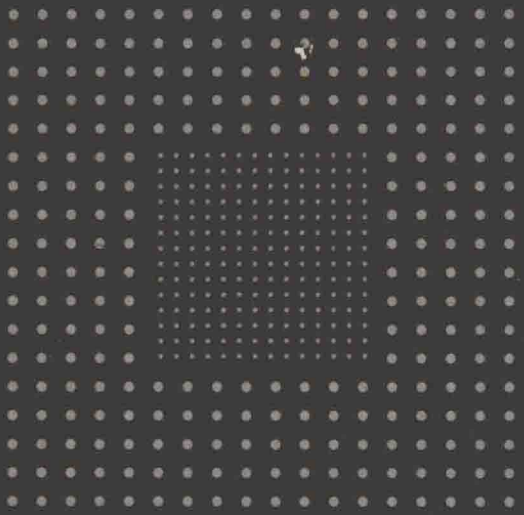
ASSESSMENT in SPECIAL EDUCATION



William H. Berdine

Stacie Anne Meyer

Assessment in Special Education

William H. Berdine
Department of Special Education
University of Kentucky

Stacie Anne Meyer
Teacher, Trainable Mentally Handicapped
Booker T. Washington Elementary School
Lexington, Kentucky

Little, Brown and Company
Boston Toronto

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Berdine, William H.
Assessment in special education.

Bibliography: p.
Includes index.
1. Exceptional children. 2. Ability testing.
3. Exceptional children — Diagnosis. 4. Behavioral
assessment of children. 5. Observation (Educational
method) I. Meyer, Stacie A. II. Title.
LC3969.B47 1987 371.9 86-19996
ISBN 0-316-09141-3

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Library of Congress Catalog Card No. 86-19996

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

ISBN 0-316-09141-3

Published simultaneously in Canada
by Little, Brown & Company (Canada) Limited

Printed in the United States of America

Credits

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pp. 322–24, Excerpts: From A. Harnadek, *Inferences — A: Inductive Thinking Skills* (Troy, MI: Midwest Publications, 1979). Reprinted by permission.

Assessment in Special Education

Preface

The very nature of assessment in special education is changing. At one time, assessment was an isolated event — a formal test administered by specialized personnel. Now it is conceived more broadly — a process in which various formal testing instruments and informal observation techniques are used by classroom teachers as well as by specially trained individuals. This larger view of assessment comes at a time when society as a whole is looking closely at what schools are doing and how well they are performing. One commission set up to analyze instructional issues and effectiveness, the Holmes Group, focused particular attention on educational excellence and teacher training. With this current emphasis on greater accountability and higher training and professional standards, it is critical that teachers be competent in using assessment to plan their programs, carry out effective instruction, and measure outcomes. Moreover, it is evident that teachers will be expected to conduct systematic student assessment across a wide range of abilities and behaviors.

This text examines assessment at each stage of instruction, from initial screening to program evaluation. It covers an array of assessment procedures commonly used in classroom settings with pupils with handicapping conditions. The special education classifications treated include: language impaired, early childhood, social and behavior problems, mildly handicapped, moderately handicapped, trainable mentally handicapped, severely and profoundly handicapped, physically handicapped, and gifted. While considerable variation exists within and between these pupil populations, a common denominator exists: the role of the classroom teacher as the primary assessment and data-collection agent. It is our conviction that the individual teacher must take responsibility not only for gathering information about children's past performance, but also about what is being accomplished during and as a result of the instructional process.

Assessment is examined from a broad perspective. Throughout the text, we describe methods for evaluating many different facets of pupils' performance. Such broadly based assessment is comprehensive, providing information immediately pertinent to classroom programming needs. For example, at various points in the text there are discussions of the impact of the environment on students' performance. These environmental issues vary depending on the purpose of the assessment and students being evaluated. When working with a physically handicapped

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pupil, an evaluation of accessibility (the presence or absence of barriers in the environment) is a critical part of the assessment process. For a behaviorally disordered pupil, it may be important to determine the antecedents for and consequences of certain behaviors.

The twelve chapters comprising this text are divided into four parts. Part I, Foundations of Educational Assessment in Special Education, consists of three chapters. In Chapter 1, we define educational assessment and introduce a five stage model for classroom assessment in special education. Direct observation procedures are discussed in Chapter 2 and the basic principles of measurement are examined in Chapter 3.

Part II, Cross-Categorical Assessment Considerations, is devoted to the assessment of developmental characteristics and behaviors found among children otherwise categorized in one or more traditional special education classification. Chapter 4 discusses the assessment of language problems that may occur in any pupil population and which often result in major instructional challenges. Chapter 5 demonstrates how to establish early assessment data bases for children across any developmental or handicapping condition. Chapter 6 describes methods of assessing specific disturbing behaviors, conduct problems, and socially inappropriate behaviors that are frequently exhibited across all special education classifications.

In Part III, Categorical Assessment Considerations, each of the five chapters considers one of the traditional special education categorical classifications. Beginning with the mild handicapping conditions (including educable mentally handicapped and learning disabilities), we go on to the trainable mentally handicapped learner, the severely/profoundly handicapped pupil, the physically handicapped pupil, and the gifted learner. Within each of these "categorical" chapters, assessment of pupil performance is related to the specific characteristics and needs of learners. Additionally, within each chapter, references are made to the methods and procedures described in Part II.

