



**Attention: Chair, Psychology Board of Australia**

**Jan Fletcher** to: natboards

Bcc: NatBoards

19/11/2009 02:11 PM

18.11.09

Dear Assoc Prof Greyner,

Re: Specialist title

I write to make specific comment on the issue of specialist title. My opinions have been formed by my involvement in the following roles:

- 2 terms as a Deputy on the Psychologists Board of Western Australia, i.e. WA Registration Board
- Active involvement in the College of Educational and Developmental Psychologists at state and national levels. (I am currently membership secretary of the College).
- Coordinator of graduate programs in Educational and Developmental Psychology at the University of Western Australia
- Registered Educational psychologist

I am intrigued that a major platform of the case for the use of specialist titles has been protection of the public. I consider this is a worthy aim but my experience in WA is that *the use of Specialist Titles has often prevented members of the public from obtaining services from the most appropriate practitioners*. This is due to the fact that many employer groups use specialist titles as a way of advertising jobs without any critical question as to the skills and competencies needed to carry out the advertised position. Let me give two examples to illustrate this point:

1. until 2008 Educational and Developmental psychologists could only be employed by the Disability Services Commission in WA as a general psychologist, i.e. 4 year trained. Only psychologists who could be registered as Clinical Psychologists could apply for positions that had a career path. This policy did not take into account the relevance of the training in educational and developmental psychology in all aspects of psychological practice relating to those with disabilities and their families and carers. After *many* years of discussions with relevant people in the DSC this policy was finally amended last year.
2. currently no educational and developmental psychologist can be employed in Child Development Centres in WA as all psychologist positions in these centres are advertised for those eligible for registration as Clinical Psychologists. Again this decision takes no account of the relevant training, skills and competencies of developmental psychologists.

These are simply 2 of the numerous government sections that inappropriately exclude psychologists with expertise and specialist titles in Counseling, Health and Educational and Developmental Psychology from positions for which they have the relevant skills and competencies. The exclusionary policies also flow on to the placement opportunities made available to graduate students, as potential supervisors understandably consider that they should put their energies into students whom they might later employ.

Specialist title was also used until relatively recently to exclude those not registered as Clinical Psychologists from access to provider numbers from HBF, the largest health insurer in WA. This meant that many members of the community had to pay extra if they wanted services from a specialist who was not a clinical psychologist. This meant that parents who were concerned about possible learning disorders, ADHD etc often went to 'specialists' who were not as specialized in these areas as, e.g. an educational and developmental psychologist. This was a hugely divisive issue among psychologists in WA.

While I think it is sensible to make clear to the public that those who have completed 6 years+ university training are *likely* to have had more systematic and thorough practitioner training than those

who have completed the 4 + 2 route I would prefer not to see specialist titles introduced. I would favour:

- public education about what the various levels of education mean
- employers indicating the level of education required and the skills and competencies necessary to carry out an advertised role
- the onus on psychologists operating under the *Code of Ethics* to demonstrate that they have the skills and competencies for the job.

Yours sincerely,

Jan Fletcher

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