From the Editor

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The education, training and development space for assessment practitioners has not been clearly mapped. This has resulted in an unclear training path for new assessment practitioners, many of whom have advanced degrees in other disciplines. It remains a common occurrence that individuals new to the field of assessment are directed to conferences for their training and development. Conferences, usually designed for development, likely fail to provide the breadth and depth of training needed for most new assessment practitioners. Fortunately, there are a number of other methods designed to provide training such as non-graduate and graduate credit courses, certificates, and graduate degree programs. Unfortunately, without a clear map of how assessment education and training contribute to the assessment practitioner, many new assessment practitioners may experience a mismatch between their learning goals and the method of education, training or development that they experience. This article focuses on "how" assessment practitioners are trained, the available methods for training and development, and the appropriate placement of each within the space of assessment practitioner development.

A Field Without A Discipline? Mapping the Uncertain and Often Chaotic Route to Becoming an Assessment Practitioner

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*L*et us face facts; no one grows up saying they want to be a student learning outcomes assessment practitioner. A few people "find" assessment, but most happen, or are encouraged, into it. A few people move purposefully into the field of student learning outcomes assessment (henceforth referred to simply as 'assessment') after finding they enjoy statistics and measurement. Some move purposefully into assessment after developing a love for higher education and wanting to "make a difference." Sometimes it is both. But most assessment practitioners trip into the assessment field. We have met assessment practitioners who were previously in institutional research and "inherited" outcome assessments as part of their expanded role. We have encountered faculty members who were "voluntold" to assume responsibility for their institution's assessment initiatives after having served as the chair of the institution's assessment committee for as little as a year. In a recent Association for the Assessment of Learning in Higher Education (AALHE) poll of practitioners, approximately 71% of respondents indicated less than 5 years of professional work in their current assessment role (Ariovich, et al., 2018). Those new to assessment fill a majority of the senior assessment positions in higher education. The truth is, assessment practitioners come from a wide variety of disciplines and from nearly every corner of the academy (Leaderman & Polychronopoulos, 2019; Polychronopoulos & Leaderman, 2019). Our paths to the profession are nearly as numerous as we are. This diversity strengthens our profession in many ways and it also creates a significant challenge. With so many of us

coming to the profession with terminal degrees in hand, the training of most assessment practitioners does not follow a traditional disciplinary path. There are exceptions of course, but for those who did not find a PhD, PsyD, or EdD in assessment along the way, the path to getting up to speed on student assessment is often a self-directed one. It is not our intent to discount the diligent work of previous and current assessment professionals who arrived at the profession through a winding path. In fact, all of the authors on this paper started outside of assessment. We are suggesting that the discipline has matured to the point of needing a clearer path to becoming an assessment professional.

With the exception of a few doctoral-level programs that have emerged over the last 20 years, most training and development has come in the form of conference sessions, workshops, webinars, and online events. In fact, we have yet to attend an assessment conference without welcoming a new colleague who has been sent by a college administrator to a conference "to learn how to do assessment." However, for that individual, the experience is akin to being 'thrown into the deep end' before being taught how to swim. Such professional events seldom scaffold knowledge, nor do they deliver a purposeful curriculum. This means that some of us who attended the conference, have some knowledge and skills, while others who attended other conferences, may have different skills and knowledge. More recently non-graduate and graduate credit courses and certificate programs have emerged. However, there is no accepted core knowledge for the field and no intentional method for delivering such a core even if there were. While others have begun to address the first issue (Horst & Prendergast, 2020), in what follows, we discuss the second issue, by what method or methods should those new to assessment practice rely on to gain knowledge about assessment? How does the field map the training, development and educational space for assessment professionals? As part of our discussions, we will examine the appropriate placement of each method within the space of assessment professional development and the potential impact the current system has on the professional development of the field and the development of advanced practice. Of course, we are not the only assessment practitioners to consider this issue in one form or another. There have been calls to consider the reasons we engage in assessment (Jankowski, 2017); examinations of established roles and tasks of assessment professionals (Jankowski & Slotnick, 2015; Nicholas & Slotnick, 2018); and encouraging efforts to guide current professionals in examining their own development and how they approach their work with other professionals (Leaderman & Polychronopoulos, 2019; Polychronopoulos & Leaderman, 2020). Building on these previous calls, our hope is that the following discussions bring further attention and spur more widespread consideration of these issues.

