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ABSTRACT

Recent federal and state legislation and litigation has changed the information needs for special education pupil planning by implementing multi-sourced evaluation and inter-disciplinary planning teams. These changes have resulted in an increase in the range of information which must be collected for making placement and programing decisions as well as an increase in the number of school personnel who must review the data. Central questions of the present study were: (1) what types of information were judged helpful, and (2) to what extent was information distributed to planning team members? Results indicated that systematic differences occur in the extent to which information types are rated helpful in making programing decisions, and appraisal personnel have more information types available than instructional or administrative planning team members. Implications of these results for future research into the information needs of pupil planning teams are discussed. (Author/MV)

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Availability and Helpfulness of
Appraisal Information for Making Special Education Program Decisions

by

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ABSTRACT

Recent federal and state legislation and litigation has changed the information needs for special education pupil planning by implementing multi-sourced evaluation and inter-disciplinary planning teams. These changes have resulted in an increase in the range of information which must be collected for making placement and programming decisions as well as an increase in the number of school personnel who must review the data. The central questions of the present study were: what types of information were judged helpful and to what extent was information distributed to planning team members. The results indicated that: a) systematic differences occur in the extent to which information types are rated helpful in making programming decisions and b) appraisal personnel have more information types available than instructional or administrative PT members. Implications of these results for future research into the information needs of pupil planning teams are discussed.

Availability and Helpfulness of Appraisal Information
for Making Special Education Programming Decisions¹

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Recent developments in litigation and legislation, both at the state and federal level, have resulted in considerable change in the pupil planning process for determining the eligibility and programming for handicapped learners.

The pupil planning process for handicapped students begins when a learner is perceived to have some academic and/or behavioral problem in the classroom (Mercer, 1973). It includes, if appropriate, his referral to appraisal personnel for evaluation, the determination of handicapped status and educational program and concludes with the student receiving an educational program either in the regular or special class, graduating, dropping-out or being excluded from school. This paper focuses on the collection of appraisal information and its evaluation by a committee of professionals which determines the placement and develops the special education program.

One area of change in determining the eligibility of children for special education services has been the specification that multiple criteria must be used. This change arises from litigation which has questioned the use of the

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intelligence test as the prime determinant for placement into educable mentally retarded (EMR) classes (Larry P. v. Riles; Diana v. State Board of Education). Standardized intelligence tests were said to be culturally biased and inappropriate because of language presentation for black and Spanish-surname students. The courts concluded that multiple criteria were necessary to insure appropriate placements. Also, state and federal legislation (e.g., P.L. 94-142, Education for All Handicapped Act of 1975), reinforced these changes by mandating that for planning and programming decisions multiple criteria must be used, such as adaptive behavior in the community in addition to an intelligence test. The legislation assumes that multi-sourced evaluation increases the probability of accurate appraisal and appropriate programming for referred students. Thus, assessment of children for eligibility and placement into special education services requires an expanded data base.

Another change is the shift from a single individual or gate keeper, usually the school psychologist, to group decision making by inter-disciplinary planning teams (PT) which decide special education eligibility and placements. The PT is now typically composed of an administrator, the school psychologist or other appraisal person, support staff members such as the school nurse or social worker and a special and/or regular education teacher. It is assumed that each PT member brings a different perspective and information base to the meeting which may affect PT decisions (Barsch, 1968; Gunderson, 1971). The major purposes of the PT are to have its members verify the accuracy of the information presented and to carefully examine placement and programming alternatives proposed during the PT meeting.

These changes have resulted in an increase in the range of information which must be collected for making placement and programming decisions as well as an increase in the number of school personnel who must review the data. The

cost of such data collection and dissemination efforts are significant. Before investing resources in wide data collection efforts, the value of different types of information for pupil planning purposes should be assessed.

Given the different types of handicapped children and the school staff who compose the PT, the probabilities are great that certain kinds of information will be valued differently. First, a student may be considered sensorially, cognitively and/or emotionally handicapped. It is likely that these attributions may result in a need for different types of information. For example, IQ and adaptive behavior may be important for determining eligibility for an EMR student whereas adaptive behavior and emotional inventories may be judged more appropriate for programming emotionally disturbed students. Second, PT members perform different roles in the school and thus may have developed distinctive perspectives in viewing children. Ashurst and Meyers (1973) found that regular education teachers were more concerned about a student's achievement whereas the school psychologist focused on clinical diagnosis. In short certain types of information may be valued differently depending on the classification of the student and the staff position of the PT member.

The present study sought to identify and compare the information sources which PT members from Connecticut elementary and secondary schools judged helpful, or indicated that they would have been helpful, in making programming decisions for recently placed learning disabled, socially and emotionally maladjusted and educable mentally retarded students. The present design provided comparisons to be made among types of PT members. In addition, the availability of these information sources was determined.

