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THINKING MORE BROADLY ABOUT ASSESSMENT (AND DIAGNOSTICIANS)

Abstract. Commenting on the paper by Filipiak et al., we especially suggest a wider definition of the category of diagnosticians than the authors have proposed. We do not fully contest the correct proposal of continuing education in the field of assessment, but we wonder how to organize such education so that it caters not just for psychology graduates but also for other specialists who deal with assessment on an everyday professional basis – such as educators, sociologists, psychiatrists, and therapists.

Keywords: psychological assessment, educational assessment.

Filipiak et al. (Filipiak, Tarnowska, Zalewski, & Paluchowski, 2015) have initiated an important discussion of an important issue: education in the field of assessment. It is a goal of no small importance and it requires reflection. However, arguably, our point of view in this discussion may take it in a different direction than the authors anticipated, which is due to our scholarly positioning – between psychology and education. This is why the question posed by the authors of the paper commented on – from our own perspective – is much broader and goes beyond the profession of a psychologist, as the authors analyze it in their paper. In essence, it is all about how to increase the standard of the practice of people who deal with assessment in Poland. This reformulation and broadening of the question makes it necessary to account for the situation of all those people whose degrees are not in psychology, but who practice assessment professional-

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ly. One needs to keep those people in mind when searching for systemic solutions for continuing education. Independently of the provisions of the Act on the Profession of a Psychologist, which considers assessment as a domain of psychologists only, it is important to bear in mind educational assessment as practiced by educators (Niemierko, 2009), the everyday activities of social workers or sociologists, and the scholarly activities of interdisciplinary researchers that span across psychology, education, or sociology. In many niche subdisciplines – such as education for creativity – high-standard assessment is a norm. What is stable is not just the level of reflection on the assessment process (e.g., Karwowski, 2009), but also the assessment of assessment itself; new instruments are developed, which also use the latest achievements of statistics and psychometrics (Karwowski, 2014) such as item response theory (IRT), and new methods are designed that are based on latent models. Finally, it is educational (or pedagogical) assessment that brings new solutions not previously available in Poland, such as computerized adaptive tests (Karwowski & Dziedziwicz, 2012), or more confidently reaches out for advanced statistical methods (Pokropek, 2014). Therefore, although certain areas – such as clinical assessment, and most probably others as well – must remain the domain of psychologists, we do not consider it right to limit the discussion to those areas only. We do not intend to disregard the numerous educators, therapists with degrees in disciplines other than psychology, psychiatrists, or social workers, who not only reach out for various assessment instruments (which they are qualified to use and which, in fact, are frequently of a psychological character) but also develop their own assessment or research instruments that psychologists frequently use later as well. In our opinion, the core of the discussion should lie in the question of the possibility to develop educational and legal solutions as universal as possible and beneficial to the quality of work of all diagnosticians by focusing on their competencies.

We agree with the thesis implied in the focus article that the competence of graduates who hold master's degrees in psychology, not to mention the holders of bachelor's degrees in other disciplines, are insufficient. We feel that master's degree studies in Poland not only fail to guarantee diagnostic competence but, for obvious reasons, cannot and never will guarantee it. Having the formal right to use all the available instruments, in their practice psychologists constantly come across methods they had not learned during their studies. We suppose everyone sees that – not just those who meet young psychologists in psychological and educational counseling centers, but also teachers or parents whose students or children participate in numerous large-scale studies, such as those conducted by the Educational Research Institute. Hundreds of younger and older psycholo-

gists visit schools and preschools and cannot handle conducting studies using Cattell test or other classic methods.

Assessment skills that university-level studies provide all too frequently boil down to the technical skills of conducting an examination with selected tests and referring to information in manuals. However, the awareness of the limitations of assessment, the role of feedback, and the importance of ethical aspects is both limited and extremely diverse. Similar, and possibly even worse, is this situation in education or social work. Differences in the quality of education in various specialties and differences in the standards of professional traineeship result in huge variance in assessment competence among students.

