9  Training Clinical Child Psychologists

Donald K. Routh

1. Introduction

At present there is no consensus on standards for training clinical child psychologists (as distinct from training clinical psychologists in general). This presents a dilemma for the student who wants to become a child clinician. How can such a student select the best school to attend? The lack of consensus also makes it difficult for faculty and clinical supervisors who are attempting to provide relevant graduate, internship, or postdoctoral training. This chapter reviews the literature on clinical child training and presents some new data on the current members of the Section on Clinical Child Psychology, where they were trained, and on the long-term relative quality of some graduate training programs.

2. General Background

As regular readers of Advances in Clinical Child Psychology are well aware, the field of clinical psychology originated with attempts to help children. This child emphasis was found in the early university psychology department clinics at Pennsylvania and elsewhere and also (of course) in the child guidance centers set up by the Commonwealth Fund. However, during World War II and postwar years, the military, the Veterans Administration, and the National Institute of Mental Health transformed the field of clinical psychology into an adult-oriented profession. It was therefore necessary for those clinical psychologists who still worked primarily with children to reframe their field as the subspecialty of clinical child psychology. One impetus to this development was a book written by Alan O. Ross (1959), The Practice of Clinical Psychology.
Ross felt that four steps were necessary before this field could be thought to have regained its professional maturity, so to speak. The first of these was simply recognition that a specialty of clinical child psychology existed. This was provided at least in part by the organization in 1962 of the Section on Clinical Child Psychology as Section 1 of the APA Division of Clinical Psychology and by the fact that this section has so far survived all threats to its existence over the last two decades. It is interesting that Section 1 has not (like many other offshoots of Division 12) gone on to become a separate division. It has not been replaced or (as will be seen) even diminished in size by the formation of the relatively new APA Division of Child, Youth, and Family Services (Division 37). Yet the larger field of psychology has not necessarily recognized clinical child psychology as a specialty. At the present time there is even considerable active discussion as to just what the nature of a specialty in psychology is, and how it should be defined. For example, are clinical, counseling, and school psychology really separate specialties, or do they have more in common as fields providing human services than they have distinctive features? Needless to say, these broader issues will have to be resolved before the issue of subspecialties can be properly addressed.

A second step that the field of clinical child psychology would have to take, according to Ross (1959), was the establishment of a scientific journal. The *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology* published by the Section since 1971 has developed into a respected peer-refereed professional journal. It has been joined by other publications such as the *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology* (begun in 1973) and the present annual series, *Advances in Clinical Child Psychology* (begun in 1977). The lead issue of the journal *Child Development* in 1984 heralded the emergence of “developmental psychopathology” as a separate area of research, a scientific event that has no doubt gladdened the heart of every child clinician. Textbooks and handbooks of clinical child psychology and child psychopathology are published in abundance, and courses in behavior disorders of childhood appear to have become a staple even of the undergraduate curriculum in psychology.

A third step on Ross’s list was setting up professional meetings. The Section on Clinical Child Psychology has presented an invited symposium at the meetings of the American Psychological Association each year for most of its history, and as of 1985 its time allotment for such symposia is to be doubled (at least on a trial basis). APA Division 37 (Child, Youth, and Family Services) provides an additional annual forum for the presentation of research papers and symposia.

The final step toward the maturity of the specialty outlined by Ross