METHOD

Subjects and Sampling Design

All senior (n=165) and junior (n=136) high schools and a random sample of one-third of the elementary schools (n=121) in Connecticut public schools were the initial pool selected to participate in the study. It was then determined whether each school used a building PT which had determined initial special class eligibility and program for an educable mentally retarded (EMR), learning disabled (LD), or socially and emotionally maladjusted (S&E) student during September, 1975 to January, 1976. More than one-half of the schools (53.6%, senior high; 57.0%, junior high; 52.9%, elementary) agreed to participate and had PTs which had placed these types of students. From each school's list of placed handicapped students, one student was randomly selected. The members of each student's PT were identified. A questionnaire was mailed to 1,536 school personnel from 230 PTs of which 1,474 responded, representing a return rate of 96.2%. The staff role or the eligibility category of the child reviewed by the PT member was not determined for 46 subjects; however, they are included in the analyses when appropriate. The final sample consisted of 1,428 subjects; their characteristics are given below:

School Psychologist (n=155) -- State credentialed school psychologist or psychometrist; School Social Worker (n=128); School Counselor (n=203); Central Administration Personnel (n=60) -- Directors, Coordinators, Supervisors of Pupil Personnel and/or Special Education who are responsible for district-wide special education programs; Principal (n=231) -- Principal, Assistant Principal or other school building administrator such as a dean; Speech and Hearing Clinician (n=48); Medical Personnel (n=73) -- Licensed medical doctors or school nurses; Reading Consultant

(n=69) -- Teachers or program heads of Title I projects or special reading teachers; Special Education Teacher (n=245) -- Teacher of the handicapped in a self-contained, resource or itinerant capacity; Regular Education Teacher (n=216) -- Elementary or secondary teacher and department head from grades K-12.

Instrument

The respondents were told that they were participating in a statewide needs assessment survey. None of the subjects were aware of how the data would be analyzed. They were assured that their responses would remain confidential.²

The survey instrument consisted of two sections: a) questions about specific events occurring in the pupil planning process of the handicapped students who were used to identify each PT for the study, and b) items about the respondent's general experience and evaluation of the pupil planning process. This study used only items from the first part which focused on the judged helpfulness and availability of various information sources which a PT may use in determining the educational programming for a special education student. For each information source, the committee member marked whether the information was available to him and whether that information was or would have been helpful.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed by two basic procedures. First, the percentage of helpfulness was ranked within each eligibility category (LD, S&E and EMR). A rank of 1 was assigned to the source having the highest number of mentions

²Detailed description of the sample and mailing procedures for the questionnaire will be sent on request.

in that group, a rank of 2 was given to the source with the next highest frequency and so forth. Spearman rank-order correlations for tied ranks were calculated between pairs of eligibility categories (Siegel, 1956).

The helpfulness and availability variables were analyzed separately with a 3 X 10 multiple analysis of variance involving three levels of the eligibility category of the students (LD, S&E vs. EMR), ten levels of staff member roles (School Psychologist, School Social Worker, School Counselor, Central Administration Personnel, Principal, Speech and Hearing Clinician, Medical Personnel, Reading Consultant, Special Education Teacher vs. Regular Education Teacher) with the twenty information sources as variables in the model. The data were processed by the MANOVA computer program developed by the SAS Institute (Barr, Goodnight, Sall, & Helwig, 1976). An alpha level $p < .05$ was adopted to test the significance of each statistical hypothesis. The MANOVA detects whether systematic differences occur for the twenty information variables by eligibility category, role and the interaction of the two independent factors. In order to determine which information sources contributed to the rejection of the multivariate hypothesis, univariate 3 X 10 analyses of variance were computed on each information source. Scheffe post-hoc comparisons were calculated on significant univariate F ratios with an alpha level ($p < .05$).

RESULTS

Judged Helpfulness

Table 1 presents the percentage of each information source judged helpful by PT members for the three eligibility categories as well as their subsequent ranking within categories. The rankings of the information sources for the LD and EMR categories were significantly correlated ($r_s = .80$, $p < .01$). However, the correlations between the S&E category and LD ($r_s = .26$) and EMR ($r_s = .41$) were

not significant. Examination of discrepancies in rank order of four or more ranks among the three groups was conducted. In the S&E category, affective and behavioral measures such as emotional inventories, behavior in different social environments, classroom observation and attitude scales were ranked higher than for either the EMR or LD groups. The LD group was assigned higher rankings than the S&E and EMR groups for educational diagnosis and perceptual tests and higher than S&E only for referring teacher's evaluation of previous instructional methods and speech and language screening. The S&E group ranked lower than either the LD or EMR categories on referring teacher's evaluation of previous instructional methods. Thus, large discrepancies were found in the judged helpfulness of information sources among the three categories; the Spearman correlations indicated that the rank order of perceived helpfulness of information sources was similar for LD and EMR but different for S&E.

