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RCTP

Evaluating Outcomes
in Consultation

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EVALUATING OUTCOMES IN CONSULTATION

Jan Hasbrouck

Consultation for mildly handicapped and low-performing students covers three broad areas of concern: social behaviors, academic performance, and physical/motor concerns (Salvia & Ysseldyke, 1985). Two other areas also can be defined. A subcategory of both the social and academic categories is work habits/study skills. These are the behaviors that *enable* students to function successfully in social and academic contexts in schools. Another area applicable only to students who are entering schools at the kindergarten or first grade levels is readiness.

FIVE AREAS OF TEACHER CONCERN

Social Behaviors

Some students are referred for special services because their school behavior is judged inappropriate (McLoughlin & Lewis, 1986). They might be disruptive, disobedient, unresponsive, aggressive, destructive, or violent. They may be having difficulty maintaining satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and adults, or they may appear to be generally unhappy or depressed. These students may be having difficulty in one or more academic areas as well. The role of the consultant in dealing with these students typically is to use a combination of direct observations and interviews, sometimes including the use of adaptive behavior scales to provide information to the teacher and assist in developing a plan for managing and improving the students' behaviors.

Academic Performance

If a teacher believes that a student is having difficulty in an academic area (reading [decoding and/or comprehension], math, spelling, handwriting, writing/composition) to such a degree that special services are required, a consultant's services sometimes are requested. The consultant can make use of

appropriate assessment instruments to provide information about the student's test performance in that skill area. However, the consultant also must do more than administer tests. He or she also should gather information about the student's instructional environment(s), current performance in daily work and past academic history. All this information can be used to determine how to best provide for the student's academic success.

Physical and Motor Concerns

A teacher's concern about a student may come under the category of physical/motor concerns. Student motor development generally is assessed by adaptive physical education teachers, physical therapists, and occupational therapists. The adaptive P.E. teacher provides information about students' motor abilities. Physical therapists primarily are concerned with gross motor development, whereas occupational therapists work with fine motor development (McLoughlin & Lewis, 1986).

Speech-language clinicians and audiologists are responsible for evaluating communication skills, including expressive and receptive language capabilities and visual and auditory acuity (Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 1982).

All students should be screened for possible vision and hearing impairments. Of particular interest to the teacher and consultant is how vision and hearing problems affect the classroom performance and assessment performance of a referred student. This would be considered during the evaluation and decision for placement proceedings and during planning for any possible intervention.

The consultant's role in referrals from this category consists primarily of referral to the appropriate specialists and will not be considered further in this paper.

Work Habits and Study Skills

Sometimes, teachers request the assistance of a consultant when poor study skills or lack of good work habits prevent students from making academic progress. Students who consistently "forget" to bring books or pencils to class, whose desks are so filled with old papers, broken crayons, overdue library books, incomplete and forgotten assignments that they "cannot find" their current work, who can successfully do their academic assignments only with structured supervision, and who rarely complete work independently need assistance in the

area of work habits/study skills. These skills include following directions, approaching tasks, obtaining assistance, gaining feedback, and gaining reinforcement (Cohen & de Bettencourt, 1983). Pertinent data can be obtained by the consultant through observations, work sample analyses, and student and teacher interviews (McLoughlin & Lewis, 1986).

Readiness

Sometimes kindergarten or first-grade teachers become concerned about students with possible disabilities. Students who are having difficulty attending to the task at hand, whose socialization skills are poor, or who seem confused or frustrated by the classroom activities may need some special assistance. At the early level of a child development, the question facing the consultant is *not* to determine whether or not the child is learning disabled, retarded, or emotionally disturbed but rather, what is the developmental status of this child and what are the child's instructional needs? (McLoughlin & Lewis, 1986). Children come to kindergarten with a great diversity in cognitive development and social maturity. They differ tremendously in their readiness to learn certain skills and in their ability to attend to and follow directions (Shepard & Smith, 1986). A consultant can provide a service to the classroom teacher by collecting information through direct observations of students, interviewing parents and others who have contact with the children, and administering developmental screening tests.

These five categories cover the general areas of concern for which teachers refer students for special services and for which a consultant would be requested to provide services. The effect of consultation can be evaluated in part by changes or outcomes of these variables.

GATHERING DATA AND INFORMATION

When a classroom teacher has a concern about a student, a consultant can be contacted to (a) verify the existence of a problem, (b) specify the nature of the problem, and/or (c) develop strategies that may assist in solving the problem (Salvia & Ysseldyke, 1985). A consultant uses a variety of procedures to gather data and information in all three steps. These procedures consist of direct observations, interviews, analysis of student work samples, analysis of archival information, and formal and informal testing.

