Introduction to the Special Section on Teaching, Training, and Supervision in Personality and Psychological Assessment

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SPECIAL SECTION: TEACHING, TRAINING, AND SUPERVISION IN PERSONALITY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

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ABSTRACT
This special section contains empirical and conceptual articles pertaining to the broad topic of teaching, training, and supervision of assessment. Despite some evidence of a decline in recent decades, assessment remains a defining practice of professional psychologists in many subfields, including clinical, counseling, school, and neuropsychology, that consumes a consequential proportion of their time. To restore assessment to its rightful place of prominence, a clear agenda needs to be developed for advancing teaching and training methods, increasing instruction to state-of-the-art methods, and defining aims that could be elucidated through empirical inquiry. The 7 articles in this special section provide a developmental perspective of these issues that collectively provide practical tools for instructors and begin to set the stage for a research agenda in this somewhat neglected area of study that is vital to the identity of professional psychology. Additionally, 2 comments are provided by distinguished figures in the field concerning the implications of the articles in the special section to health services psychology and the competencies-based movement in applied psychology.

Dedicated to Leonard Handler

Leonard Handler (1936–2016) defined the academic clinical psychologist of a generation that is largely past. His contributions to the personality assessment literature, to training and supervising assessment psychologists, and to the Society for Personality Assessment (SPA) are directly related to an integrated approach to clinical work and clinical research that is truly rare in our increasingly specialized professional culture. Immediately after receiving his PhD in clinical psychology from Michigan State University in 1958, Len joined the faculty in the Department of Psychology at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, where he would spend the entirety of his academic career until retiring in 2011. During this time, he maintained a thriving private practice where he conducted assessments and provided psychotherapy to children, adolescents, and adults for at least 2 days a week. At the same time, he contributed more than 100 journal articles and book chapters to the literature, published four books as editor or coeditor, developed a personality assessment instrument for children (the Fantasy Animal Drawing and Storytelling Technique), pioneered the application of techniques that have become commonplace in personality assessment (i.e., the extended inquiry), and impacted the practice and research of hundreds of clinical psychology trainees. Although the Boulder (scientist-practitioner) training model might be more familiar to most readers, the truly integrative clinical training model Len helped to establish at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, dubbed the Tennessee model (Handler & Wahler, 1995), elucidates his approach to using clinical experience to inform

research discovery, which, in turn, informs an evidence-based approach to clinical intervention.

A complete recounting of Len's accomplishments and accolades, of which there are many, is infeasible in this venue. His collective lifetime contributions to the field were recognized when, as he neared retirement in 2008, he received the Bruno Klopfer Award for Distinguished Lifetime Contribution to Personality Assessment from the SPA and the Toy Caldwell-Colbert Award for Distinguished Educator in Clinical Psychology from the Society for Clinical Psychology (Division 12) of the American Psychological Association. These two awards for research prowess and influential educational activities, respectively, underscore the breadth of Len's impact on clinical and assessment psychology. In addition, for more than four decades, Len was a fixture at SPA's annual meeting, where he presented research findings and clinical case material; he served as President of the Board of Trustees of SPA from 2003 to 2005; and he was on the editorial board of the *Journal of Personality Assessment*, including a period as coeditor of the Clinical Case Applications section.

Len was not only a creative clinician and esteemed clinical researcher, he was also a dedicated and inspiring educator and supervisor and a warm, caring, giving, and humble man. Given the focus of this special section on teaching, training, and supervision, nothing is more fitting than to dedicate it to Len.

Handler, L., & Wahler, R. G. (1995). *The Tennessee model of human science: The marriage of clinical research and practice.* Unpublished manuscript, University of Tennessee–Knoxville. Excerpts can be accessed at https://psychology.utk.edu/research/tnmodel.php

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Personality and psychological assessment training and professional practice are in large part in the midst of a multidecade decline. Yet, there are promising signs of resurgence in certain areas, prompting a need to critically evaluate and possibly reconceptualize current methods for teaching, training, and supervising at every stage of professional development in personality and psychological assessment. This special section was conceived using a life-span developmental perspective with the explicit aim of identifying both the factors that inhibit proliferation of assessment in this era and the potential approaches that could reverse the current downward trend and restore the prominence of personality and psychological assessment in the field of psychology. The seven articles in this special section are wide-ranging in the developmental stage on which they focus (undergraduate and graduate, professional practice, continuing education), the content area (teaching methods and approaches, models and paradigms for training, assessment supervision practices and perspectives, and models for ongoing continuing education and professional development), and the type of article (theoretical or conceptual, quantitative or qualitative data-driven study). A discussion of the recent context of training and professional practice of personality and psychological assessment is helpful in understanding the need for a special section on this topic and the contributions of each individual article.

