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Feedback from a
Forensic Industrial Psychologist

JPV INDUSTRIAL PSYCHOLOGISTS
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BY JP VENTER (M Com, MBL)

Industrial Psychologists (IPs) often have to consider Educational Psychology (EP) reports. There are a number of things in these reports that tends to occur time and again that makes life difficult for me. And I find the expert system makes it hard to communicate across lines of expertise – the pressure of delivering reports being one of them. So I am very pleased and thankful for this opportunity to provide some feedback to the forensic Educational Psychology community. **Based on the types of problems and challenges I have, I will focus on PRE-INJURY predictions more than POST-INJURY**

“...Educational Psychologists make predictions without sufficient attention to South African circumstances”

A key difficulty I have with educational Psychology reports is the following pattern: When dealing with *very young children*, often those who have not even passed Grade R yet, or without having any school reports, the EP will evaluate the development milestones, lack of any pre-injury incidents and general good health. Regularly they then conclude that the child probably had an average pre-injury mental capacity. Then, based on that the psychologist will predict that without the injury, the child would have passed matric and would have embarked on tertiary studies such as a diploma or a degree. And just as often I will find this conclusion runs contrary to the circumstances of the child and the family. But many of the EPs remain silent about the family circumstances and provide no reason why this particular child would manage to rise above the circumstances. So, based on this often-repeated pattern, I feel Educational Psychologists make predictions without giving sufficient attention to South African circumstances. More on this below

I also find that Educational Psychologist's predictions are often not clear. I frequently find statements like "He had the potential to pass Grade 12" This is not helpful, as I must then make interpretations of what the actual outcome will be. (See **Note 1** at the end of this feedback report). For instance, all of us who have done career guidance know that difficult family circumstances like not having a place and privacy to study, or not having parental support can jeopardise the reaching of potential. **The industrial psychologist needs a clear prediction of probable educational outcomes - based on the balance of probabilities given all relevant and available evidence.** Note that a probable outcome is better than a 50% chance. This is a much higher standard than simply stating potential. Note the regulations regarding the scope of practice for educational psychologists: "...learning, academic performance and the behavioural, social, emotional and career development of learners of all ages, especially children and young people in school, educational, family and related contexts;"

"The industrial psychologist needs a clear prediction of probable educational outcomes - based on the *balance of probabilities*"

Educational Psychologists predict the obtaining of a diploma or a degree far too easily. I often come across a vague statement that there is this trend in South Africa that children are doing better than parents and therefore the educational prediction made is higher than the education of the parents – and the child is then predicted to obtain a diploma or a degree. I feel there is substantial overlap between the industrial psychologist and the educational psychologist when it comes to predicting learning outcomes, but the educational psychologist has a clear domain which makes it difficult if my information or interpretation differs. See **Note 2** below. While I agree that children do better than parents, I find there is a complete over-interpretation of this trend. In my own practice, I seldom find that children jump more than one level of skill over that of their parents. In other words, parents working in unskilled jobs might have children working in semi-skilled jobs, and semi-skilled parents find their children progressing to skilled jobs. However, the South African labour force is still lacking those who can function on high level skill positions such as managers, professionals and specialists. The key to entering these ranks are usually a diploma or a degree and for some a certificate. StatsSA (2016) (p15) research show that only about 12% of the South African labour force have reached an NQF 5 level of education or above*. It must be noted that NQF 5 is usually equal to Grade 12 plus a certificate, a national diploma usually NQF 6 and a degree usually NQF 7. Less than half obtain a degree – see list of statistics further below

*See References consulted

Are young South Africans closing the skills gap? Well, although the trend is more or less in the right direction, young South Africans are NOT catching up that rapidly. StatsSA (2016) research show that although youngsters do better than parents it is incrementally so: P89: “However, the odds for upward educational mobility....were confined mostly to one level up from their parents’ educational achievements.” (“Levels” defined in Table 4.3 on p87). The defined levels appear below:

“Levels” of education as defined by the research of StatsSA:

EDUCATION LEVELS
1. NO SCHOOLING
2. SOME PRIMARY
3. COMPLETED PRIMARY
4. SOME SECONDARY
5. COMPLETED SECONDARY
6. POST SECONDARY

So my feedback and suggestion to the educational psychologists is that they should usually expect a future outcome of only about one level of education above that of the parents. And if they depart from this they must have a specific good reason to predict more than one level up from the parents, probably proven good academic performance by the child and a stable home environment. Furthermore, the “Post Secondary” level will mostly be of a certificate or diploma type of qualification. In my experience certificates are usually NOT a full NQF 5 level so they do not then qualify as Post Secondary”. More often than not certificates, even if *done* post-secondary are shorter than a year or are still no higher than NQF4 – and often lower, as they are usually vocationally based without covering learning higher than technical school level.

