

TSP in Toronto

Mardis Dunham, Murray State University and
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Left to right: Tony, Tammy, Beth, Jack and Bill during the projectives debate.

Despite the SARS scare and the cold weather (from a Southerner's standpoint), the TSP conference in Toronto again attracted a significant number of trainers—over 100 trainers and several dozen students attended this year's conference April 9. Following the continental breakfast provided by our friends at Riverside Publishing, Judith Kaufman and Tony Crespi, Advisory Board members of TSP, provided a Future's Conference update and called for consistency in school psychology respecialization requirements to prevent "program shopping." The general consensus from participants was that many programs are consistently requiring similar coursework, practica and internships but that other professions and those that hire school psychologists are unaware of the nature and extent of respecialization requirements, thus begging the need for awareness training for school administrators in general.

The morning session was devoted to the role of projective personality techniques in school psychology training and practice, an issue that seems to arise for every generation of school psychology trainers. Although only a

small percentage (about 10%) of the trainers in attendance reported having a "projectives class", the debate nevertheless generated considerable discussion, as a number of individual trainers use them or teach them as informal tools or as techniques to augment rapport. Moderated by Beth Doll, the panel consisted of Tammy Hughes, Tom Kratochwill, Bill Mathews, Frank Gresham, and Jack Naglieri. Tammy began the debate by focusing upon the Rorschach and the Exner scoring system.

She attempted to dispel some of the misconceptions of the Rorschach by specifically addressing its validity and reliability and acceptance by courts. Bill explained that projectives such as the TAT "pull for pathology", lack validity and reliability, and have poor treatment validity. He also noted that tests should remove the "higher order inference" and that clinical judgment is a poor justification for their continued use. Tom, taking a somewhat middle of the road approach, urged the field to fully evaluate projectives empirically before discarding them outright. By adopting the approach employed by the What Works Clearinghouse on empirically validated interventions (i.e., that we should have a template to evaluate the usefulness of all tools of the trade) Tom explained that we could avoid dismissing all projectives as inherently useless. Frank reported declining numbers of school psychologists using projectives in their practice and that they are "fundamentally irrelevant in a problem-solving model of service delivery." He expanded this notion, explaining that they lacked empirical support yet continue to hold a degree of mystique because partial reinforcement in explain-



Left to right: Ed, Steve, Mark and Rick following the afternoon panel discussion.

ing a child's behavior maintains the practice. A multi-method, multi-modal, multi-axial assessment approach would better serve the needs of children, he concluded. Lastly, Jack contrasted our need to use only empirically validated practice and our tendency to overinterpret tests in general. He suggested that we reframe the question of whether or not to use projectives to "what value do they have." He closed by explaining that projective tests do have value when used in the context of understanding individual children. Audience participation was enthusiastic, suggesting that trainers and practitioners vary considerably in their use of these tools.

In the afternoon, following a great lunch provided by AGS, the expert panel of Rick Short, Steve DeMers, Mark Swerdlik, and Ed Gaughan debated the issue of requiring all school psychology internships to take place in the school setting. Both sides of the issue presented cogent arguments, using widely varying props from a SARS mask to anecdotal stories, which were moderated by Jim Deni. To some extent, this issue highlighted differences in training programs (doctoral or specialist) concerning level of training and licensure for independent practice. Steve argued the need for internships in multiple sites serving children. He argued that school psychology



Left to right: Jack, Bill, Tammy, Tom and Frank after receiving their wonderful T-shirt gifts following the projectives debate.

is a general theoretical position centering on understanding and service delivery to children. Further, he says, this knowledge base is applicable and transportable to all places children are served including correctional and therapeutic facilities. Steve questioned whether the field should determine its' practice on location in the service to children. Ed countered with the need to remain grounded in the school context because we are after all, *school* psychologists. Ed further added that if the internship is the capstone integrative experience then schools are the contextual ecology that defines a school psychologist. The debate ended

with a discussion of the ethical considerations of practicing within your skill area balancing the differences between the setting and a specialty of the field. Many examples of complex ecology exist across professional psychology, IO and military psychology for example, who also face the setting versus specialty field dichotomy.

Mark and Rick explained separately that the goal of individual students and programs need to be considered as well. Specifically, specialist and doctoral requirements and employment needs are diverse. Audience participants acknowledged each graduate student brings different expertise to the table and may require individualized experiences to achieve national and state competencies. Also individual state boards may have different requirements and trainers should work with those agencies to help in defining our field as well as place of work with in the state context.

The day's activities ended with the TSP Trainer's Reception sponsored by The Psychological Corporation. As always, the conference provided trainers the opportunity to strengthen bonds of professional friendship, make new acquaintances, and appreciate others in their continued service to the field.



Jessica Mack and Steve Welsh graciously work the TSP table.