



**“Giving psychology away” to non-psychologists  
Comment on: Psychology curricula for non-psychologists? A  
framework recommended by the EFPA Board of Educational  
Affairs (Dutke, Bakker, Sokolova, Stuchlikova, Salvatore &  
Papageori, 2019)**

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6 the EFPA Board of Educational Affairs (Dutke, Bakker, Sokolova, Stuchlikova, Salvatore &  
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33 Psychology is a multi-faceted discipline which can be applied within a wide range of professions,  
34 including health and social care, education, the criminal justice system, marketing, human resources,  
35 information technology, the military, and many more, where understanding human behaviour is  
36 beneficial. Psychology can change behaviours (e.g. to reduce smoking, or increase preference for a  
37 consumer product); promote and enhance learning and communication (e.g. cognitively-informed  
38 revision strategies, or improving patient understanding of a medical intervention); psychometrically  
39 assess individual attributes (such as personality fit for a particular profession, or the risk of re-  
40 offending following incarceration); and improve the quality of human life (e.g. improving  
41 accessibility of technology).  
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44 This recognition of the value of psychology is not novel; former APA president, George Miller,  
45 addressed this decades ago, arguing that the majority of the world's problems were created by  
46 humanity, and thus a deeper understanding of human thought and behaviour would help to solve  
47 them. Miller (1969) suggested that the world's problems were too vast for psychologists, proposing:  
48 “... our responsibility is less to assume the role of experts and try to apply psychology ourselves than  
49 to give it away to the people who really need it” (p. 1071). In Miller's view, psychology must be  
50 accessible to the public.  
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53 For Dutke et al. (2019), those training for professions such as teaching, medicine and the law, “really  
54 need” psychology, which is frequently delivered in professional training. However, two challenges  
55 may arise. Firstly, the content may be delivered by an expert psychologist, with minimal knowledge  
56 of the school classroom. Secondly, content may be delivered by teacher educators, who understand  
57 the role, but may have limited psychological knowledge. This has two implications: (1) that the  
58 psychological content of the course may be deemed irrelevant by the trainee teacher because it is  
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3 insufficiently professionally focused; or (2) that the psychological knowledge gained is shallow, or  
4 misrepresentative of psychology. As Dutke et al. note, this can badly influence public perceptions of  
5 psychology.  
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7 As such, Dutke et al.'s framework is crucial if psychology education is to be appropriate for non-  
8 psychologists. Their criteria are aligned with pedagogic theory on curriculum design, and enable an  
9 engaging learning approach. Understanding the usefulness of the subject is important for motivating  
10 engagement (Jones, 2009). The curriculum must address the context in which the professional is  
11 working (and not stray beyond this), and fit non-psychologists' specific needs and processes.  
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14 The need for deep, focused knowledge, and multi-perspectivity, relates to an ability to confidently  
15 select, evaluate and apply relevant knowledge. An old proverb states that "a little knowledge is a  
16 dangerous thing". If one cannot evaluate information, or know how much one doesn't know,  
17 mistakes are inevitable, with potentially damaging consequences in professional contexts. Non-  
18 psychologists can become experts in constrained aspects of psychology, so that depth is acquired,  
19 where breadth is unachievable, enabling the development of transferable skills and knowledge.  
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22 According to Billing (2007), transferability arises when teaching addresses problem solving rather  
23 than content, and when it is social, applying collective reasoning skills, and recognising similarities  
24 and shared strategies across different problems. An active, or problem-based learning (Savery,  
25 2015), approach is ideal. Incorporating authentic assessment (Guliker, Bastiaens & Kirshner, 2004)  
26 may facilitate learners' confidence in working on novel problems. These techniques are successful in  
27 supporting the delivery of psychological literacy (the ability to apply psychology to solve real  
28 problems) in psychology students (Taylor & Hulme, 2015, 2018), and could enable similar outcomes  
29 for non-psychologists.  
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32 However, some questions remain. Firstly, who should deliver psychology curricula to non-  
33 psychologists? Psychologists must collaborate with their counterparts in other disciplines to  
34 determine which aspects of psychology are relevant, and how to ensure a fit within the professional  
35 context. Collaboration can help us to "give psychology away"; and reciprocally, to learn about the  
36 value of our own discipline, and other disciplines. An approach similar to that found in  
37 interprofessional education in the health disciplines may be of use (Hammick, Freeth, Koppel,  
38 Reeves & Barr, 2007). This enables students to develop their own professional identity, whilst  
39 appreciating other professionals, invaluable skills for employment.  
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42 Further, how can we ensure that non-psychologists remain up-to-date with the relevant areas of  
43 psychology after training? Psychological research moves rapidly. As such, in addition to the  
44 recommendations, students need awareness of the need for knowledge currency. Psychology  
45 education develops critical thinking and evaluation skills (McGovern, Corey, Cranney, Dixon, Holmes,  
46 Kuebli et al., 2010), facilitating continuing professional development alongside further study of  
47 psychology.  
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50 Finally, it is important to emphasise to non-psychologists that their expertise is restricted.  
51 Understanding the psychology of learning, for example, does not qualify a teacher to treat a pupil with  
52 severe mental ill health. Most ethical codes of conduct for psychological bodies include a  
53 requirement to "work within the bounds of competence". Teaching non-psychologists this principle,  
54 encouraging them to consult professional psychologists for issues beyond their competence, would  
55 be a welcome addition to the framework.  
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58 In conclusion, this framework is to be applauded. Implementing its principles will enable high quality  
59 psychology education for non-psychologists, greatly benefit society and service users, and help to  
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3 improve the reputation of psychology amongst the general public. However, delivery of this will not  
4 be straightforward, and there may be room to expand the framework. To return to Miller (1969): “I  
5 can imagine nothing that we could do that would be more relevant to human welfare, and nothing  
6 that could pose a greater challenge to the next generation of psychologists than to discover how best  
7 to give psychology away” (p. 1074). The challenge should not, however, cause us to falter, and the  
8 benefits obtained will make the efforts worthwhile.  
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