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**SUBMISSION ON BEHALF OF EPASSA, THE
EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH AFRICA,
TO THE HPCSA'S PROFESSIONAL BOARD FOR PSYCHOLOGY
ON THE SCOPE OF PRACTICE FOR EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS**

Proposed Scope of Practice for Educational Psychology

Educational psychologists have skills in the areas of assessment, psychotherapy and research and are particularly skilled in the areas of learning and development across the lifespan.

Educational psychologists may evaluate, diagnose and treat behaviour, mental processes, emotions and personality, and may engage in the following psychological acts reserved for psychologists: ⁱ

- The evaluation of behaviour or mental processes or personality adjustments or adjustments of individuals or of groups of persons, through the use or interpretation of any psychological test, questionnaire, instrument, apparatus, device or similar method for the determination of intellectual abilities, aptitude, interests, personality make-up or personality functioning, and the diagnosis or measurement of personality and

emotional functions, neuropsychological disorders and mental functioning deficiencies according to a recognised scientific system for the classification of mental deficiencies;

- the use of any psychological method or practice aimed at aiding persons or groups of persons in the adjustment of personality, emotional or behavioural problems or the promotion of positive personality change, growth and development, and the identification and evaluation of personality dynamics and personality functioning according to scientific psychological methods;
- the evaluation of emotional, behavioural and cognitive processes or adjustment of personality of individuals or groups of persons by the usage and interpretation of psychological questionnaires, tests, projections, or other techniques or any apparatus, whether of South African origin or imported, for the determination of intellectual abilities, aptitude, personality make-up, personality functioning, psycho-physiological functioning or psychopathology;
- the exercising of control over prescribed psychological questionnaires or tests or prescribed techniques, apparatus or instruments for the determination of intellectual abilities, aptitude, personality make-up, personality functioning, psychophysiological functioning or psychopathology;
- the development of and control over the development of psychological questionnaires, tests, techniques, apparatus or instruments for the determination of intellectual abilities, aptitude, personality make-up, personality functioning, psychophysiological functioning or psychopathology;
- the use of any psychological questionnaire, test, prescribed techniques, instrument, apparatus, device or similar method for the determination of intellectual abilities, aptitude, personality make-up, personality functioning, temperament, psycho-physiological functioning, psycho-pathology or personnel career selection;
- the use of hypnotherapy;
- the use of any psychotherapeutic method, technique or procedure to rectify, relieve or change personality, emotional, behavioural or adjustment problems or mental deficiencies of individuals or groups of people; and
- the use of any psychological method or psychological counselling to prevent personality, emotional, cognitive, behavioural and adjustment problems or mental illnesses of individuals or groups of people.

An educational psychologist shall limit his or her practice to areas within the boundaries of his or her competency based on his or her formal education, training, supervised experience and/or appropriate professional experience. ⁱⁱ

Note: *EPASSA believes that the above paragraphs are sufficient to describe the scope of practice of educational psychologists and that a similar template should be followed for each category of psychology. However, if the scopes of practice of other categories are to be described in greater detail, the additional clauses that follow will be required to describe the scope of practice of educational psychologists.*

Educational psychologists engage in the following activities: ⁱⁱⁱ

- Assessing, diagnosing, and intervening to optimise human functioning, mental health and/or wellbeing in all areas of development across the lifespan, including in the areas of cognition, personality, emotion, education, and neuropsychological functioning;
- Conducting psychological acts such as assessing, diagnosing, and intervening in supporting persons to transcend psychological, social, learning and/or educational barriers, so that they may attain optimal mental health, wellbeing and functioning, and/or to tackle maladjustment, arrested development and/or psychopathology.
- Identifying and diagnosing barriers to learning, wellbeing, mental health and/or development; applying psychological interventions to enhance, promote and facilitate optimal learning, development and/or wellbeing; performing therapeutic interventions, and, when appropriate, referring clients to other professionals for further assessment or intervention;
- Designing, managing, conducting, reporting on and supervising research in psychology; conducting research in accordance with the Ethical Rules of Conduct for Practitioners registered under the Health Professions Act, 1974; and adhering to regulations;

- Advising on the development of policies, based on various aspects of psychological theory, and research; designing, managing, and evaluating psychological and/or educationally-based programmes;
- Training and supervising other registered psychological practitioners in their areas of competence; and
- Providing expert evidence and / or opinions in their areas of competence.

