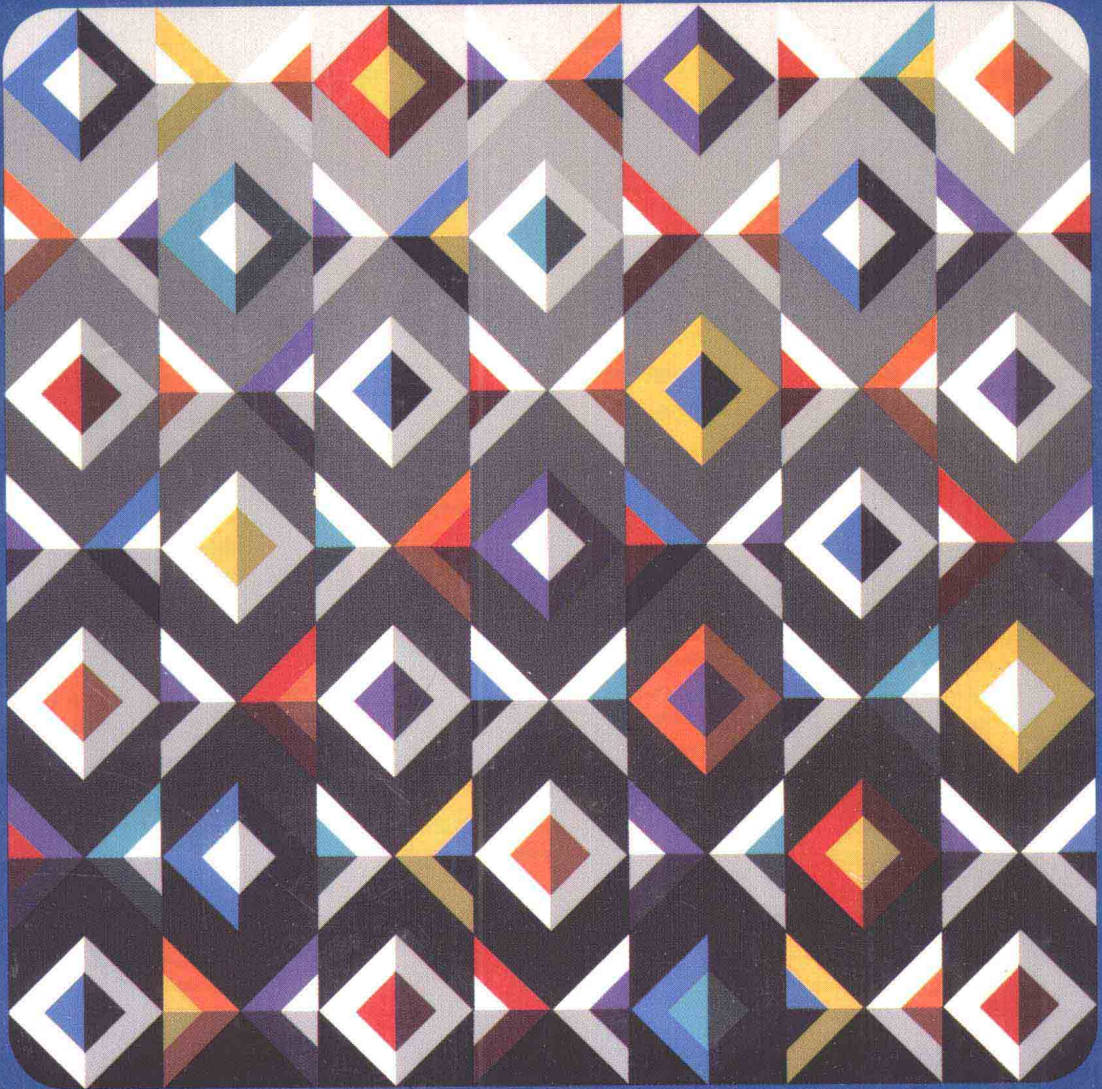


ASSESSMENT IN
SPECIAL EDUCATION

An Applied Approach



Terry Overton

Assessment in Special Education
An Applied Approach



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Assessment in Special Education
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*To
Frankie, for your support
Jake and Kristy, for your patience
Michael J. Wiebe, for your inspiration*

Preface



Special education is laden with ambiguities and inconsistencies in common practice. Although variety and creativity are essential to effective teaching, consistency and preciseness are mandatory in effective assessment. Unfortunately, assessment in special education continues to be plagued with problems that can result in major errors in diagnosis and placement of students. Many of these errors are easily preventable with adequate training in assessment techniques.

