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IS PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT TRAINING POSSIBLE WITHOUT A SPECIFIC CONTEXT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL PRACTICE?

The polemic with the authors of the text about the need for a systemic solution for continuing education in the area of assessment focuses on the problems connected with training in a specific area of psychological practice. The authors formulated a number of questions, which it is impossible to answer in a short polemic text. Therefore, this response is focused on elements indispensable in any training and on several remarks concerning the process of assessment competence certification.

Keywords: psychological practice, assessment competence, certification.

INTRODUCTION

It is hard not to agree with the thesis advanced by the authors of the article “On the system of continuing education in psychological assessment in Poland.” (Filipiak, Tarnowska, Zalewski, & Paluchowski, 2015) that there is an urgent need for constant postgraduate training of psychologists in various aspects of psychological assessment. Undoubtedly, there is a need for training courses going beyond individual diagnostic techniques and focusing on complex assessment processes. However, it is impossible to consider an entire system of such education without adopting certain basic assumptions.

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The general standards of psychological assessment are and should be taught and trained as part of the psychologist's basic education, during unified five-year graduate studies. What should also be trained during studies is how to apply contemporary psychological knowledge to a specific object of assessment.

Still, continuing postgraduate professional development must refer to a specific area of psychological practice. Psychological assessment as defined by Katarzyna Stemplewska-Żakowicz (2009) comprises, above all, specifying the aim of assessment, the formulation of diagnostic hypotheses, the selection of tools, and, finally, the interpretation and integration of the obtained data. It should be clearly stressed at this point that it is not the ministry that the psychologist works under but the scope of assessment – the problems it helps to solve and the purpose it serves – that is crucial. This makes it difficult to accept the authors' charge that diagnostic opinions drawn up under a particular ministry are not accepted under another. It is the purpose of assessment that determines whether it can and should be recognized in different conditions and for a different purpose. It is hardly conceivable that a psychological assessment of aptitude for driving vehicles (driver assessment) could be accepted by the court in a driver's divorce case. Similarly, what is useful and acceptable in the assessment of a minor's corruption level, ordered by the court and done by an expert psychologist, is the assessment of intellectual ability performed at a psychological and pedagogical counseling center. Aware of the problem of repeated and often redundant assessment of the same person in different places, perhaps it is worth trying to specify and put in order as well as legally regulate the possibilities of using previously made assessments at subsequent examinations. This problem also involves communication difficulties between psychologists working in different areas of psychological practice.

How to Teach Psychological Assessment?

It can be assumed that assessment training should contain three elements: (1) psychological and psychometric knowledge, (2) developing the skills of formulating questions, putting forward hypotheses, selecting tools, integrating data, and, finally, (3) the basic ethical principles involved in conducting assessment. The extent of each of these parts depends, of course, on the profile of training: on whether it focuses on the use of a particular assessment tool (test) or, for example, on diagnosing a child's school problems. Professional development must concern specific issues of psychological practice, since only such training encou-

rages practitioners to take active part in it and to pursue self-education in assessment further.

What practical assessment problems should training address?

Analyzing the problems frequently encountered by an assessment psychologist, it is possible to identify three basic skills that require constant development and practice in active workshop forms supplementing every assessment training:

1. The skill of establishing contact with a variety of assessed clients (children, young people, elderly people, adults sent for assessment, intellectually disabled people, etc.) and presenting the diagnosis to them in order to obtain consent for a psychologist's interventions as well as motivate them for cooperation;
2. Providing feedback information based on integrated assessment data;
3. Preparing diagnosis in the form of a written opinion useful to the client and to the party ordering the assessment.

Another important element of professional development in the area of assessment should be discussion groups as part of particular psychological practice, focusing on the problems of implementing the basic ethical principles of assessment (humanization, autonomy, dignity, client confidentiality) in specific clinical cases. A group of this kind could also perform a supervisory role for discussing specific diagnosed cases, difficulties, and dilemmas stemming also from institutional factors.

Competence Certification

In the authors' opinion, an effect of professional development in psychological practice could be the certification of specific skills acquired in the course of training. The creation of a system for the certification of assessment skills in isolation from the applications of assessment in a particular area of professional practice is impossible, and it seems to be unnecessary, too. It is, therefore, a good idea to begin with answering the question of what skills a good diagnostician ought to have in a given area of psychological practice. The Polish Psychological Association has many years of experience in certifying and recommending a variety of skills, including typically assessment skills of specialists such as forensic psychologists or child clinical psychology consultants (see www.ptp.org.pl).

In the case of forensic psychologists, recommendation concerns selected specific skills, such as the assessment of family and childcare problems or the

assessment of adult offenders. Each of these areas requires extended knowledge in a different area of psychology and different assessment skills.

In order to be objective, the certification system must be implemented by a board of experts independently of specific, even long-term professional development. Confirmation of competence is possible after a number of various training courses and after a verification of actual skills. Working out the basic set of conditions that a certified person must meet is a serious challenge for the community and demands a debate among specialists in a particular area, followed by agreement on the basic requirements.

A problem to consider and work out in detail is the manner of confirming general and specific assessment skills in a particular area in a certificate in such a way as to enable the psychologist to have them recognized by different employers.

Reflections concerning the possibility of establishing such certificates according to the law is a subject for a separate study.

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