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ABSTRACT

This study identified specific assessment and diagnostic competencies seen as important for masters level special educators. In Phase 1, objectives were gathered from the assessment courses of 61 universities preparing special education teachers. In Phase 2, an initial list of 128 competency statements (71 knowledge statements and 57 skill statements) was developed and organized by the steps of the typical assessment process. In Phase 3, this list was validated by 105 members of the Council for Educational Diagnostic Services. Forty-five knowledge items were rated as very important, with the two highest ratings going to knowledge of basic terminology used in assessment and understanding of assessment guidelines contained in federal law. Forty skill items were rated as very important, with gathering background information and identifying learners' ability to meet the demands of assessment procedures rated the highest. Comparison with ratings for beginning teacher skills found significant differences for both knowledge and skill items. An attached position paper of the Council for Educational Diagnostic Services, based on the findings of this study, lists the eight most critical areas of knowledge and skills for master teachers of any exceptionality. (L3)

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Defining Assessment and Diagnostic Competencies
for Master Level Special Education Teachers

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DEFINING ASSESSMENT AND DIAGNOSTIC COMPETENCIES FOR MASTER LEVEL SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

As with any true profession, educators must begin to regulate and supervise the training and standards for professional practice of each of their members. To this end, comprehensive criteria for professional evaluation and the articulation of the basic knowledge and skills necessary to enter and rise within the profession must be developed.

This study was undertaken by the authors to provide research based information to the Council for Educational Diagnostic Services (CEDs) regarding the knowledge and skills in diagnosis and assessment needed by beginning and Master level teachers. Data derived from these studies was used to develop policy statements which articulate the minimum knowledge and skills necessary in the area of assessment for these groups of teachers. The data has also been shared with the Knowledge and Skills Subcommittee of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) Professional Standards and Practices Committee which was established by CEC to develop new professional standards for special education.

METHOD

The process of developing and validating the knowledge and skill statements occurred in three phases. The first part of the process involved gathering information in the form of objectives and project guidelines from the assessment courses of colleges and universities preparing special education teachers. Phase 2 required these objectives to be aggregated into a format that would lead to phase 3, which was the validation study.

DEVELOPING THE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL STATEMENTS

Subjects

In order to develop competencies appropriate for validation, a sample of 144 teacher education programs was selected from 1987 edition of The National Directory of Special Education Personnel Preparation Programs (Blackhurst, Doty, Geiger, Lauritzen, Lloyd, & Smith, 1987). Up to three universities from each state which offered the widest range of certification options were selected and sent a survey requesting information about the university and special education programs. In addition, respondents were asked to send syllabi and assignment descriptions from courses that included objectives related to diagnosis and assessment in special education. Sixty-one universities responded (42.3%).

Instrument

An initial list of competency statements was developed by two teacher educators each analyzing the syllabi and course assignment descriptions provided by ten of the responding institutions. All course objectives from the syllabi and class assignments of the remaining 41 institutions were compared to the initial list, then aggregated and refined to produce 128 competency statements. The final list of statements was sequenced to reflect the typical assessment process used in educational evaluations, i.e, referral, diagnosis, assessment for teaching, and monitoring progress.

THE VALIDATION STUDY

In order to validate the list of competency statements, a survey was sent to 250 members of CEDS who were randomly selected from the membership rolls of

approximately 1900 active members. A followup was sent to nonrespondents three weeks after the initial mailing. The response rate was 42%. The respondents identified themselves as educational diagnosticians (35%), school administrators (20%), classroom teachers (14%), teacher educators (14%), school psychologists (13%) and others (9%), including students, state department personnel and retired individuals. Some respondents indicated that they serve in two professional roles.

The survey form contained 71 knowledge statements and 57 skill statements based on the courses requirements of undergraduate and graduate classes in the area of assessment of children in special education. A 4 point Likert Scale was used to rank the importance of each item where 4 indicated high value, i.e., the knowledge or skill is necessary in order to be effective; 3 indicated moderate value where the knowledge or skill is very useful, but not mandatory; 2 indicated minimal value where the knowledge or skill is helpful, but not necessary; and 1 indicated none or no value where that knowledge or skill is simply not needed by the teacher. The subjects were asked to rank each knowledge or skill statement relative to the importance of that competency for beginning teachers. They were also offered opportunities to add areas of knowledge or note specific skills which they felt were necessary and may have been omitted in our survey. The time necessary to complete the survey was approximately 30 minutes. In addition to ranking each knowledge and skill statement, subjects were asked to provide some demographic information about themselves including current position, highest degree earned, years of experience, and area(s) of certification in special education.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