The following list is adapted from a list proposed by Eaves (1985) that includes errors in assessment found in the field of special education:

1. Using instruments in the assessment process solely because those instruments are stipulated by school administrators.
2. Regularly using instruments for purposes other than those for which they have been validated.
3. Taking the recommended use at face value.
4. Using the quickest instruments available even though those instruments may not assess desired areas of concern.
5. Using currently "popular" instruments for assessment.
6. Failure of the examiner to establish effective rapport with the examinee.
7. Failure of the examiner to document behaviors of the examinee during assessment which may be of diagnostic value.
8. Failure of the examiner to adhere to standardized administration rules which may include:
 - a. failure to follow starting rules
 - b. failure to follow basal and ceiling rules
 - c. omission of actual incorrect responses on the protocol which could aid in error analysis and diagnosis
 - d. failure to determine actual chronological age or grade placement
9. Various scoring errors following test administration which may include
 - a. simple counting errors
 - b. simple subtraction errors

- c. counting items above the ceiling as correct and/or items below the basal as incorrect
 - d. entering the wrong norm table, row, or column to obtain a derived score
 - e. extensive use of developmental scores when it is inappropriate to do so
 - f. lack of knowledge regarding alternative measures of performance
10. Ineffective interpretation of assessment results for educational program use. (pp. 9–12)

Eaves made two global recommendations for those professionals concerned with psychoeducational assessment: first, individually and as professionals, we begin to bring what is known about good practice to bear in our everyday work, and second, that we work harder to uphold the qualities that mark a genuine profession (pp. 26–27).

This book was written for teachers and other special educators directly involved with assessment of students who have learning and/or behavioral problems. It addresses assessment as a functional part of the special education process. Teachers are required to use assessment and evaluation procedures every day. This book was designed to help educators understand the meaning of information gained through assessment and evaluation and how to use that information for effective teaching. By possessing a true understanding of basic measurement principles, special education law, and good assessment techniques, the special educator can combat common technical and legal errors and help prevent the misdiagnosis that occurs in the field today.

FORMAT OF THIS TEXT

This text combines content and practical activities, called “Check Your Understanding,” that were developed to provide a hands-on, applied approach prior to the actual assessment of students. You will benefit from completing all of the activities as you proceed through each chapter. The exercises at the end of each chapter were designed to help you review the content of the chapter and to provide a foundation for understanding the concepts presented in subsequent chapters. The answers for “Check Your Understanding” activities and the exercises are provided in the Instructor’s Manual. Key terms are listed at the beginning of each chapter; each is defined in a margin note at the appropriate point in the text.

ORGANIZATION AND CONTENT

The 12 chapters in this book are divided into four major parts. The first part, “An Introduction to Assessment,” introduces the assessment process, describes the comprehensive evaluation, and discusses the mandatory assessment regulations set forth in Public Law 94-142.

The second part, “Technical Prerequisites of Understanding Assessment,” addresses the topics of descriptive statistics, reliability and validity, and norm-referenced assessment.

In the third part, “Assessing Students,” various types of assessment instruments are discussed. Chapter 6 describes tests of educational achievement, the Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational tests, the Peabody Individual Achievement Test, and the Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement. Chapter 7 addresses standardized diagnostic tests, including the KeyMath Diagnostic Arithmetic Test, and the Woodcock Reading Mastery Tests—Revised, among others. Various informal assessment techniques are discussed in Chapter 8, including criterion-referenced tests, curriculum-based assessment, and informal assessments in various academic areas. Chapter 9 describes various measures of intelligence and adaptive behavior, including the Wechsler Intelligence Scales, the Woodcock-Johnson Revised Tests of Cognitive Ability, the Stanford-Binet IV, and the System of Multicultural Pluralistic Assessment. The final chapter in this section, Chapter 10, discusses ability tests in the areas of language assessment, sensory-motor and perceptual development, visual perception, and auditory assessment.