Novice versus Intermediate versus Advanced Practitioners

For their taxonomy, Horst and Prendergast (2020), defined three levels of assessment practitioners. Their Assessment Skills Framework (ASF) outlines knowledge, skills, and attitudes for the novice, the intermediate and the advanced practitioner.

> Specifically, someone at the novice level is described as being able to provide basic explanations of assessment concepts and apply that knowledge to hypothetical examples devoid of context and real-world complexity...The intermediate level is described as being able to provide a more thorough explanation of assessment concepts than someone at the novice level. ...People at the intermediate level successfully apply their knowledge to real-life assessment projects. People at the advanced level are described as being able to provide a nuanced explanation of assessment concepts. These individuals use reflective thinking about their assessment practice that results in the generation of new knowledge or useful alternative conceptions about assessment processes. (p.7)

It is important to note that the authors not only distinguish among the levels based on what the practitioners know and can do, but also practitioners' confidence, their ability to generate new knowledge, and their ability to develop new approaches (Horst & Prendergast, 2020).

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Defining Training, Development, and Education

Even the newest assessment practitioner quickly learns to value the importance of operationally defining terms. To begin, we look at how to define and distinguish between training, development, and education. A review of the literature reveals that there are multiple models (for example, see Bhatia, Rao, & Bhatia, 2019) for differentiating training and development. In their article, Horst and Prendergast (2020), focusing more on the skills acquired rather than the methods, referred to all delivery methods as "professional development" opportunities. For our purposes, we believe the following definitions, adapted specifically for assessment practitioners represent a useful nuance within the wide array of opportunities. *Training* is a process by which the assessment novice can learn the *key* skills required to successfully conduct student learning outcomes assessment. *Training* is usually seen as a short-term process that focuses on building basic skills and knowledge for one's current position. *Development* is the process by which those individuals at advanced levels cultivate their skills, preparing for more advanced positions, addressing future challenges, or advancing practice. *Development* is more of an ongoing process that is future focused.

Unlike earlier definitions of *assessment professional* (e.g., Nicholas & Slotnick, 2018), we believe a differentiation between assessment *practitioners* and assessment *professionals* is helpful. We propose that assessment *professionals* require not just more advanced proficiency in the same skills, knowledge, and attitudes as assessment *practitioners*, but also additional areas of expertise such as qualitative, quantitative, and mixed research methods; advanced statistical skills; and/or an understanding of public and educational policy as it pertains to assessment practice. This, of course, leaves the question of what is *education* in terms of developing an assessment professional? This broad *education* can be acquired through formal graduate or doctoral programs or through a vast accumulation of training, development and practice opportunities.

Mapping the Training, Development and Education Space

We propose that assessment professionals require not just more advanced proficiency in the same skills, knowledge, and attitudes as assessment practitioners, but also additional areas of expertise such as qualitative, quantitative, and mixed research methods; advanced statistical skills; and/or an understanding of public and educational policy as it pertains to assessment practice.

Prior to mapping out the available methods for training and development, we must understand where training, development, and education can each be most useful to practitioners looking to advance their proficiency. Figure 1 below demonstrates that training offers opportunities for practitioners to be introduced to new skills and knowledge. The number of training sessions required to assist an individual in moving from novice to intermediate on a Knowledge, Skill, or Ability (KSAs) depends on the complexity of the topic. For example, in Figure 1, if the KSAs are at the novice level of the Assessment Skills Framework (Horst & Prendergast, 2020) it may take practitioners only one (for least complex KSAs), or two (for somewhat complex KSAs) training experiences to move to the intermediate level. For example, a practitioner may quickly provide "basic descriptions of each step of the assessment cycle" (p.9); yet, it may take many more experiences before that practitioner "defines validity threats in the context of research design" (p. 17), a more complex KSA. Once these foundational KSAs are learned, then developing assessment practitioners may wish to engage in professional development activities to advance their skills, prepare for a more advanced or different professional position, address developing and future challenges in assessment practice, or advance practice itself.