It is not for nothing that Bolesław Niemierko – a doyen of Polish educational assessment – calls it the younger sister of psychological assessment. The stereotypical vision of educational assessment as focusing solely on staying up-to-date with the changes and determinants of pupils' and students' school achievements does not have much to do with reality. After all, in fact, educational assessment – as also focusing on examining attitudes toward learning, instructional issues, and a series of “soft” psychological capabilities – is more in line with psychological assessment than several scholars widely assume. Agendas of the annual congresses of the Polish Association of Educational Assessment are full of presentations that deal with the assessment of the psychological determinants of school achievements, and the methods that the participating scholars use (and frequently develop as well) require both psychometric and assessment competence. This is why we think it is necessary to launch postgraduate studies entitling their graduates to carry out assessment. During these studies, participants would acquire knowledge on the theoretical and practical foundations of using various instruments and methods, with special focus on providing feedback, planning further interventions, and the ethics of assessment. Such studies would, at least partially, be open not just to psychologists but also to educators, therapists, and psychiatrists, so that each practitioner could have a chance to develop their competencies.

Let us now consider the next stage of academic education, namely doctoral studies in psychology. The authors claim that “doctoral studies in Poland are not related to practice (including assessment practice)” (p. 175), which it is hard to agree with. It is indeed a fact that doctoral studies infrequently – surely too infrequently – address the question of assessment, especially narrowly and specifically understood assessment, given that research work encompasses the use of various instruments and methods. In the end, however, doctoral students often develop their own research instruments, frequently excellent. They then verify their psychometric properties and adapt those measures that are not available in

Poland; therefore, the issues of methodology and psychometrics are especially important to them. However, this does not mean that the questions of ethics or assessment procedures are insignificant.

Following this line of reasoning, it is worth asking the question of whether a person who does not hold a master's degree in psychology (but does hold one in sociology, social work, or education) and who completes her or his doctoral studies and obtains a Ph.D. in psychology should have the right to use psychological assessment instruments. What would third-level studies have to include in order for a positive response to the above question to be justified? Would successfully making up for curriculum differences and thus filling the possible gaps in second-level education be sufficient to authorize a student to use such instruments – also outside of scholarly work? In the light of the need to fulfill the requirements of the Bologna Process (which assumes that third-level studies aim at increasing competence in a given discipline, not just at launching a scholarly career), this issue requires discussion and proper regulations, especially now that proposals of legislative changes connected with the profession of a psychologist are in preparation. It is impossible to evade this now – in the time of intensive development in education and in the time of an increasingly interdisciplinary character of the academia.

The direction that, we believe, should be taken in increasing the standards of diagnosticians' work is one that amounts to the continuation of classic academic education, mainly in the form of specialist courses. People who complete their postgraduate studies that entitle them to conduct assessment could continue their specialist education by taking accredited courses. Longer courses or training programs (e.g., semester-long ones), which could be based on more detailed standards of practical education in assessment, could entitle them to use particular types of instruments (or even particular tools) within a certain thematic domain, such as child assessment, clinical assessment, or the use of assessment methods for recruitment. Shorter courses (one- or two-day ones) could provide a chance to get to know new instruments. Participation in such courses, however, would have to be regulated by proper rules of certification and a scoring system for professional development. This means that, for example, in five-year periods, an assessment practitioner would need to obtain a particular (realistic) number of points for continued professional development, just as is the case with medical doctors. At the same time, we are deeply worried by the spreading business practices that consist in "selling" accreditation for particular unverified instruments as well as in the requirement of continuing education being used as a source of income by companies springing up like mushrooms. Examples of such patholog-

ical situations can already be found in those professions in which the extension of the licence to practice is conditional upon continued professional development. Courses and training sessions are mainly run by private companies that not only charge high fees for participation but also fail to subject their services to external quality assessment. Consequently, the risk of malpractice exists wherever corporate responsibilities are imposed without the interests of those who are subject to these responsibilities being properly safeguarded.

In conclusion, we see continuing education with a high degree of openness to similar professions as a chance to develop assessment competence. It is difficult to evade interdisciplinarity, and the integration of various perspectives and experiences is usually creative.

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