Educational psychologists often work with neurodevelopmental disorders, depressive disorders, anxiety disorders, obsessive-compulsive and related disorders, feeding and eating disorders, elimination disorders, sexual dysfunctions, gender dysphoria, disruptive, impulse-control, and conduct disorders, substance-related and addictive disorders, neurocognitive disorders, personality disorders, trauma- and stressor-related disorders, and other conditions that may be a focus of clinical attention (relational problems, abuse and neglect, educational and occupational problems, housing and economic problems, other problems related to the social environment, problems related to crime or interaction with the legal system, other health service encounters for counselling and medical advice, problems related to other psychosocial, personal, and environmental circumstances and other circumstances of personal history). Educational psychologists may also deal with bipolar and related disorders, dissociative disorders, somatic symptom and related disorders, sleep-wake disorders and paraphilic disorders. Less often Educational psychologists may deal (for instance via psychoeducation) with schizophrenia spectrum and other psychotic disorders, medication-induced movement disorders and other adverse effects of medication.^{iv}

It would be unusual to find an educational psychologist working with individuals with severe pathology to the extent that the individual's behaviour is considerably influenced by delusions or hallucinations or serious impairment in communication or judgment (i.e. a Global Assessment of Functioning below 30).

Some areas of activity for educational psychologists, within their specialized focus on learning and development, may include (but not be limited to) the following:^v

- Preventative work: promoting psychological well-being, learning and development across the life span
- Assessments: psycho-educational, psycho-legal, custody, career, vocational, examination concession and neuropsychological assessments
- Interventions: psychotherapy, family therapy, group work, community interventions, parental guidance, couples counselling, marital therapy, play-therapy, parent-infant psychotherapy, case management, parent co-ordination, treating psychopathology

Learning and development, in which educational psychologists are particularly skilled, are manifold and broad concepts. Learning provides cognitive tools to better comprehend the world; skills that enable participation in the economy and society, self-analytic and social skills that help individuals reach their potential; and exposure to principles of human rights, democracy, intercultural understanding, respect and peace.^{vi}

Explanatory Notes

Educational psychologists make unique contributions in addressing pressing issues relating to learning and development. They also have core competencies that they share with other psychologists.

The scope of practice for educational psychologists should be neither vague nor open to misinterpretation. Educational psychologists must be liberated from irrational challenges to their legitimate skills.

If ours is to be a united profession that can best serve the community, it would be prudent to move away from the marginalisation of educational psychologists and from the habitual, unethical casting by some of aspersions on the legitimate activities of educational psychologists. We must protect and promote all the competencies that educational psychologists can and should contribute in a country with limited mental health delivery resources. As long as they have the requisite training, skills, knowledge and/or experience, all psychologists, no matter their registration category,

have been legally entitled to evaluate behaviour, mental processes or personality adjustments; to use psychotherapeutic procedures to relieve or change personality, emotional, behavioural or adjustment problems or mental deficiencies; and to use psychological methods to prevent such problems or mental illnesses.

Narrowly defining the scope of practice of educational psychologists and restricting the activities of educational psychologists contradicts principles of community psychology that value flexibility and non-authoritarianism in professional practice. In our country, where psychological services are in great demand, it is counterproductive if not unethical for the role of psychologists to be unconstitutionally limited. Community psychology principles hold by less rigidly regularised services, and make psychology more accessible to underserved communities. Obviously, the more broadly trained psychologists are, the better this will be for people requiring much needed services. Moreover, pigeon-holed scopes of practice would require repeated referrals between different psychologists, as a person's situation changes, resulting in a lack of efficiency, a less streamlined service and interrupted working alliances or dialogical experiences. Oscillating referrals may further result in reified therapeutic experiences, with clients, their families and communities feeling treated as objects.

Blanket statements of competence for different categories of psychologists invariably lead to eventual, illogical consequences. For example, the Board's recent guidelines for educational psychologists state that educational psychologists deal with mild to moderate mental disorders. That would mean, if the guidelines were to become regulatory, that educational psychologists would have to refer severe cases of learning disability to clinical psychologists. This is irrational, because hardly any clinical psychologists treat learning disabilities. Furthermore, those seeking psychological services are diagnosed on a dynamic continuum; the same client may move from a severe point of concern to a mild form via treatment. It is difficult to think of a single DSM 5 diagnosis that cannot have severe consequences.

Preventing psychologists from behaving incompetently would be better effected with regard to competence clauses than with reference to blanket restrictions on the activities of different categories of psychologists. Competence is best evaluated on an

individual basis, from person-to-person and sometimes from case-to-case. There is variability and similarity both within and between registration categories.

EPASSA has reflected on the guilty verdicts of HPCSA disciplinary hearings and can see no evidence that educational or other categories of psychologists need to be pinned down by a restrictive scope of practice. EPASSA invites the PBP to apprise EPASSA of any significant data it may have that educational psychologists are prone to undertaking psychological acts beyond their areas of competence.

EPASSA argues that the more broadly and competently trained psychologists are, the better this has been and will be for members of the public requiring services. In 2012, an Educational Psychology Task Team identified that educational psychologists often work with clients with a broad range of psychological conditions. In October 2016, representatives of educational psychology departments at the Universities of Pretoria, Johannesburg, Stellenbosch and the Witwatersrand wrote to the PBP stating that their students are competently trained to work with children, adolescents and adults confronted with a range of mental health issues and contextual barriers.