It is important to note that an assessment practitioner, regardless of their overall assessment competency, may be a novice, intermediate, or advanced practitioner on any number of assessment-related knowledge, skills, or abilities. Advancing from *novice* to *intermediate* to *advanced* on the KSAs should not be equated with overall years of experience nor with institutional role or title (ACPA/NASPA, 2015). For example, an experienced assessment practitioner may be an expert in many areas of assessment, including quantitative data analysis approaches, but be a novice in qualitative approaches. Figure 1 intentionally addresses a single, hypothetical assessment practitioner's level of specific KSAs, not their overall competence in assessment practice. The figure outlines two possible ways for a practitioner to develop assessment-related KSAs. First, practitioners might structure their own learning and development through a series of trainings, workshops, and applied experiences. Second, an assessment practitioner might enroll in a more structured full- or part-time program in assessment practice, represented by the dotted pattern in Figure 1. Practitioners in these

programs often move from *novice* to at least advanced on many individual KSAs. However, as new processes and practices develop, these professionals may also find they are in need of training and development to move from *novice* to *intermediate* to *advanced* in areas they had not focused on during their formal education. If the practitioner in Figure 1, as an example, had engaged in this hypothetical formal educational program, they would not yet develop to the *professional*-level in either of the first two KSAs. Thus, a future set of professional development experiences would be necessary to develop those KSAs further. Either self-structured or formal educational experiences have the potential to help practitioners looking to further develop their KSAs as long as the experiences are well matched to the level of KSA being developed.
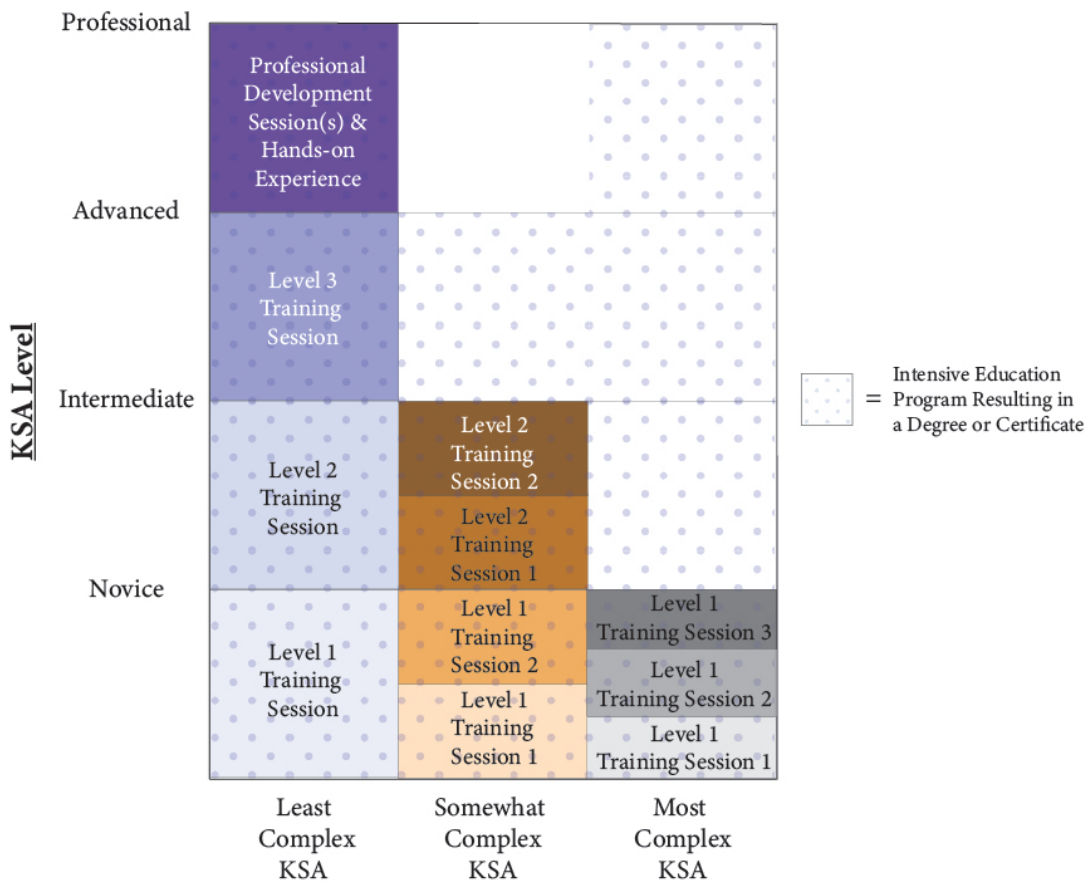
What Practitioners Want

We do not intend this discussion piece as a formal research article. Yet, when considering how to structure a training, development, or education path, it is important to consider what assessment practitioners want from such experiences. Thus, as we considered training and development experiences, we examined results from three related surveys and one market research report to determine what assessment practitioners might want and what they may need from a training, development, and educational standpoint. It is important to note that none of these sources distinguished between training, development, and education. Yet, the results can provide some insight into practitioners' preferences for these kinds of experiences.

