



CAME Voice/Voix

Validity : Different conceptualizations? Different purposes?

Christina St-Onge and Meredith Young

Validity is one of those recurring challenging concepts in medical education assessment, in part because it has been conceptualized in different ways such as theories (eg. Messick's unitary theory¹), frameworks (eg. Kane²), and types (eg. content, predictive, discriminant, etc). Results from recent systematic reviews have suggested that modern theories of validity are not always 'appropriately' applied³⁻⁵. More importantly, there seems to be an underlying belief that there is a single 'correct' validity theory, and a correct and incorrect way to apply that theory. However, a recent discourse analysis has proposed that the co-existence of different conceptualizations of validity may contribute to the variance with which the validity theories are applied in the medical education literature.⁶

This led us to wonder, what if the choice of and application of a validity theory is not 'black or white'? What if different conceptualizations of validity have different consequences on assessment development or monitoring? Our recent work has explored the implications of different conceptualizations of validity. We have found that the conceptualization of validity used has a downstream effect on the choice of validation framework and evidence used to support the validation of an assessment.

Given these downstream effects, we argue that the question we should be asking is "why was this particular validity theory chosen and how has it influenced assessment?". Making one's reasons for choosing a particular validity theory explicit, in addition to making the choices within a particular validation framework explicit (which is the conclusion of most recent systematic reviews³⁻⁵), could allow researchers and practitioners to make better informed decisions about their approach to validity and to their assessment developments. We also hope it will move us beyond a binary right or wrong understanding and application of validity, to a more explicit conversation about why we make the choices we do in assessment.

References

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