Background

According to recent reports of graduate training programs, training in psychological assessment has either been stable or increasing in the past 10 years, with the exception of training in projective personality assessment techniques (Ready & Veague, 2014). This is a promising shift after a long period of perceived decline and marginalization of assessment in graduate training programs (Handler & Smith, 2012; Martin, 2009; Stedman, Hatch, & Schoenfeld, 2001) as well as indications that trainees far too often arrive at the predoctoral internship level unprepared to practice personality assessment (Clemence & Handler, 2001; Stedman, 2007). Further, despite the continued threat to assessment by the rise of managed care (Eisman et al., 2000), assessment remains a nontrivial portion of psychologists' clinical activities (Norcross, Karpiak, & Santoro, 2005). Neuropsychology, an assessment-driven subspecialty, in particular is growing and the employment outlook is very positive, according to the American Psychological Association's Center for Workforce Studies (see http://www.apa.org/workforce/).

With the emphasis in the field of professional psychology as a whole on the use of evidence-based practices and the practice of core clinical activities with competence (Kaslow, 2004), including psychological assessment (Hunsley & Mash, 2007), the need for training and supervision that achieves this aim will continue to be important. The current de-emphasis on assessment in many training programs threatens to effectively remove this practice from its field-defining status and render it a niche or specialty practice that all those with a licensable degree in psychology cannot be assumed to be prepared to practice with minimum competency.

Each of these factors contributes to a need for greater attention to (a) effectively teaching personality assessment at the graduate and undergraduate levels while also engaging students and fostering interest; (b) training and supervising personality and psychological assessment in graduate, internship, and post-doctoral training programs; and (c) establishing a culture of ongoing education and peer consultation in assessment among practicing professionals. Failure to adequately achieve the relevant training and educational goals at any of these stages creates a trickle-down effect, which over time could result in a severe degradation in the quality and clinical relevance of personality and psychological assessment, thus creating the conditions for further decline.

Articles in this special section

In the first article in this special section, Roche, Jacobson, and Roche (this issue) discuss the potential benefits of early exposure to personality assessment in an undergraduate course on personality psychology. The authors describe how the infusion of self-assessment leading to an integrative personality assessment paper about themselves increased interest in personality assessment among other outcomes (deepened understanding of course material, promoted student growth and self-exploration). These kinds of innovative and interactive instructional activities could lead to increased interest among students to enter doctoral training programs to become assessment psychologists, particularly personality assessment psychologists. Further, the use of contemporary and evidence-based assessment instruments runs counter to the inaccurate, and even pejorative, way that psychological assessment practices are described in undergraduate textbooks.

The second article, a qualitative study of a required psychological assessment course by Smith and Egan (this issue), indicates that there are also opportunities to increase interest in and shift perspectives about assessment psychology among doctoral students. Unfortunately, assessment has been marginalized in many doctoral programs and even the instructors selected to teach these courses (often assistant professors with no interest in the area personally or professionally who drew the "short straw" when given this teaching assignment) at worst perpetuate negative stereotypes about assessment or simply do not have the personal experiences and convictions to communicate the clinical benefits of psychological assessment to trainees. A culture in the program then develops that views assessment courses as a necessary evil required to graduate. Using a directed content analysis of student self-evaluations of their final project, an assessment conducted using Finn's (2007) Therapeutic Assessment (TA) paradigm, Smith and Egan found that students' perspectives about personality and psychological assessment shifted (to be more positive); they desired to learn more about and to practice assessment during their professional careers; they saw the clinical utility; and they reported that the TA approach aligned with their professional identity. This study suggests that teaching training in accordance with the TA paradigm could lead to more positive views of psychological assessment, which might increase its acceptance and use.

In the next article, Blais and Hopwood (this issue) describe three conceptual models of psychological assessment to improve the way complex issues are taught and practiced. The authors aptly point out that high-quality psychological assessment requires much more than knowledge of tests, psychometrics, and psychopathology—it also requires extensive knowledge of theory (personality, human development, neuropsychology, social behavior) and clinician attributes and skills, such as cognitive flexibility, skepticism, and interpersonal sensitivity. The authors include the trans-theoretical model of personality, the quantitative psychopathology–personality trait model, and the interpersonal situation model. These models have unique and complementary strengths and can be used in isolation or combination depending on the nature of the clinical case, the assessment methods being used, and the data derived from the testing. These models are brought to life using a clinical case example that effectively demonstrates the case for teaching from and using these models in professional practice. These pedagogical tools are helpful for increasing the effectiveness of instruction and for improving the quality of assessment practices and the clinical reports that are produced because they provide an framework to improve the integration and the interpretation of complex human affect, behavior, cognition, and personality organization.

The fourth article discusses the use of Bloom's (Bloom [Ed.], Englehart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl, 1956) taxonomy of educational objectives as a model for developing effective and trainee-centered instructional design of assessment training (Ramirez, this issue). Bloom's six objectives, ordered from simplest to most advanced, are knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Ramirez applies the six objectives to psychological assessment pedagogy while highlighting effective instructional activities, ways to address common mistakes learners make, and how to identify the level of each student's grasp of these hierarchically ordered learning objectives. Similar to the way Blais and Hopwood suggest that models will aid in learning and practicing assessment psychology, Ramirez makes a compelling case for designing assessment courses, and overall curricula, around the achievement of Bloom's six objectives. Doing so would provide trainees with the necessary higher order thinking skills to effectively accomplish the challenging responsibilities and complexities of competent psychological assessment, such as resolving discrepancies in test findings and integrating multiple sources of information, theoretical perspectives, and evidence-based techniques.