Direct Observations

Observation of pupil behavior in classrooms and other school settings makes it possible to document the specific nature of referral problems. It is one important way to verify the existence of a problem or problems (Salvia & Ysseldyke, 1985). Direct observation is a versatile assessment technique that can be used to study any type of student behavior in any setting (McLoughlin & Lewis, 1986). In the assessment of school behavior problems, data are gathered about the frequency and/or duration of specific student behaviors within the relevant school environment (during the reading group in the classroom, on the playground, in the lunchroom, etc.) and within specific activity structures. Measuring the behaviors of the other students in the same environment with the referred student often provides valuable information for the teacher and consultant.

The first step in planning an observation is to describe the behavior to be observed clearly and precisely. Next, a measurement system must be selected. Counting the number of times the behavior occurs (frequency), measuring the duration of the behavior, and/or using an interval time-sampling recording of the behavior are different ways behaviors can be measured. A data collection system must be developed: Who will collect the data, when and where will the observations occur, how many observations will take place, and how will data be recorded? The results of observations usually are graphed and then the results are interpreted. Data are evaluated to determine whether or not a behavior problem exists to make certain intervention is needed, and to guide thinking on what form the intervention might take.

Interviews

Interviews gather information not otherwise easily available through other means. When children are too young or unable to respond themselves, interviewing people familiar with the student can be vital for gathering information. Parents may be interviewed about their child's developmental, academic, and social history. Teachers' observations and other professionals' judgments also can be useful. At times, the referred students should be interviewed. At other times, peers can be a valuable source of information.

Interviews can be highly structured or unstructured. Structured interviews may involve using adaptive behavior scales, developmental inventories, and clinical interviews. Clinical observations or interviews are designed to identify the strategies the student uses when attempting to perform a task and focus on the *process* the student follows in completing a task. Checklists and rating scales also can be included in this category.

The results obtained from unstructured interviews are descriptive data and must be interpreted by the interviewer with the understanding that poor memory of past events, inadequate interpretation of current observations, poor judgment, and a lack of accuracy and veracity can result in poor information.

Analysis of Student Work Samples

The analysis of students' work samples (also called "permanent product analysis" or "outcome recording" from McLoughlin & Lewis, 1986, p. 9). is used to study the correct and incorrect responses made in students' work on regular class assignments. Work samples can be taken in any subject and for any student. The results of the analysis are the number, types, and patterns of frequently made errors and successes. Because of the clear connection to the curriculum, the potential usefulness of the data is high. Work sample analysis most often is used to assess academic skills, but it can be applied to any area in which a product results. The consultant can use the information to establish goals and identify ways to modify instruction. (Alberto & Troutman, 1982; Cooper, 1981)

Analysis of Archival Information

In addition to *current* information obtained through observation, interviews, and student work samples, the retrieval and analysis of archival information can provide important *historical* information. This kind of information is obtained from students' permanent files and from interviews with parents, former teachers, etc. It includes such information as scores from previously administered tests, grades, any previous referrals and special program placement. However, Salvia and Ysseldyke (1985) point out that historical information has four limitations: (a) No control exists over what information was collected in the past, making it possible that crucial bits of information may never have been collected, (b) past information is difficult and sometimes

impossible to verify, (c) the conditions under which the information was collected are often difficult to evaluate, and (d) remembered observations may not be as reliable as current observations.

Formal and Informal Testing

Many types of tests, both formal and informal, are available for use in making assessment decisions. These include norm-referenced and criterion-referenced tests, both published and teacher-made. The selection of a test is a critical decision to make. Practical decisions (Does the test measure the skill you are interested in? Can it be administered in the time and setting available?) and technical decisions (Is the test reliable and valid?) must be considered. Test administration also must be considered (Is special training necessary? Are all the necessary components of the test available?) Consideration also should be given to scoring (by hand or machine) and interpretation of tests.

