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COMPETENCE IN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT IS NOT INDEPENDENT OF COMPETENCE IN SPECIFIC AREAS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL PRACTICE

The commentary on the paper by M. Filipiak et al. emphasizes that psychological assessment in a broad sense is an inevitable part of psychologists' occupation regardless of whether or not psychological tests are used. Also, competence in the area of psychological assessment is not independent of competence in specific areas of psychological practice. This is the reason why general education in psychological assessment is not sufficient to gain assessment competence; still, it can be a solid basis for improving the quality of assessment in specific areas of psychology.

Keywords: psychological assessment, competence, education.

We should be thankful to the authors, M. Filipiak et al. (Filipiak, Tarnowska, Zalewski, & Paluchowski, 2015), because their paper raised several important questions related to psychological assessment that should be discussed and cleared up in order to set the way for psychological education in this area. The space provided for this commentary allows me to respond only to those that I consider the most important.

Let me start my commentary with the term psychologists-diagnosticians, which is frequently used in the paper. I am not much in favor of this term. Assessment and intervention are two basic pillars of the psychological occupation. It can be said that psychologists combine these two processes in their practice, and we cannot imagine one activity without the other. Psychological assessment understood in a broader sense is an inevitable part of every psychologist's work

regardless of whether he or she uses psychological tests or not. Even a psychotherapist, who does not use any standardized methods for the assessment of his or her clients, evaluates the nature or extent of the client's psychological problems at the beginning of the psychotherapeutic process and evaluates the effect of his or her intervention. Even without using psychological tests, he or she uses interview or observation to make evaluative conclusions. This is the reason why I am convinced that there are no psychologists-diagnosticians or psychologists-nondiagnosticians. Of course, I do not want to insist that there are no psychologists whose main activity is assessment using tests and other psychodiagnostic methods. But psychological assessment with or without these methods is present in the work of all psychologists.

The second comment is based on the nature of knowledge and skills related to psychological assessment. Every psychological assessment is performed in some psychological area, for some psychological reason, which corresponds to the specialization of the psychologist. These areas are understood in a wider (clinical psychology, counseling psychology, work and organizational psychology, etc.) or narrower sense (e.g., neuropsychology, school maturity assessment, personnel selection, etc.). Therefore, competencies related to psychological assessment are not dissociated from particular psychological specializations. A psychologist cannot be a good assessor in general, but only good and competent in one or another area of psychological specialization. The quality of psychological assessment depends not only on the general knowledge of tests and test theory but also on the knowledge of specific psychological phenomena and processes relevant to the area of assessment. This knowledge enables adequate interpretation of data collected using tests and other methods. Apart from education, this knowledge is obtained especially through professional experience and supervision.

The above considerations are not merely useless theorizing: they determine the discussion on the content of education in the area of psychological assessment. What should be the content of the kind of education that is suggested by Filipiak et al.? In my opinion, there are several possible answers.

The first option is education primarily focused on advanced knowledge of psychological assessment in general. This knowledge includes mainly the principles of test construction, the test administration process, test interpretation, legal and ethical issues related to psychological assessment, etc. Some of this information is usually part of the undergraduate program, but usually not to an extent sufficient for good practice. Besides, this information is subject to change – for example, to changes in legislation. The completion of such education does

not make a psychologist competent in psychological assessment. This is because he or she lacks the knowledge mentioned above – specific information and experience in the specific area of psychological practice in which the assessment is performed. However, this kind of education could be a good basis for improving the quality of psychological assessment in specific areas of psychological practice.

The second option is specialized education in psychological assessment that is relevant for specific areas of psychological practice, for example clinical, counseling, or work psychology. In this case, education should be relevant to the specific context of the chosen area and, apart from general information, it should include practice with tests applicable in a specific area. It should also include supervised practice with the types of clients that are relevant for the practice area, such as patients in the case of clinical psychology, etc. The completion of such education makes it legitimate to recognize the psychologist as a competent assessor in a particular area. The main problem with this kind of education is that it should be realized separately for each specialization, which means there should be several courses for different areas of psychological practice.

Of course, a combination of these options is also possible. But I consider education that is based only on work with different tests regardless of usage context to be unsatisfactory and useless. Naturally, this kind of education can be helpful in obtaining knowledge related to these tests, but it cannot develop competencies relevant to specific psychological practice, for the reason suggested above: competencies in psychological assessment are not independent of knowledge related to specific areas of psychological practice.

The discussion in my commentary leads to one conclusion. I believe that psychological assessment should not be considered a new or independent area of psychological practice. This conceptualization of psychological assessment should not be the basis for the development of education in this area. Psychological assessment will always be dependent on the context in which it is executed. All education and competence development in this area should take this fact into account.