

What does it mean to be professional?

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At the recent European Congress of Psychology I went to a session on 'Quality and Standards of Professional Psychology' – which is, indeed, an important topic. But I cringed at what was going on and exited.

I have a long-standing interest in the goals of education, the role of the universities, professional competence, and the tendency for the apparently laudable objective of generating standards to protect the public to result in the opposite; and, more specifically, in the case of psychology, to result in studies that, because of the limited range of outcomes that it is possible to assess with the tools currently available, are seriously misleading and often deeply unethical while presented as contributing to 'evidence-based practice'. I feel, therefore, that I cannot let the matter pass without sharing a few remarks.

To contextualise these remarks, I should perhaps first mention that I was already seething with anger arising from the fact that, while the official theme of the conference was to 'understand and enhance diversity', hardly any of the speakers said anything at all directly or indirectly relating to this topic – and those who did spoke only of ethnic diversity, without even coming to terms with many important issues arising from that. So far as I am aware, no one spoke about the huge diversity of talents, values, action-guiding beliefs, and motivations that are available in every classroom and the fact that these cannot be recognised, registered, nurtured or utilised using psychological assessment procedures that meet current test 'standards'. No one spoke about how these diverse talents can be harnessed to create emergent cultures of intelligence or enterprise or societies offering diverse patterns of life satisfaction and different chances of surviving into the future. No one spoke about the apparently abhorrent human predisposition to denigrate, even eliminate, values and life styles that differ from one's own and how such predispositions can be capitalised upon on the one hand and held in check on the other.

And so to the symposium: So far as I could see there was no discussion of the huge variety of roles and activities carried out by professional psychologists, no discussion of what is meant by professional conduct (as distinct from the routine execution of prescribed duties), no discussion of the role of the universities in promoting the development of diverse, generic, motivationally based, high-level competencies, and no acknowledgement – let alone recognition of the significance – of the tendency of the majority university students from any academic discipline to enter employment in areas outside their discipline of study.

At least while I was there (and in the accompanying booklet) there was no discussion of the paucity of ways of giving students credit for having developed these diverse high-level competencies, no discussion of the ways in which universities can nurture them and give lecturers credit for having done so, and no discussion of ways of differentiating institutions in these terms so that students can make informed choices between them. This despite the fact that 'everyone knows' that the institution attended is more important than the courses taken.

Yet these are all topics to which one might have expected psychologists of all people to have paid attention.

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The booklet which accompanied, and formed the basis for, the symposium was: EuroPsy (2011). *European Certificate in Psychology: EFPA Regulations*. Published by EFPA, but no publication address cited.