Part IV is an epilogue for the book, as well as a look to the future. The authors summarize the uses of assessment data in decision making, identify some of the major issues and problems confronting professionals, and examine implications for both summative and formative assessment in special education. Part IV concludes with a description of microcomputer innovations currently used in educational assessment and considers the implications of technology for future applications.

Assessment in Special Education has a number of distinctive features. First, the organization of chapters around the major classification areas reflects current special education practice. Second, the division of the text into cross-categorical and categorical assessment acknowledges that early childhood needs, communicative, and social and behavioral problems must be addressed in each of the traditional special education classifications. Third, application by classroom teachers of the principles and tools of assessment is emphasized throughout. Fourth, each chapter concludes with a series of questions and exercises designed to enhance mastery and application of the contents. Fifth, the contributing authors are specialists and

have much experience using the assessment techniques discussed in their chapters.

This text is the result of the sustained efforts of a large number of people. We, the editors, would like to thank our contributing authors for their cooperation and understanding over the long process of producing the text. We also want to thank colleagues whose reviews were instrumental in developing this book: Cheri Hoy, The University of Georgia; John Junkala, Boston College; Mary F. Landers, Wright State University; James J. McCarthy, University of Wisconsin-Madison; Jeanice Midgett, University of Central Florida; Maurice Miller, Indiana State University; Tom Pace, Appalachian State University; Sue T. Rouse, University of South Carolina; Robert Sheehan, Cleveland State University; Paulette J. Thomas, University of New Orleans; Stanley F. Vasa, The University of Nebraska-Lincoln; and, Edward Welch, State University of New York at Albany.

We wish to extend our gratitude to Marcia Bowling who prepared all of the typed text from first draft through final edition. We also want to acknowledge the work of graduate assistants Mary Balles, Kathy Leslie, Becky Trexel, and Cathy Alig in the preparation of the text through various manuscript forms. We are particularly indebted to our editor, Mylan Jaixen, whose patience and considerable assistance have helped produce this text, and to Ellen Herman, who assisted in coordinating the book.

Contributing Authors

William H. Berdine is an Associate Professor and Coordinator, Teacher Certification Programs in Trainable Mentally Handicapped at the University of Kentucky. He has worked as a teacher of the trainable mentally handicapped in both elementary and junior high school settings. Current areas of involvement and research include secondary programs for persons developmental disabilities and personnel preparation in that area.

Stacie Anne Meyer has taught in the area of Trainable Mentally Handicapped for ten years at the elementary school level. She is currently involved in research and program development with micro-computers applied to the T.M.H. classroom setting.

Donald B. Bailey, Jr. is Director of Early Childhood Research at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Current interests include mainstreaming, families, communication training, and the interdisciplinary team.

Arthur H. Schwartz is an Associate Professor and Director of Speech and Hearing Services at Bradley University. He has taught graduate and undergraduate courses in language development, language disorders, and diagnostic methods. His current areas of interests are the application of microcomputers to assist in the management of language disorders in children and is directing a grant to develop instructional packages on this topic.

Lewis Polsgrove has held positions as a clinical psychologist in a mental hospital and mental health center, and has served as a school psychologist, and counselor for delinquent children. He has also been a liaison counselor and a teacher of emotionally disturbed children at the Central Kentucky Re-Ed schools. He is currently a Professor in the Department of Special Education at Indiana University where he teaches behavior management and strategies for consultation in the schools, and he is the Director of the Center for Innovation in Teaching the Handicapped.

Barbara Tymitz-Wolf is an Associate Professor and Director of the Undergraduate Program for Teachers of the Mildly Handicapped at Indiana University. She has taught classes for the mildly handicapped of all ages in public school and community settings. Current interests include research on effective teaching and the infusion of quality practices in teacher education and public school programs.

Cordelia Robinson is an Associate Professor in Nursing, Special Education and Psychology at the University of Nebraska. Her involvement with severely handicapped students has included graduate instruction in teaching the S/PH pupil and direct service of evaluation, assessment, teaching, program administration, and research.

Susan C. Hupp is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Educational Psychology, Special Education Program, at the University of Minnesota. She coordinates the personnel preparation program in the area of severe handicaps. Current areas of research interest include mastery motivation of young children with moderate and severe handicaps and concept acquisition by handicapped children.

John Venn is Associate Professor in the Department of Special Education and Coordinator of personnel preparation programs in the area of the severely/profoundly handicapped at the University of North Florida. Current areas of interest include diagnostic prescriptive programming and programming for the adult handicapped.

Mary K. Dykes is a Professor of Special Education and School Psychology at the University of Florida. She coordinates the physically/multiply handicapped personnel preparation program. Current interests include appropriate assessment of children whose skills are significantly different than expected for age, integration of medical and therapy professionals and their data into education teams and programs, and education of the gifted handicapped child.

H. Earle Knowlton has been a classroom teacher in regular and special education; he has also served as a clinical diagnostician, an Easter Seals camp counselor, and a parent trainer. His current research interests at the University of Kansas include the transition process and methodological issues regarding the use of qualitative and naturalistic inquiry in special education.

Ann Boyer is a doctoral student and instructor in the Department of Special Education at the University of Kentucky. Current areas of interest include the preparation of teachers in microcomputer applications for special education students and programming and software development for limited English proficient exceptional learners.

Susan L. Rosenthal, Ph.D., currently post-doctoral fellow, Child Study Center, Yale University. Completed doctoral studies at the University of North Carolina School of Psychology/Chapel Hill.

June Maker. Associate Professor, Department of Special Education, University of New Mexico/Tempe.

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