KNOWLEDGE

Of the 71 knowledge items, 45 were rated 3.5 or higher (see table 1). Those items ranked highest included knowledge of basic terminology used in assessment. Respondents felt strongly that master teachers should be expected to be able to accurately communicate using appropriate vocabulary when interpreting or discussing the results of tests with parents and other professionals. Knowledge of professional responsibility and competence including the limits and qualifications necessary for using some types of assessment instruments was also judged very important. The role of the special educator, and of each member of the multidisciplinary team in the assessment process was also evaluated as very important for the master teacher. Some procedures which were also ranked very high by the respondents were the procedures for screening for disabilities, prereferral procedures and activities, and the procedures for making a referral for special education services. One other highly ranked item was knowledge of approaches for direct observation of classroom performance.

There were several items which the respondents felt were not as important as the others including items related to historical perspectives, philosophical positions and models of assessment. These are often included in the opening weeks of a course on individualized assessment, but deemed rather unimportant by those who responded to the survey. Other items ranked as less important for master level teachers included commercial sources of assessment instruments, assessing

TABLE 1

ITEMS RATED 3.5 OR HIGHER FOR MASTER TEACHERS

SURVEY ITEMS	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES AT EACH LEVEL			
			1	2	3	4
KNOWLEDGE						
BASIC TERMINOLOGY USED IN ASSESSMENT	3.84	0.44	0	3	10	87
ASSESSMENT GUIDELINES CONTAINED IN PL 94-142 AND AMENDMENTS	3.78	0.58	2	1	14	83
PL 99-457	3.72	0.62	2	3	17	78
PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY	3.85	0.56	1	1	11	88
GUIDELINES ON PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE	3.83	0.53	2	1	9	88
STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE	3.81	0.54	2	1	12	85
SECURITY OF ASSESSMENT INFORMATION	3.84	0.47	0	4	9	87
PROVISIONS IN BUCKLEY AMENDMENT	3.55	0.84	4	10	13	73
ETHICAL CONCERNS RELATED TO ASSESSMENT	3.79	0.57	1	5	9	86
ROLE OF SPECIAL ED TEACHER IN ASSESSMENT	3.80	0.53	1	3	12	85
ROLES OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAM MEMBERS	3.86	0.40	0	2	11	88
CURRENT ISSUES IN EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION	3.64	0.70	2	7	17	74
TYPICAL SCREENING PROCEDURES	3.82	0.43	0	2	14	84
TYPICAL PREREFERRAL PROCEDURES	3.84	0.39	0	1	14	85
TYPICAL REFERRAL PROCEDURES	3.87	0.36	0	1	11	88
PROCEDURES FOR CLASSIFICATION	3.79	0.57	2	2	12	84
INSTRUMENTS FOR ELEMENTARY	3.58	0.64	1	5	30	64
INSTRUMENTS FOR ADOLESCENTS	3.57	0.64	1	5	30	64
ASSESSING COGNITIVE ABILITY	3.54	0.72	3	5	27	65
ASSESSING GENERAL ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT	3.78	0.48	0	3	16	81
READING ASSESSMENT	3.77	0.49	0	3	18	80
ORAL LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT	3.66	0.60	1	4	23	72
ASSESSING WRITTEN EXPRESSION	3.78	0.49	0	3	18	79
MATHEMATICS ASSESSMENT	3.75	0.50	0	3	19	78
LEARNING STYLE ASSESSMENT	3.65	0.70	3	4	18	75
SOCIAL EMOTIONAL ASSESSMENT	3.65	0.62	2	2	25	71
SOCIAL SKILLS ASSESSMENT	3.65	0.62	2	2	25	71
ADAPTIVE BEHAVIOR ASSESSMENT	3.54	0.68	2	5	30	63
NORM REFERENCED PROCEDURES	3.73	0.56	1	3	18	78
CURRICULM BASED PROCEDURES	3.74	0.54	1	2	19	78
CRITERION REFERENCED PROCEDURES	3.79	0.50	1	1	16	82
USING WORK SAMPLES IN ASSESSMENT	3.72	0.53	1	1	23	75
USING SKILL INVENTORIES IN ASSESSMENT	3.65	0.66	2	4	22	72
APPROACHES FOR USING DIRECT OBSERVATION	3.81	0.50	1	2	12	85
USING ANECDOTAL RECORDS	3.70	0.59	1	4	19	76
USING INTERVIEWS IN ASSESSMENT	3.62	0.73	3	6	17	74
CONDITIONS WHICH INSURE MAXIMUM PERFORMANCE DURING ASSESSMENT	3.77	0.55	0	6	11	83
APPROPRIATE USE AND LIMITATIONS OF EACH TYPE OF ASSESSMENT APPROACH	3.72	0.63	2	4	14	80
CENTRAL PROCESSING REQUIRED FOR VARIOUS ASSESSMENT TOOLS	3.57	0.72	2	8	22	69
INTERPRETATION OF STANDARD SCORES	3.71	0.57	0	6	18	76
IMPACT OF STANDARD ERROR OF MEASUREMENT	3.50	0.71	1	10	28	62
POTENTIAL DANGERS OF CULTURAL BIAS WITH DIVERSE LEARNERS	3.76	0.57	1	4	14	81
DIFFERENTIAL ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES FOR INDIVIDUALS FROM DIVERSE CULTURES	3.58	0.72	2	8	21	71
HOW INFORMAL ASSESSMENT CAN COMPLEMENT FORMAL ASSESSMENT	3.67	0.61	1	5	19	76
METHODS FOR MONITORING STUDENT PROGRESS	3.78	0.56	1	4	12	83