Example: Parents: One with Grade 12 and the other with some high school: On average their level is some high school. Corresponding prediction for child: Grade 12 or NQF level 4: So Grade 12 with maybe short certificates would be suitable. (In the absence of other evidence indicating better or poorer performance)

“...educational psychologistsshould usually expect a future outcome of only about one level of education above that of the parents”

Educational Psychology reports that misrepresent the South African context. In my view, if the average Medico-Legal Educational Psychology report were used to interpret the South African situation, it would seem quite commonplace for learners to finish school and to carry on successfully studying post-secondary. I find it shocking that so many reports would reflect such a rosy context even if the learner’s situation does not warrant the overly-optimistic educational outcomes. Compare the rosy context with some recent statistics that describe the South African situation: (See Note 3 and List of Key references at the end for more detail about the sources)

- **The chance of passing matric by 18 years old: 41%**
Department of Basic Education (2017): Calculated from their 2016 figures: Table 10 on p13 and senior certificate pass rate figures from p24
- **In 2016, young adults aged 20 to 34 who have completed Grade 12: 45.2%**
Statistics SA (2017) p 83
- In 2016: “The percentage of **20-24 year olds** ...enrolled in higher education”: **18%**
Council on Higher Education (2018) p2. Higher education apparently defined as Post School Education and Training (PSET) that includes higher level skills training – see p1 of the same publication.
- **Pass rate at universities** after 2 additional years: 2009 to 2011 cohorts: **54%**
Council on Higher Education (2018). Calculated from Figure 9 on p6.
- **In 2016, young adults aged 20 to 34: with completed Post School qualification: 8.2%**
Statistics SA (2017) p 83
- Anything **more than secondary [Post School]: 12%** of age 25 to 64
Statistics SA (2017) Table 2.1 p 15
- **Degree** (or more) in 2016: **5.4 %** of age 25 to 64 and certificate or diploma **6.6%**
Statistics SA (2017) Table2.1 p 15 and p.30 to get non-degree proportion and population size

So, without knowing anything else about them: if we use current knowledge and apply it to 100 South Africans who are today in Grade1: (without having any school reports)

Out of 100 Grade 1’s the probable expectations are that:

45 will complete matric (So the chances of completing matric are less than “probable”)

12 will then ultimately complete anything more than matric – many only after the age of 35

Should the above be the usual prediction for educational psychologists? (Especially for the pre-injury scenario). Well mostly yes – UNLESS the specific circumstances of the child are better than average in terms of school performance, or the qualifications of the PARENTS warrant a different prediction.

***“Out of 100 Grade 1’s :
45 will complete matric..
12 will ultimately complete ...more than matric ”***

Seeing that the trends are improving, should we not be somewhat more liberal in predictions for very young South Africans? How can we be sure that the current situation will be applicable in future (say within the 10 to 15 years or so spanning the education of a child) Well, we cannot be completely sure – In my practice we use the policy that in making predictions for any individual case the CURRENT situation and statistics are the most applicable. Regarding educational trends, the problem is that we have no way of knowing if current trends will actually carry on improving: The South African Labour market is in a very tight spot. The population growth tends to be higher than economic growth – for many years by now. This might seem unrelated to educational statistics – but it is not: The economy provides the means for children to get educated so educational capacity is under pressure. And with our population growth rate every learner is increasingly in competition for resources – not only for the attention of the teacher in the overpopulated class room but also for opportunities such as at universities. The Council for Higher education for instance found that the higher education participation rate for young adults in 2013 reached a desired 20% - but by 2016 it had dropped back to 18% - citing financial pressures at universities. (See p2 of the CHE 2018 publication in the reference list)

Thank you for the opportunity for feedback. I trust you found it beneficial.

Notes

1: Industrial Psychologists must make prediction regarding probable earnings, not potential earnings. Dr Koch, a well-known actuary, advocate and author states in his Quantum Yearbook (2019) p121: “As the law stands at the moment, compensation for loss of earnings ...is directed at likely earnings, not possible potential earnings.” As this is the demand under which I must perform, I am compromised if educational psychologists are vague and refer to potential educational outcomes without rising to the standard of making predictions.

2. The regulations pertaining to the scope of practice of the industrial psychologist cover things that overlap with the educational psychologist: “...issues of critical relevance to organisations, including career development,selection, training, ...performance, potential,... In my own career, one of my key tasks in my first professional job was to predict the training outcomes of artisans going for N1 to N3 training (Technical Matric). As a strategist I was also interested in Labour Statistics and presented papers on labour market demands on Black candidates to fulfil the needs of industry – and I had to delve in the educational patterns – labour market supply is created via the educational system. So as far as predicting educational performance using statistics, trends and social context, I can help myself. But I do not test primary school children, do not determine the effects of injuries on their learning ability and can say nothing about remedial education. Please, I need the EP!

3. I found government related sources unclear about some aspects. For instance, the term having “completed upper secondary” is not necessarily matric but could be only grade 11 (even though at some places it is defined as completed Grade 12) and having “secondary” qualifications could also mean just having grade 8. I found internet news channels like News 24 making use of the Institute of Race Relations and SAPTU opinions, coming to superficial and overly pessimistic conclusions.

KEY REFERENCES LIST

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