board is classified as “inactive” at the present time).

As to developments in APA, although APA had been accrediting programs in professional psychology for many years, it had never officially recognized these fields of professional psychology as “specialties.” For this reason, several task forces to address the recognition of specialties were established in the 1980s, and one result of these efforts was that the concept of a specialty was officially accepted by APA. In this connection, ABPP adopted, as it resumed the recognition of specialties in the 1980s, the criteria and model that evolved from these APA task forces (Pryzwansky, 1998; cited in ABSP, 2000). In 1995, the APA established the Commission for the Recognition of Specialties and Proficiencies in Psychology (CRSPP). As Pryzwansky (1998; cited in ABSP, 2000) has pointed out, while

ABPP retains authority to recognize specialties seeking to offer board certification, it has placed a moratorium on recognition, and advises groups to pursue CRSP recognition initially. Within the CRSP framework, specialty status is granted to those areas of professional psychology that demonstrate distinctiveness with respect to the population they serve, the problems they address, and the techniques or methodologies they employ (Pryzwansky, 1998; cited in ABSP, 2000). The first specialty recognized by APA, based on CRSP recommendations, was school psychology.

A Summing Up

To sum up school psychology's place in the history of specialty recognition, it was recognized for accrediting purposes by APA, and as an examination area by ABPP, in the late 1960s. Later, school psychology was recognized as a specialty by ABPP (in the 1980s, along with a number of other professional psychology areas of practice), and, very recently, as a specialty by APA. And school psychology has prospered as a specialty in APA and ABPP.

Nevertheless, the current status of school psychology as a specialty in good standing within ABPP is in jeopardy. The problem is that school psychology is not processing a sufficient number of diplomate candidates annually to meet ABPP requirements. However, as a result of the good work of John Brantley and Rosemary Flanagan, and other ABSP and AASP board members, the situation seems to be improving this year. While that is good news, making the Diploma a dominant feature of doctoral school psychology in the years ahead, is a continuing, and very huge, challenge for all school psychologists who serve as keepers of this vision.

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Drum, D. (1997). Regulatory system for professional psychology in North America. The Diplomat, 17 (1), 4-5.

Footnote

¹This paper was presented August 27, 2001 in San Francisco at the American Psychological Association convention as part of the symposium titled, “Board-Certified School Psychologists – Advancing Competence for the New Millennium.” Portions of the paper are based on A Self Study by the American Board of School Psychology (American Board of School Psychology, 2000).

Designation, Accreditation & Credentialing: Three Modes of Assessment of Competence

Competence Level & Scope	Program Evaluation (Designation/Accreditation)	Individual Evaluation (Credentialing)
i. Basic & Minimal	Criteria-based designation of doctoral programs & internships that produce professional psychologists.	Certification of individual's degree/training in professional psychology.
ii. Basic & Extensive	Criteria-based accreditation of doctoral programs & internships in professional psychology.	Licensure to practice as a professional psychologist. Recognition of credentials for health service or specialized practice.
iii. Advanced & Specialized/ Generic	Criteria-based accreditation of postdoctoral residency programs in professional psychology.	Certification through examination in specialty practice areas.

adapted from Drum, D. J. & Hall, J. E. (1993). Psychology's self-regulation and the setting of professional standards. *Applied and Preventive Psychology*, 151-161.

Table 1

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