PROCEDURES AND INSTRUMENTS TO USE IN EVALUATING OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION

Social Behaviors

Possible Assessment Questions

- ◆ *What is the student's past & current behavior in particular school settings within particular activities?*
- ◆ *What are the characteristics of the classroom learning environment and other environments?*
- ◆ *How is the student's self-concept?*
- ◆ *What is the student's relationship with peers and teachers?*
- ◆ *What are the student's current interests and attitudes toward school and learning?*
- ◆ *What is happening in the student's home?*
- ◆ *Is the school performance problem related to a handicapping condition?*

Gathering Information

Direct observations. Observations to determine the student's behavior in all relevant environments and the characteristics of those environments:

- ✧ *What are the rules for behavior?*
- ✧ *Are they clearly communicated to students and consistently enforced?*
- ✧ *What are the strategies for rewarding appropriate behavior and standard disciplinary techniques?*

Instruments for direct observations include the following: continuous or narrative recordings; event recordings; duration recordings; time-sample recordings (whole interval; partial interval; momentary time sampling) within activity structure, as appropriate.

Interviews. Teachers, other school staff, student, peers, parents, and others as appropriate.

Instruments for interviews include the following: *Behavior Rating Profile (BRP)* (Gr. 1-12); *Walker Problem Behavior Identification Checklist* (Preschool-Gr.6); *Conners' Teacher Rating Scale*; *Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale* (Gr. 4-12). *Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventories* (Gr. 4-8); *Estes Attitude Scales* (Gr.3-12).

Analysis of Student Work Samples. Where relevant.

Analysis of Archival Information. Any previous referrals for behavior problems and resultant placements, interventions, etc. Success or failure of each. Discipline and attendance records. Observations of former teachers.

Formal/Informal Testing. Can be used to gather norm-referenced comparative data in some cases.

Instruments for testing include the following: *Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery* (3-80 yrs.) Measures cognitive ability and specific scholastic aptitudes, academic achievement, scholastic and nonscholastic interests.

Academic Performance

Possible Assessment Questions

- ✧ *What is the student's current level of performance and achievement?*
- ✧ *What are the student's specific strengths and weaknesses in the skill?*
- ✧ *What has the student's past performance been in this academic area?*
- ✧ *How is he/she doing in related academic areas?*

Gathering Information

Direct Observations. Work environment analysis.

Instruments for direct observation of academic performance problems include the following: Continuous or narrative recordings; event recordings; duration recordings; time-sample recordings (whole interval; partial interval; momentary time sampling) within activity structures. As appropriate.

Interviews. Teachers, other school staff, student, peers, parents, others as appropriate.

Instruments for interviews include the following: Informal and teacher-made.

Analysis of Student Work Samples. Where relevant. Examine written products in the area(s) of concern, i.e. worksheets, quizzes, writing samples, probes, etc.

Analysis of Archival Information. Any previous referrals for related academic problems and resultant placements, interventions, etc. Success or failure of each. Attendance records. Observations of former teachers.

Gathering Information for Reading

Formal/Informal Testing. Can be used to gather criterion and norm-referenced comparative data for screening and placement decisions, instructional planning and progress monitoring.

Instruments for testing include the following: Diagnostic teaching, IRI from basal; *Monterey* data system (or other data keeping system); *Mann-Suiter* or *Sucher-Allred Reading Placement Inventory* (any age; up to 10th-grade reading skills); *Classroom Reading Inventory* (Silveroli) (PP to 8th-grade reading skills); *Roswell-Chall Phonics Test*; *Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test* (Gr. 1-12 and

college); *Woodcock Reading Mastery Test* (Gr. 1-12). Many other reading tests are available (see p. 252-253 McLoughlin & Lewis, 1986).

Gathering Information for Math

Formal/Informal Testing. Can be used to gather criterion and norm-referenced comparative data for screening and placement decisions, instructional planning and progress monitoring.

Instruments for testing include the following: Curriculum checklists; informal inventories or probes; error analysis to find error patterns; *KeyMath Diagnostic Arithmetic Test* (any age; up to 9th-grade level math skills); *Stanford Diagnostic Mathematics Test* (Gr. 1-12); *Test of Mathematical Abilities (TOMA)* (Gr. 3-12); *Diagnostic Mathematics Inventory* (Gr. 1.5 -8.5). Many other math tests are available (see p. 291 McLoughlin & Lewis, 1986).

Gathering Information for Spelling

Formal/Informal Testing. Can be used to gather criterion and norm-referenced comparative data for screening and placement decisions, instructional planning and progress monitoring.

Instruments for testing include the following: Work sample analysis; informal inventories; *Test of Written Spelling (TWS)* (Gr. 1-8); *Diagnostic Spelling Test* (Gr. 2-6); *Diagnostic Achievement Test in Spelling* (Gr. 2-10). Some other spelling tests are available (see p. 323 McLoughlin & Lewis, 1986).