In the Association for the Assessment of Learning in Higher Education (AALHE) poll of practitioners, mentioned above (Ariovich, et al., 2018), practitioners expressed a clear preference for professional development opportunities delivered in the form of conferences, webinars, journals, and training sessions. We conducted a similar, informal survey of attendees

at the Virginia Assessment Group annual meetings in November of 2018 and 2019. The responses continued to support demand for an assessment training program and indicated that such a program should ideally have some face-to-face, synchronous components. Some respondents indicated that affiliation with a major college/university was not always necessary.

In order to build on these surveys, one for-profit assessment software company conducted a series of market-research tests to collect more specific information (Weave, 2020). Findings indicated a strong desire for access to a knowledge base and participation in a professional community of active learners. Respondents also requested participation in on-line training courses and access to expert consultants. Based on this data, the company offered six sessions of two certification courses in assessment from spring 2019 through spring 2020. Upon completion of each course, participants were asked to respond informally to a survey related to their thoughts about the course, with items addressing the course organization, instructors, assignments, and other items. One of the items asked participants to respond to the question "What did you like most about the course?" Responses to this question could be categorized within three topic areas: (a) interactions with peers and experts, (b) acquisition of knowledge and skills, and (c) applicability/relevance to their current work. The interaction with others, peers and experts, was the most often stated reason for appreciating the course.

In summary, the findings from these sources indicate that assessment practitioners have a preference for: (a) training with at least some face-to-face component; (b) participation in a professional community of active learners; (c) access to a knowledge base of highly effective training tools and artifacts based on best practice; and (d) access to expert consultants on a variety of important educational effectiveness topics. As we contemplate how assessment training and professional development is currently structured and how it might be restructured, it is important to consider the factors important to those who would be engaging in these experiences.

Implications for Practitioner Training and Development

So, why is distinguishing between *training* and *development* (and in some cases *education*) important? Assessment in higher education, as a discipline, continues to develop rapidly. Each year, while there are still newcomers to assessment, there are also more and more intermediate and advanced practitioners. This increased diversity in skills, knowledge, and ability presents challenges for the field. Our conferences, once geared entirely for those new to assessment, are having to shift to satisfy multiple audiences. Such a shift is important, because a mismatch between method of training/development/education and the educational goals may result in a lower quality learning experience, a lower feeling of satisfaction from participants and facilitators, and a misuse of valuable time and resources that could have been directed more appropriately. For example, if a practitioner who falls at an intermediate level on a specific skill signs up for a webinar that sounds like it is a form of professional development, but it provides basic training, the practitioner is not going to be highly satisfied nor, perhaps more importantly, will their skill level improve. Conversely, if a novice signs up for a conference session that is marketed as training, yet provides intermediate or advanced professional development, it is unlikely that person will have acquired the foundational concepts required to benefit from that session.

Many assessment conferences, unfortunately, may fall into the role of covering largely introductory topics as their organizers are aware of the current niche they play in training up the novice practitioner. However, this often leads to a shortage of development opportunities for the advanced practitioner. Yet, due to the high turnover of assessment practitioners, we cannot simply shift all conference activities to focus on intermediate, advanced, and professional topics. We are aware that many conferences label their sessions with categories such as beginner, intermediate, and advanced. Yet, what these labels mean varies from presenter to presenter and also from conference to conference. A clear understanding of what is *training* and what is *development* could serve as a guide for selecting and accurately labeling delivery methods (i.e. conference presentation, webinar, graduate course).

With that in mind, we offer the following taxonomy of training, professional development, and education for further discussion. First, we suggest, in Table 1, that training

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efforts be aligned with the three levels of the Assessment Skills Framework (Horst & Prendergast, 2020). We further suggest that the training levels might be best considered as relevant to experience with specific KSAs. For example, level one training would be for those with no experience in assessment and designed to introduce *novice-level* KSAs. As practitioners gain additional experience applying what they have learned in their training, training at the higher levels becomes more appropriate. We also propose that professional development occur only after all three levels of training have been accomplished within an area of study.