The fourth part, “Interpreting Assessment for Educational Intervention,” discusses interpreting test results for eligibility decisions, writing test results, and using test results to write educational objectives. A case study is also included. The last chapter contains five partially completed case studies; you are asked to use the information you have gained from reading the text and completing the activities throughout the chapters to complete each case study.

In an effort to encourage professional test administration procedures, some of the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* (American Psychological Association, 1985), particularly those which concern testing in special education, are presented at specific points throughout the text. Yoshida and Friedman (1986) believe that it is imperative that institutions training professionals in assessment require expertise of those professionals in the skills contained in the *Standards* for the best practice in testing students with handicapping conditions.

The Joint Committee on Testing Practices (1988) developed a *Code of Fair Testing Practices in Education*. This code presents standards for educational test users and developers in four areas: (a) developing and selecting tests, (b) interpreting scores, (c) striving for fairness, and (d) informing test takers. The *Code of Fair Testing Practices in Education* is included in its entirety in the appendix.

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Part One
An Introduction to Assessment



Chapter One
An Introduction

Chapter Two
Law and Issues

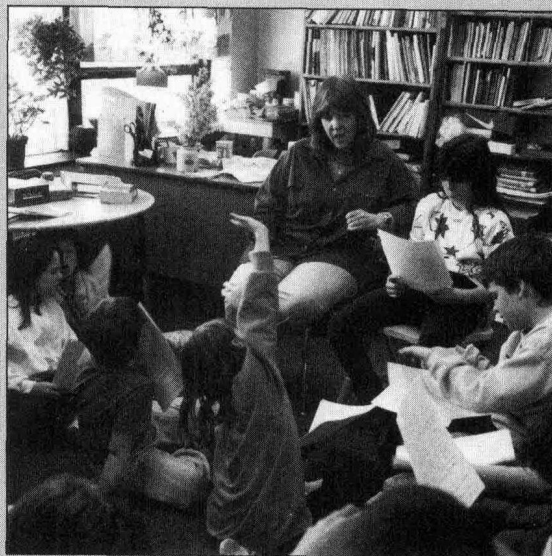


Chapter One

An Introduction

Key Terms

testing
assessment
continuous assessment
curriculum-based
assessment
criterion-related assessment
criterion-referenced tests
error analysis
checklist
informal assessment
multidisciplinary team
prereferral intervention
strategies
overidentification
individualized educational
program (IEP)
ecological assessment
screening
individual assessment plan
*Standards for Educational
and Psychological
Testing* (American
Psychological
Association)
norm-referenced tests
standardized tests
eligibility meeting
alternative planning



ASSESSMENT: A NECESSARY PART OF TEACHING

Teachers must test. **Testing** is one method of evaluating progress and determining individual student needs. Testing, however, is only one form of assessment. **Assessment** has been defined as the collection of information to identify problems and make educational decisions (Salvia & Ysseldyke, 1988).

Assessment happens every day in every classroom. A teacher observes the behaviors of a student solving math problems. The teacher then checks the student's answers and determines the student's ability to solve the particular type of math problems. If the student made mistakes, the teacher determines the types of errors and decides what steps must be taken to correct the miscalculations. This is one type of assessment. The teacher observed behavior, gathered information about the student, and made program or instructional changes according to the information obtained.

Assessment in special education is based on the same principles as assessment in the regular classroom. In many cases, the assessment is the same. Behavior is observed, progress is evaluated, and a program is planned. The best assessment practices, however, must adhere to legal mandates and basic principles of measurement. The special educator has a professional responsibility to be accountable for understanding all assessment practices. Therefore, a knowledge of various types of assessment and when to use each type is necessary.

ASSESSMENT: A CONTINUOUS PROCESS

Assessment begins in the classroom. The effective teacher monitors students' progress continuously; in other words, the teacher uses **continuous assessment**. When a student fails to progress as expected, the teacher may use several methods in an attempt to discover why progress has not been made as expected. The teacher may develop assessment measures directly from curriculum materials. This type of assessment is **curriculum-based assessment**. Curriculum-based assessment is common and also may be used to measure

testing A method to determine a student's ability to complete certain tasks or demonstrate mastery of a skill or knowledge of content

assessment The process of gathering information to monitor progress and make educational decisions if necessary

continuous assessment The continuous monitoring of student progress

curriculum-based assessment Using the content from the currently used curriculum to assess student progress