4 indicated high value where the knowledge and skill is necessary in order to be effective; 3 indicated moderate value where the knowledge or skill is very useful, but not mandatory; 2 indicated minimal value where the knowledge or skill is helpful, but not necessary; and 1 indicated none or no value where that knowledge or skill is simply not needed by the teacher

NOTE: Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding

perceptual motor skills, procedures for developing norm referenced tests, and computer scoring. The last item was probably ranked low even for master level teachers because in many school districts the school psychologist does most or all of the scoring.

Comparison to Beginning Teacher Data for Knowledge of Assessment

There was a sharp contrast for the expectations of beginning and master level teachers in the area of assessment. There were only 5 items ranked at 3.5 or higher for beginning teachers, although the items ranked high for beginning teachers were similar to those ranked high for master level teachers. For example, basic terminology used in assessment, competence and professional responsibility, and roles of multidisciplinary team members were among the highest scored items on our survey for beginning teachers and master level teachers. Overall, the differences appear to be in the expectations of when one should acquire this knowledge, not if it should be expected of teachers.

SKILLS

Forty skill items on the survey received a mean rating of 3.5 or above for master teachers (see table 2). These items included gathering background information, administering tests including developing rapport and recording test behavior, using various types of assessment procedures, scoring them, making observations, identifying patterns and discrepancies in assessment data, forming and testing hypotheses, writing and reporting results, using information from other professionals and monitoring instructional outcomes.