Table 1
Proposed Taxonomy of Training, Professional Development, and Education

	Target Level of Audience	Purpose and Targeted Level of ASF*
Professional Development	Has demonstrated consistent and correct application of *Advanced*-level of the KSA	To reinforce *Advanced*- level KSAs & provide a platform for advancing the field and developing novel KSAs
Training - Level 3	Has demonstrated consistent and correct application of *Intermediate*-level of the KSA	To reinforce *Intermediate*- level KSAs & introduce *Advanced*- level KSAs
Training - Level 2	Has demonstrated consistent and correct application of *Novice*-Level of the KSA	To reinforce *Novice*- level KSAs & introduce *Intermediate*- level KSAs
Training - Level 1	No Experience with the Assessment-related Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs)	To introduce *Novice*- level KSAs (KSAs)

Assessment Skills Framework (Horst & Prendergast, 2020)

Second, building on this taxonomy, we then move to mapping each level of training/development to ideal methods for those seeking to advance their KSAs. Table 2 provides our initial thoughts on some of the methods available to us that might be best equipped for each level. We believe that any method (including many not listed here) might be adapted to meet the needs of practitioners at any level. Yet, we also believe that some methods are more naturally aligned with certain levels and thus, might be best able to help practitioners efficiently and effectively develop the important knowledge, skills, and abilities at those levels. We intentionally present this information divorced from content in an attempt to resist conflating KSAs with methods of delivery.

We propose this taxonomy, not for the purposes of trying to propose a definitive structure, but instead we seek to spur discussion across the field of assessment so that we might come to a consensus together; a consensus that boosts our collective efforts to advance the field. We trust that, with the benefit of multiple perspectives across the field, our suggestions can be refined.

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Conclusion

Assessment is a rapidly changing professional field. For more than three decades, many people, enthusiastic about the promise of assessment, have worked to develop and apply increasingly complex and sophisticated methods of assessment. Many, if not most, assessment professionals shifted their professional focus to develop such knowledge, skills, and abilities subsequent to developing a professional identity in another discipline (e.g., psychology, biology, English, etc.). Now, with a sufficient base of knowledge, skills, and abilities that might begin to define the scope of the assessment field, we believe it is time for a paradigm shift: from assessment as a secondary profession to a primary one. As we mentioned at the start of this paper, it is not our intention to discount the diligent work of previous and current assessment professionals who arrived at this point through a winding path. The authors on this paper started their careers as a K-12 educator, a school psychologist, and a mental health counselor. However, like people and organizations, disciplines develop over time. After 30+ years, it is time we move past drafting or

Table 2

Proposed mapping of training/development methods to training and development levels

	Training - Level 1	Training - Level 2	Training - Level 3	Professional Development
Short Conference Presentations				X
Online Single Session Presentations				X
Interactive Single Session Webinars				X
In-Person Workshops (< 2 hours)			X	X
In-Person Workshops (2-6 hours)		X	X	
In-Person or Online Multi-Day Workshops	X	X		
Certificate Programs	X	X	X	
Master's Degree Programs	X	X	X	
Doctoral Degree Programs	X	X	X	X

We hope that this article spurs a profession-wide conversation to better align our collective efforts to produce the best possible assessment professionals.

"voluntelling" people to step into assessment roles and instead move assessment into a professional, legitimate, and defined discipline with a clear path for becoming an assessment professional. The straightest path, like for any discipline in higher education, is through a terminal-level degree. However, there will always be a need for training and professional development. Even assessment professionals with a doctorate in the discipline will need to learn new KSAs as new methods and practices emerge. And as assessment professionals, we work with partners all across campus, including administrators, faculty members, staff, and students. These partners will also continue to want and need training.

In order to achieve this vision, we first need to collectively be more transparent about the goals of our current training and development work. We also need to better map our chosen goals to the wide array of training and development methods available to us. We believe that all training and development methods have strengths and weaknesses that lend themselves best to particular levels of training and development. By being more transparent about the KSAs we are trying to deliver and at what level, we hope to reduce the number of incidences where advanced practitioners are jumping into level one trainings because no advanced professional development activities exist or where novices are sitting in sessions that are being pitched well-above their level of understanding. In addition, if we put a framework of KSAs around the assessment discipline, those KSAs will likely filter into job descriptions for assessment professionals, further increasing the need to ensure that our training and development methods align well with the KSAs in order to help develop people qualified to fill those positions. As we state above, what we present here is a draft, a draft framework of how we may be able to better align the level of training and development with methods of delivery. We hope that this article spurs a profession-wide conversation to better align our collective efforts to produce the best possible assessment professionals.

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