Mihura, Roy, and Graceffo (this issue) present the findings of a survey to directors of American Psychological Association accredited clinical psychology doctoral programs concerning their training in personality and psychological assessment. This survey updates and expands on the findings of similar surveys conducted in the past decade (Curry & Hanson, 2010; Ready & Veague, 2014). Among the key findings of Mihura and colleagues' survey are that psychological assessment training is at least equally as active as has been reported in previous surveys; the often stark differences, concerning both the content and amount of training, between programs self-described as clinical science, scientist-practitioner, or practitioner-focused training models; the rise of exposing trainees to outcome assessment (to determine the effectiveness of psychological interventions and programs) and to the collaborative or therapeutic assessment paradigm; and the shortage of practicum opportunities for students to obtain applied assessment training. The authors provide a number of suggestions intended to shape assessment curricula and training opportunities that would improve their quality and better prepare trainees for the next stages of professional development, mainly the clinical internship. The results of this survey are promising in terms of the volume of assessment-related didactic course work and are useful in identifying general gaps in training. Most notable, perhaps, are the gaps that exist between classroom learning, which is broad and well represented, and real-world experiences to build applied skills; and between clinical science training programs and others in which the former assessment appears more focused on self-report measures and less on integrated, multimethod assessment, despite the incremental benefit that seems to align with the aims of the clinical science training model.

Supervision is a critical component of training in assessment, psychotherapy, and research. However, research on assessment supervision practices and even models specific to this activity are scarce in comparison to the other two areas. Iwanicki and Peterson (this issue) conducted a survey to better understand supervisory practices in professional psychology. The study was intended to be exploratory and contribute to the development of (a) best practice guidelines, (b) research questions that can be empirically tested, and (c) models and approaches for effective assessment supervision at various stages of training and competence. A number of common supervisory techniques were identified, including discussion, directed readings, role-play, and case presentations. The results indicated that supervisors in assessment recognized the need for formal assessment training, ongoing (continuing education) training opportunities, and adherence to supervision competencies specific to psychological assessment. Respondents indicated that each of these needs is currently underdeveloped and largely unavailable. The results of this survey provide a multisource perspective on assessment supervision. Potential next steps could be collecting information from supervisees regarding effective supervisory interventions and arrangements and systematic examination of the relationship between specific practices or packaged curricula and trainee's acquisition of knowledge and demonstration of proficiency or expertise. Given that empirical research in this area is in its infancy, this survey has the potential to shape the research agenda.

The final article in the special section concerns continued professional training and consultation beyond doctoral, internship, and postdoctoral training. Evans and Finn (this issue) identify areas of assessment psychology that render ongoing training and consultation a necessity if professionals are to maintain competent and ethical practice standards. These include the complexity of cases encountered by psychologists who specialize in psychological and personality assessment, the continuous updating of test versions and scoring systems (e.g., MMPI–2 to MMPI–2–RF and Rorschach Comprehensive System to Rorschach Performance Assessment System, respectively), and development of new

tests or the need to learn a test not previously learned. These areas are similar to those in psychotherapy, but the ongoing consultation and training are not as well defined in assessment, nor are models articulated. Evans and Finn discuss a collaborative group-based assessment consultation model that adheres to continuing education guidelines and the spirit of the competency-based practices movement. The authors provide useful instructions for how to form and run these groups to maximize their effectiveness. Their suggestions are based largely on their own experiences with such groups over the past 30-plus years. Finally, Evans and Finn discuss how this approach to continued education and consultation fits within the broader assessment training landscape that exists today.

Finally, and Eisman and Nordal (this issue) of the American Psychological Association's Practice Directorate and Kaslow and Egan (this issue) from Emory University School of Medicine offer comments on the special section as it pertains to the health care system and to professional competencies, respectively.

Concluding thoughts

The articles in this special section provide two important factors for improving the way psychological and personality assessment is being taught, trained, and supervised. First, the articles offer specific techniques, paradigms, models, and objectives to enhance all aspects of the training continuum from undergraduate course work to professional consultation, application of which will have the effect of increasing interest among trainees, improving perceptions, recognizing the clinical value, and effectively learning and practicing assessment. These hypotheses need to be tested, however, which leads to the second major contribution of these articles: Their findings and suggestions can be used to generate hypotheses and develop a program of empirical research to better understand the most effective methods and the precise mechanisms responsible for improved training and practice. Although trends in assessment training and use have been evaluated, and guidelines for competencies been published, few systematic and rigorous attempts to understand the why and how have been undertaken. If we are to maintain personality and psychological assessment as a defining practice of psychologists, and one that is not in name only, but is in actuality a prominent feature of clinical practice, then a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the issues raised in this special section is needed. Further, for any progress in this area to be realized, there is a need for advocacy efforts on behalf of psychological and personality assessment within and across training programs, to related health care professions whose clients would benefit from assessment, and at the national level as it concerns funding for research through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which oversees such funding agencies as the National Institutes of Health and the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. This multilevel and developmental "system" will require strong voices and empirical evidence to fully realize the benefits of assessment in the changing health care and psychological training environments.

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