

Topic stream: A. Pedagogic research

Submission type: Presentation

Submission title:

Changing professional assessments – changing professionals?

Abstract:

“The political struggles associated with identities, constitute the most important issues of our time” Foucault (1993)

As far back as 1993 Foucault was suggesting that identity would become an important issue. Many of the students who study at Edinburgh Napier are studying for a career as an identified professional and many of our courses offer initial entry registration to regulated professions. Professional identity is important for those students.

The backwash effect of assessment on learning is well documented (Watkins et al, 2005), but does changing our assessments of professionals impact on their professional identity? Does it change how regulated professionals think about their professional identity?

This qualitative study (carried out as part of a Professional Doctorate at Glasgow Caledonian University) suggests how we assess professionals and those aspiring to be professionals matters and that there is a backwash effect of assessment on professional identity. Moreover, methods of assessment can actually act to undermine professional practice and produce differential effects on professional identity similar to those in learning, (Boud, 1995).

Through a discursive approach and utilising a semi-structured interview methodology, this research explores the impact of changing assessment on the professional practice and identity constructions of 21 regulated practitioner psychologists.

The assessment of professionals is often treated as if it were an objective and neutral sample of behaviour. This presents those of us working with and around the professions that use assessments with a paradox. Despite a long history of assessment research, little has transferred across to knowledge about the effects of professional assessment.

Theory driven and thematic analysis demonstrates that psychologists are (re) framing their professional identity based on (dis) identification with changing assessments. Utilising a Foucauldian analysis of statements (Graham, 2005) the impact of changing assessments on the mundane day to day practices of practicing psychologists (Foucault, 1973) is examined. This study suggests that assessment can have unintended outcomes and are therefore not neutral. Foucauldian approaches are particularly helpful in understanding professional practices which are played out in organisational contexts such as those that subsequently employ those that achieve registration (Ferlie, et al, 2011) which is a pivotal moment in the formation of professional identity.

This study suggests changing the mode or content of professional assessments can deeply impact professional identity. When regulatory process are mandatory and are inconsistent with professional beliefs or values, professional identity is conflicted. There are real and unintended effects of measurement which may act to undermine professional assessment and regulation. This effects may even change the very nature of the profession itself. Of course professional identity is not a static process and professional identity is never ‘done’ (Bottery, 2000). This research is important in understanding some of the differential effects our assessments can have.

This presentation will focus on what this means for those of us who teach and assess those aspiring to claim professional status at the end of their training and explores what that tells us about how we measure professional performance.

References

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