Gathering Information for Written Expression

Formal/Informal Testing. Can be used to gather criterion and norm-referenced comparative data for screening and placement decisions, instructional planning and progress monitoring.

Instruments include the following: writing sample analysis (using the *Diagnostic Evaluation of Writing Skill (DEWS)*), expressive writing rating scale in *Teaching the Mildly Handicapped in the Regular Classroom* (Affleck, Lowenbraun, Archer, 1980), T-unit analysis, sentence analysis, vocabulary

analysis, Correct Word Sequences), fluency measures, or holistic measures. The *Test of Written Language* (Ages 7 to 18-11), *Picture Story Language Test* (Ages 7-17).

Gathering Information for Handwriting

Formal/Informal Testing. Can be used to gather criterion and norm-referenced comparative data for screening and placement decisions, instructional planning and progress monitoring.

Instruments include the following: Rating scales (using the *Zaner-Bloser Evaluation Scales* (Gr. 1-8), informal checklists, error analysis to find error patterns, and informal inventories.

Work Habits/ Study Skills

Possible Assessment Questions

- ◆ *What is the student's current functioning level in strategies for learning?*
- ◆ *What are the student's work habits?*
- ◆ *What is the student's functioning level of study skills?*

Direct Observations. Observations of student's work habits within the context of the classroom and studying environments.

Instruments include the following: frequency and duration counts.

Interviews. Teachers, other school staff, student, peers, parents, others as appropriate; clinical observation/interview with student.

Analysis of Student Work Samples. Analysis of all relevant work; analysis of notebook/binder/locker/desk for information on organization skills, etc.

Analysis of Archival Information. Any previous referrals for related problems and resultant placements, interventions, etc. Success or failure of each. Attendance records. Observations of former teachers.

Formal/Informal Testing. Instruments include the following: no formal assessment tool available for elementary level; *The Study Skills Counseling*

Evaluation (SSCE) for high school students. Could be used as an informal screener at any level.

Readiness

Possible Assessment Questions

- ✧ *What is the student's developmental status or school readiness level?*
- ✧ *What are the student's specific strengths and weaknesses?*
- ✧ *What is the most appropriate placement for this student?*

Direct Observations. Observations especially important for this category. Instruments include the following: Continuous or narrative recordings; event recordings; duration recordings; time-sample recordings (whole interval; partial interval; momentary time sampling) within activity structures, as appropriate.

Interviews. Again, especially important for this category of referral. Teachers, other school staff, student, peers, parents, others as appropriate.

Instruments include the following: informal interviews and more formal screening/observation/interviewing tests (see Formal/Informal Testing).

Analysis of Student Work Samples. As appropriate.

Analysis of Archival Information. Use as available.

Formal/Informal Testing. Can be used to gather criterion and norm-referenced comparative data for screening and placement decisions, instructional planning and progress monitoring. For this category, usually a combination of observation, interview and testing procedures.

Instruments include the following:

Developmental assessment: *Denver Developmental Screening Test (DDST)* (ages 2 weeks to 6 years); *Developmental Profile II* (birth to 9 years); *Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales* (birth to 19 years); *Adaptive Behavior Inventory for Children* (age 5 and above); *Denver Prescreening Developmental Questionnaire (PDQ)*; *Bayley Scales of Infant Development (BSID)* (birth to 2 1/2 years); the *McCarthy Scales of Children's Abilities (MSCA)* (ages 2 1/2 to 8 1/2).

Educational Assessment: *Early Learning Accomplishment Profile (E-LAP)* (age birth to 3 years); *Learning Accomplishment Profile-Revised (LAP)* (age 3-6 years); the *Learning Accomplishment Profile-Diagnostic Edition (LAP-D)* (36 to

72 months); *BRIGANCE Diagnostic Inventory of Early Development* (birth to 7 years); *Ordinal Scales of Psychological Development* (birth to 2 years).

School Readiness Assessment: *Metropolitan Readiness Tests* (Level I early and middle kindergarten; Level II late kindergarten and early 1st grade); *BRIGANCE K & 1 Screen for Kindergarten and First Grade* (K-1st grades); the *Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning (DIAL)* (2 1/2 to 5 1/2 years); the *Basic Schools Skills Inventory-Diagnostic (BSSI-D)* (4-0 years to 6-11 years); the *Test of Early Reading Ability (TERA)* (4-0 to 7-11 years); the *Test of Early Mathematics Ability (TEMA)* (4-0 to 8-11 years); *The Boehm Test of Basic Concepts (BTBC)* (Kindergarten to 2nd grade).

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