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CONTINUING EDUCATION AS SHARING THE RESPONSIBILITY

Commenting on an article devoted to the continuing education of assessment psychologists from the point of view of transport psychology, the author proposes that various forms of postgraduate education should be evaluated in terms of the assumed and verifiable effects of education, and that, with their assumptions based on the effects-based approach (EBA), they should develop a habit of combining practice with scientific knowledge. Since many people lack basic psychological skills, the best solution in their case seems to be traineeship and work under supervision. The system of education should take into account the fact that the teaching of rules, skills, and procedures amounts to taking over part of the responsibility for the trainees' actions in their future assessment practice.

Keywords: psychological assessment, EBA, effects of education, responsibility.

Working in a fairly well structured area of assessment – namely, in transport psychology – I have a chance these days to observe the implementation of assessment methodology modernized by the amended directive. Very often the basic question comes down to “how to act in accordance with the new regulations without changing anything in your work.” Thus, even despite the very comfortable situation of quite detailed and fairly modern regulations being in existence (obliging assessment psychologists to raise their qualifications, too), attempts at professionalization in transport psychology encounter considerable resistance. Teaching transport psychologists who do obligatory postgraduate studies and then observing them as they move on to traineeship at the Military Institute of Aviation Medicine, I have plenty of material to add in answer to the

questions that the authors posed in the lead article (Filipiak, Tarnowski, Zalewski, & Paluchowski, 2015). Because, unfortunately, it is impossible to comment on all the issues, I will try to focus on the most important questions.

The criteria of evaluating training courses in the field of assessment should primarily concern simple rules of education quality. For courses and studies, there should be specified effects of learning and specified methods of verifying those effects. Only then would it be possible to decide whether a particular course guarantees the acquisition of skills; the evaluation of the content of programs is, in my opinion, of secondary importance. I strongly support the application of EBA principles and the development of the skills of using academic sources independently in improving one's own practice. Psychologists often have a feeling that "the academic world" and "the clinical world" function as totally separate realities – and the role of continuing education is to bridge this gulf.

I am strongly against purely technical "test-based training." Before proceeding to a particular test, it is necessary to answer the question of what circumstances it was introduced in and what hypothesis it was supposed to verify. Next – apart from the technical aspect – it is necessary to teach trainees to formulate interview questions that will allow them to draw reliable conclusions. Training courses must definitely encompass a context more complex than merely administering a test. They should not give an impression that an individual test can contain comprehensive information about human functioning. Unfortunately, I am skeptical about the idea of training courses devoted to "fundamental" skills. I can see two ways to ensure fundamental competencies in continuing education: by demonstrating professionalism during classes (e.g., in describing case studies) and, unfortunately, by selecting candidates for training. During training courses or even postgraduate studies it is difficult to make up for the glaring gaps that are left after graduate studies and to correct the bad habits some practitioners have. If defects in this respect are too large, they can only be rectified through supervised work. In my practice as a teacher at the postgraduate level, I sometimes see people for whom taking up work as a psychologist is extremely difficult: they do not have the knowledge that would have been acquired in the course of graduate studies and they have worked for many years in completely different fields (as a bartender, an accountant, or a boatswain on a sailing ship – to name just a few occupations). Sometimes they believe that what they need is "a certificate to find a job and then manage somehow"; others openly say: "I learned nothing during my graduate studies and that is why I've enrolled in a postgraduate program." There are also Masters of Arts in psychology who cannot give the name of any personality or intelligence test (let alone the names of scales). Our board refuses

to admit them because we can see no possibility of these people attaining a minimum level of competence by the time they complete the studies. We try to show the rejected applicants where their problem lies; we encourage them to undertake traineeships and to come for an interview again. And very often we see the same people back after a year or two, when they have made the effort and taken the responsibility connected with their professional development. They can already be called psychologists then – still inexperienced and in need of training but making their first steps towards professionalism. If it had the chance to be formally established, the “theory–practice–supervision” model would be the best option for them, but today it is followed only in particular education centers and sometimes intuitively by graduates, who do traineeships and seek support from experienced colleagues.

Motivation to pursue education always involves the need to share responsibility. Psychological assessment often has legal and administrative consequences and therefore the diagnostician formulating a prediction concerning the client’s functioning (as a driver, a parent, or a student), especially one who does not have much experience, should have the possibility of sharing the responsibility for the decision made. He or she has the right to assume the reliability of data given in the test manual (which means the author of the test and the author of its adaptation take some of the responsibility). Also the people who conduct training or teach postgraduate courses take some of the responsibility by transmitting knowledge about the principles of assessment. Anxiety in a situation of assessment is inherent in the psychologist’s work, and the procedures taught during studies and training courses allow to reduce it considerably. Of course, in its extreme form, this kind of attitude leads to ossification in rigid patterns, and therefore good training always points to the limited applicability of the principles taught and to the possible exceptions to these principles.

To sum up, continuing education in the form of training courses and postgraduate studies focusing on specific skills should supplement the “theory–practice–supervision” model, which is the only way of developing general competencies.

REFERENCES

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