The main effect of Eligibility Category for the multivariate analysis of variance was significant for helpfulness ($p < .0001$) and are consistent with the above results. Inspection of the univariate F-tests indicated that eligibility category was significant for percent helpful on ten sources at $p < .001$ for educational diagnosis, academic diagnostic tests, emotional inventories, referring teacher's evaluation of previous instructional methods, perceptual tests, behavior in different social environments, speech and language screening, attitude scales, hobbies and interest and vocational interest, at $p < .01$ for achievement tests and $p < .05$ for autobiographical data. Given almost identical mean square error estimates for the above twelve sources, pairwise differences between LD-S&E, LD-EMR and S&E-EMR greater than 6.5, 12.0 and 12.4 respectively were significant ($p < .05$). In general, the significant pair-wise differences were similar to those identified by determining the discrepancy in ranks among the eligibility categories.

The main effect of Role for the multivariate analysis of variance was significant ($p < .0001$). Univariate analyses indicated that role was statistically significant for seven sources: intelligence test, achievement test, perceptual test, speech and language test, medical factors, classroom observation and parental programming preferences. For significant pair-wise comparisons, the school psychologist in general judged the intelligence, achievement and perceptual tests and the medical factors as more helpful than other staff members as presented in Table 2. The school counselor more often rated the achievement test as helpful; the speech and hearing clinicians rated the speech and language test results as helpful more often than seven other staff members. The multivariate Eligibility Category X Role effect was not significant.

Reported Availability

The multivariate analysis performed on the frequency with which the information sources were available to PT members revealed two significant effects: eligibility category ($p < .001$) and Role ($p < .001$). The Eligibility X Role effect was not significant. Examination of the univariate analyses indicated that fourteen sources differed according to eligibility category. The sources were the same as those identified for helpfulness with the addition of the intelligence test, student's learning style and parental programming preferences and with the exception of the achievement test. The rank order of the percentages within each information source for availability as shown in Table 3 corresponded very closely with those for helpfulness.

Twelve univariate F ratios for Role were statistically significant. Inspection of the pair-wise comparisons in Table 4 revealed that appraisal personnel such as the school psychologist, social worker, and counselor had

more information sources available than either the administrators or instructional personnel. Higher percentages of availability were found for the speech and hearing clinicians and medical personnel for the speech and language tests and medical factor source respectively.

Discussion

The results of this investigation indicate that systematic differences occur in the extent to which information sources are rated helpful in making programming decisions for certain types of special education learners. Affective and observational measures were found more helpful for S&E learners whereas the LD student was associated more with diagnostic-prescriptive and perceptual tests. These judgments were made after the student's case was resolved. Nevertheless, before the PT meeting and formal classification of the student has been made, appraisal personnel begin to selectively collect and assemble information based upon their judgments about the student which necessarily affects the scope and specificity of the information base. The results from the present study point out general types of information most often found useful according to eligibility category. These data suggest what information at a minimum should be collected for certain types of children which may help guide appraisal personnel in developing the student's case history.

How well school personnel are collecting and disseminating information for PT use may be viewed from three perspectives. First, schools have available a wide range of information from which to make placement and programming decisions. These sources include both the cognitive, and affective dimensions as well as medical and parental inputs.

Second, the rank order of availability for each information source corresponds very closely with those for helpfulness. For example, educational diagnostic tests were available more often for LD cases than the S&E and EMR; the same order was found for helpfulness. Thus, data collection efforts appear to correspond with the information sources identified as being helpful. However, deficits were found between the percentage helpful and available which were greater than 20 percent for emotional inventories, attitude scales and vocational interests and greater than 10 percent for hobbies and interests. Such discrepancies may be the result of school personnel being unfamiliar with instruments or systematic methods for gathering this information or the problem may be that the staff responsible for assembling information for the PT are unaware that such information has potential value in determining a student's program. In either case, consideration should be given to making emotional inventories and other such information sources more available. On the other hand, some sources were valued less often than they were available such as classroom behavior, intelligence tests and achievement tests. Perhaps these sources are not presented in a usable format or evaluated in an optimal way which impacts on programming for the student. School personnel should review their evaluation procedures to determine whether they can enhance the usefulness of these sources or alter the manner of their collection if the measures currently used are found wanting.