The specific skill items receiving the highest mean ratings were the items

TABLE 2
ITEMS RATED 3.5 OR HIGHER FOR MASTER TEACHERS

SURVEY ITEMS	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES AT EACH LEVEL			
			1	2	3	4
SKILLS						
GATHERING BACKGROUND INFORMATION	3.56	0.76	4	5	23	68
IDENTIFYING LEARNERS ABILITY TO MEET TASK DEMANDS OF ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES	3.51	0.81	5	6	23	66
MINIMIZING BIAS	3.52	0.85	6	6	19	69
ADMINISTERING STANDARDIZED READING TESTS	3.79	0.53	1	3	12	84
ADMINISTERING ORAL LANGUAGE TESTS	3.60	0.74	3	6	20	72
ADMINISTERING STANDARDIZED MATHEMATICS TESTS	3.78	0.54	1	3	14	82
ADMINISTERING STANDARDIZED WRITTEN LANGUAGE TESTS	3.79	0.53	1	3	12	84
ASSESSING LEARNING STYLES	3.55	0.80	5	5	21	70
USING NORM REFERENCES PROCEDURES	3.66	0.65	2	4	20	74
USING CURRICULUM BASED PROCEDURES	3.77	0.54	1	3	14	82
USING CRITERION REFERENCED PROCEDURES	3.78	0.54	1	3	14	83
USING WORK SAMPLES IN ASSESSMENT	3.81	0.50	1	2	12	85
UTILIZING OBSERVATIONS	3.84	0.46	1	1	12	86
UTILIZING INTERVIEWS	3.72	0.63	3	1	17	79
USING ECOLOGICAL PROCEDURES	3.52	0.74	3	6	27	64
ESTABLISHING STUDENT/EXAMINER RAPPORT	3.84	0.58	3	1	6	90
OBSERVING AND RECORDING TEST TAKING BEHAVIOR	3.75	0.62	3	1	15	82
SCORING STANDARDIZED TEST PROTOCOLS	3.63	0.82	7	1	15	77
CONVERTING RAW SCORES TO DERIVED SCORES	3.64	0.81	6	3	12	79
COMPLETING A TASK ANALYSIS	3.68	0.71	4	2	16	78
ADMINISTERING INFORMAL TESTS	3.78	0.54	1	3	13	83
SCORING INFORMAL TESTS	3.74	0.58	1	4	16	79
MAKING AND RECORDING ACCURATE OBSERVATIONS OF STUDENT BEHAVIOR	3.89	0.37	0	2	7	91
DESIGNING AND CONDUCTING EFFECTIVE STRUCTURED OBSERVATIONS	3.76	0.62	1	7	8	85
IDENTIFYING PATTERNS OF PERFORMANCE ACROSS PROCEDURES	3.71	0.63	2	4	15	79
IDENTIFYING AND VERIFYING DISCREPANCIES IN STUDENT PERFORMANCE	3.70	0.68	3	4	14	80
PINPOINTING SPECIFIC ACADEMIC SKILLS AND WEAKNESSES	3.86	0.46	1	2	7	90
SYNTHESIZING DATA TO FORM HYPOTHESES	3.71	0.70	4	3	12	82
DETERMINING DATE NEEDED TO TEST HYPOTHESES	3.64	0.75	3	8	12	78
COLLATION AND INTERPRETATION OF ASSESSMENT INFORMATION	3.71	0.68	3	4	12	81
WRITING A COMPREHENSIVE REPORT	3.51	0.88	6	9	14	71
APPROPRIATELY REPORTING ASSESSMENT RESULTS	3.75	0.68	3	5	7	86
COLLABORATING WITH OTHER PROFESSIONALS INVOLVED IN THE ASSESSMENT	3.90	0.35	0	2	6	92
ORGANIZING ASSESSMENT INFORMATION INTO A FUNCTIONAL IEP	3.82	0.49	1	2	11	86
UTILIZING INFORMATION FROM OTHER PROF- SSIONALS TO ADJUST METHODS AND MATERIALS FOR A SPECIFIC STUDENT	3.88	0.48	1	3	4	92
USING ASSESSMENT INFORMATION TO MAKE INSTRUCTIONAL DECISIONS	3.92	0.30	0	1	6	93
CREATING AND MAINTAINING STUDENT RECORDS	3.84	0.44	0	3	10	87
MONITORING STUDENT PROGRESS	3.91	0.35	0	2	5	93
PLANNING AND CARRYING OUT SYSTEMATIC MEASUREMENT OF GENERALIZED OUTCOMES	3.72	0.62	2	3	16	79
EVALUATING THE RESULTS OF INSTRUCTION	3.86	0.49	1	3	5	91

4 indicated high value where the knowledge and skill is necessary in order to be effective; 3 indicated moderate value where the knowledge or skill is very useful, but not mandatory; 2 indicated minimal value where the knowledge or skill is helpful, but not necessary; and 1 indicated none or no value where that knowledge or skill is simply not needed by the teacher

most directly related to planning and monitoring classroom instruction, i.e. using assessment information to make instructional decisions; monitoring student progress; collaborating with other professionals involved in the assessment and using that information to develop a functional IEP and adjust methods and materials. Making and recording accurate observations of student behavior also was considered to be one of the most important skills for a master teacher .

All of the skill items on the survey received a mean ranking of above 3.0, indicating that respondents thought that all these skills would be helpful, if not essential, for those considered master teachers.

Comparison to Beginning Teacher Data for Skills in Assessment

In rating the survey items for beginning special education teachers, only one item rated 3.5 or above. That was monitoring student progress. However, 29 items were rated 3 or above for beginning teachers. Many of these skills are directly related to planning and monitoring classroom instruction, such as skill in the use of test results in order to develop IEP's and adjust instructional methods and materials; skill in pinpointing academic strengths and weaknesses through use of all kinds of assessment methods; administering informal tests; skill in using several informal assessment techniques such as observations and interviews; making and recording accurate observations of student behavior. Several items related to interactions with adults were seen as important for beginning teachers. These included collaborating with other professionals and parents in order to use their assessment information to make and monitor instructional decisions and also skills in reporting assessment results to those individuals.