EPASSA's proposal above followed a process of engagement with various colleagues and addresses the needs of the community. It presents a broad definition of educational psychology, emphasizes competence and ethics, and refers to the general field of Psychology. It avoids issues of bias and vagueness.

The proposals are based on standard understandings of the role of educational psychologists in South Africa. Each paragraph has an endnote providing a rationale for the paragraph's inclusion. The endnotes cite current regulations and/or the opinions of organizations that at some stage referred to current regulations when representing the views of educational psychologists.

EPASSA has explicated several points of view made in this document in greater detail in its *amicus curiae* affidavit in the Relpag case. Reference can be had to the affidavit for more information. Should clarification of any point in our current submission be required, the Professional Board (PBP) is encouraged to contact EPASSA. This submission reflects consensual processes amongst educational psychologists.

EPASSA would welcome and requests the opportunity to respond to any challenges to our proposals, in a way that is transparent and that contributes toward rational decision-making.

EPASSA is aware that the process of finalizing a scope of practice is an iterative one. EPASSA's proposals and the contents of this document should therefore be considered an initial draft rather than a final product. EPASSA reserves the right to comment further based on the proposals of other stakeholders and of the Professional Board for Psychology.

EPASSA believes it would be correct for the Professional Board for Psychology to include EPASSA committee members on the PBP committee or working group that is drawing up new regulations. EPASSA further believes that the PBP should be transparent in sharing with EPASSA, stakeholders and the public any research and perspectives that may influence the Board in its deliberations, and that EPASSA should have an adequate opportunity to comment on these. Before finalizing any regulation, EPASSA calls upon the Board to release a draft to EPASSA, stakeholders and the public for consideration and comment.

Martin Strous

EPASSA Chairperson

15 May 2017

ⁱ Regulation 993 of 16 September 2008 stipulates psychological acts that apply to the field of Psychology and that are as applicable to educational as to other psychologists. Regulation 993 is widely accepted by the profession and has not been challenged since its introduction almost a decade ago. Any attempt to limit the rights of educational psychologists contained in Regulation 993 will likely be challenged as irrational, unconstitutional and illegal.

ⁱⁱ This paragraph is based on a competence clause in Regulation R717 of 2006 (the Ethical Rules of Conduct for Practitioners Registered under the Health Professions Act, 1974). This clause has never been challenged. Any attempt to limit the rights of any existing category of psychology provided in Regulation R717 may be challenged as irrational, unconstitutional and illegal.

The competence clause of Regulation R717 protects the public against psychologists acting outside of their areas of competence. The clause recognizes that competence can be attained by four means, which are complimentary and not mutually exclusive:

- formal education,
- training,
- supervised experience, and/or
- appropriate professional experience.

The phrasing of Regulation R717 of 2006 means that competence can be attained beyond the formal training of a master's degree and internship training. This is compatible with legislation relating to the recognition of prior learning.

It is apposite to note that in October 2016 Prof R Ferreira, then Head of the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Pretoria; Dr H Dunbar-Krige, then Head of the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Johannesburg; Prof D Daniels, Head of Department of Educational Psychology at Stellenbosch University; and Dr Z Amod, the Coordinator of the M Ed Educational Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand wrote to the PBP regarding the scope of practice. They noted, *inter alia*, that the HPCSA's process for continued professional development provided pathways for psychologists to add to their competencies.

ⁱⁱⁱ This paragraph is the logical integration of the competence clauses of Regulation R717 of 2006, of Regulation 993 of 16 September 2008, of Regulation 704 of 2011 and of the paragraphs that follow.

^{iv} This paragraph derives from a document that reflected standard conceptualizations around the training, competence and experience of educational psychologists in and around 2012. The document reflected peer consensus about the Scope of Practice and was supported by an Educational Psychology Task Team comprised of leading academics, practitioners and policymakers who had been involved in the provision of educational psychology services and in the training of educational psychologists over many years. The then Vice-chairperson of the Professional Board for Psychology acclaimed the document. Any attempt to limit the rights of educational psychologists as reflected in the document will probably be challenged as irrational, unconstitutional and illegal. Some wording has been changed to ensure compatibility with DSM 5 as opposed to DSM IV.

^v This paragraph draws off the viewpoints of the Educational Psychology Association of South Africa and the Educational Psychology Division of PsySSA, as enunciated on their respective websites. These activities reflect the training of many educational psychologists on individualised, Board-approved internship programs, the supervised experience, and/or the professional experience of different educational psychologists.

^{vi} UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, identified these Four Pillars of Learning in a document compiled by global representatives.