COMPARISONS BETWEEN RESPONDENT GROUPS ON KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

In order to see if there were any differences in the ratings of the items by groups, the data were analyzed using chi square. For the master teacher data, there were very few differences between respondent groups. There were significant differences in responses on only three out of the 128 items. These differences were in knowledge statements. One could expect some group response differences by chance, so three differences from all of these items is not significant. The results then indicate a high degree of consensus among all respondents. There was no pattern to these three significant differences, i.e. one group of respondents did not rate the three knowledge items as more important than another group. Teacher educators and school administrators indicated that knowledge of the current issues in special education directly related to educational evaluation on the part of the master teacher was slightly more important than diagnosticians or those in the "other" category thought it to be. School administrators and school psychologists indicated that knowledge of assessment procedures for learning style was slightly more important than teacher educators and classroom teachers thought it to be. And for the last item yielding a significant chi square, classroom teachers and "other" ranked knowledge of the appropriate use of each type of assessment and the limitations of each type, slightly higher than educational diagnosticians and school psychologists.

POSITION STATEMENT

This data from the survey has been used to develop the position paper of the Council for Educational Diagnostic Services on Knowledge and Skills for Master Teachers. This position paper was approved by the membership of CEDS at the Council for Exceptional Children Conference in April, 1993. The text of the position paper follows.

The Council for Educational Diagnostic Services (CEDS) is committed to increasing knowledge and skills in the area of diagnosis and assessment for all professionals serving children with disabilities. As a leader in promoting professional standards for practitioners who engage in assessment and instructional services for children with disabilities, the CEDS division offers the following competencies as a guide for those who train and supervise teachers. Based on a nationwide survey of the CEDS membership, these knowledges and skills are viewed as essential for master teachers of children with any exceptionality.

1. KNOWLEDGE OF BASIC TERMINOLOGY. Effective communication with parents and other professionals involved in the educational process is based on knowledge of the terms and concepts used in assessment. Fundamental terms and concepts related to assessment should be part of the knowledge base of all master teachers.

2. KNOWLEDGE OF LEGAL ISSUES AND PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS. Master teachers need to be well versed in assessment guidelines contained in federal law. A clear understanding of federal and state guidelines that govern the security and proper handling of confidential records and assessment information is

essential. Master teachers also should be aware of ethical and professional responsibility and standards, and keep abreast of current issues in assessment.

3. KNOWLEDGE OF THE MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO DECISION MAKING. Professional participation in a multidisciplinary process of evaluation, placement, and program development is a requirement for all educators. Understanding the role of assessment within that process and of the role of other professionals, including a basic knowledge of the instruments and procedures used by other professionals to assess cognitive and language functioning, is crucial to the success of the multidisciplinary approach to decision making. CEDS believes it is vitally important that master teachers understand that the validity of any decision made within a multidisciplinary process is based on each member performing assigned tasks with competence, professional responsibility, and integrity.

4. KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS IN USING PROPER PROCEDURES. Master teachers should be aware of the procedures needed for referral and assessment, as well as classification of students. They should be able to use these procedures appropriately to provide services to children with disabilities.

5. KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS IN THE SELECTION AND USE OF ASSESSMENT TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES. Master teachers should be knowledgeable regarding differential procedures for preschool, elementary and secondary aged students. They should be able to determine the appropriate use and limitations of each type of assessment approach. They should also be able to determine the central processing requirements of various instruments and be able to select appropriate instruments to answer assessment questions. Using

assessment information to develop hypotheses regarding the student and select procedures to test those hypotheses is an essential skill for master teachers. They should be able to appropriately select and use rating scales and questionnaires, interviews, direct observations, tests (norm referenced and curriculum based), work samples, anecdotal records, and clinical judgement.

6. KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS IN SPECIFIC AREAS OF ASSESSMENT. Master teachers should be knowledgeable and skilled in assessing general achievement in the academic subject areas. Assessment skills in the foundation subjects of reading, oral language, written expression, and arithmetic are essential. Skill in assessing students' learning style is also needed for instructional planning.

7. SKILLS IN ESTABLISHING POSITIVE PERSONAL RELATIONS. The ability to establish good student/examiner rapport is viewed as especially important for effective and valid classroom assessment. The master teacher also should be able to collaborate with other professionals to ensure appropriate placement and services for students.

8. SKILLS IN INTERPRETING AND USING ASSESSMENT RESULTS. The master teacher should be able to organize assessment information into an appropriate IEP and use information gathered by all team members to adjust methods and material for specific students. The teacher must also be able to create and maintain accurate students records and gather assessment data to monitor and evaluate the results of instruction in order to plan necessary program modifications.

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