Finally, differential rates of information availability was associated with staff member roles on fourteen sources. If we assume that PTs function as the decision-making unit for special education programming, then more equitable distribution of this information is necessary to increase the probability that interdisciplinary decisions are informed ones. The appraisal

personnel have the greater responsibility in this effort given that they usually possess more of the information than the instructional and administrative PT members. In short, the data indicate that alternative methods for collecting and disseminating information should be considered.

The present investigation is an initial step in a sequence of efforts for developing a body of research on the informational needs of school personnel for deciding special education placement and programming. Several issues require further examination. First, within the global categories of information sources used in the present study, school staff should assess the helpfulness of specific instruments and methods. Research is needed to discover sets of data for different types of students which will generally work well most of the time in describing their educational needs. These sets would assist appraisal personnel in developing case histories. Second, procedures for disseminating these data to PT members should be determined. More specifically, is it better to provide information before the PT convenes or is it sufficient to have the various professionals present the information during deliberations? In either case, PT members should be as well informed as possible if we assume that PTs function as groups. Finally, the criterion issue of what is helpful must be addressed. Information sources judged helpful are not necessarily equated with correct or better decisions about a student's program. We must also demonstrate that the information aids in improving the learner's educational performance. The answers to these questions will not be immediately forthcoming. However, given the pressures to develop more systematic and fair evaluation procedures, efforts should begin to respond to these questions.

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TABLE 1

Percentage and Ranking of Information Sources Rated As Helpful By Eligibility Category

Information Source	Eligibility Category							
	Total (N=1428)	Learning Disabilities (N=791)		Socially Emotionally Maladjusted (N=525)		Educable Mentally Retarded (N=112)		
		%	%	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank
Intelligence Test	66	67	1	63	3	71	1	
Classroom Behavior	66	66	2.5	66	2	66	2.5	
Parental Information	60	61	5	58	4	66	2.5	
Student's Work Habits	59	61	5	55	6.5	62	4	
Student's Learning Style	59	61	5	55	6.5	57	7	
Educational Diagnostic Tests	57	66	2.5	44	12	46	9.5	
Achievement Tests	57	60	7.5	51	8.5	59	5	
Academic Diagnostic Tests	54	59	9	49	10.5	45	11.5	
Medical Factors	53	55	11	49	10.5	52	8	
Classroom Observation	52	53	12	51	8.5	44	13	
Emotional Inventories	52	43	14.5	67	1	42	14	
Referring Teacher by Evaluation of previous instructional methods	50	56	10	39	15	58	6	
Perceptual Tests	50	60	7.5	36	17.5	45	11.5	
Behavior in Different Social Environments	49	44	13	57	5	46	9.5	
Autobiographical Data	36	34	17	40	13.5	36	18	
Parental Programming Preferences	36	35	16	36	17.5	42	14.5	
Speech & Language Screening	34	43	14.5	20	20	38	17	
Attitude Scales	30	24	19	40	13.5	25	20	
Hobbies and Interests	30	26	18	36	17.5	31	19	
Vocational Interests	27	19	20	36	17.5	40	16	

NOTE: Learning Disabilities vs. Socially & Emotionally Maladjusted $r_s=.268$; $t=1.18$ NSLearning Disabilities vs. Educable Mentally Retarded $r_s=.809$; $t=5.84$, $p<.01$ Socially & Emotionally Maladjusted vs. Educable Mentally Retarded $r_s=.408$; $t=1.89$ NS

TABLE 2
Significant Pairwise Comparisons for Helpfulness of Information Sources by Roles

Information Sources	Role(s) >	Role(s)									
		Central Administration (CA)	Principal (P)	Special Education Teacher (SE)	School Psychologist (SP)	School Social Worker (SW)	School Counselor (C)	Regular Education Teacher (ET)	Reading Consultant (RC)	Speech & Hearing Clinician (SH)	Medical Personnel (M)
Intelligence Test	SP		*	*		*	*	*			
Achievement Test	C		*	*		*		*	*		*
Perceptual Tests	SP		*		*						*
Language and Speech Test	SH	*	*	*	*	*	*				*
Medical Factors	RC		*								
Classroom Observation	SP, M			*		*					
Parental Programming Preferences	SP							*			
	SP, SW	*							*		

NOTE: For significant Scheffe pairwise comparison ($p < .05$), role(s) > indicates role(s) which were greater than those asterisked in the columns to the right.

TABLE 3

Percentage of Information Sources Available to Staff Members by Eligibility Category

Information Source	Total (N=1428)	Eligibility Category		
		Learning Disabilities (N=791)	Socially & Emotionally Maladjusted (N=525)	Educable Mentally Retarded (N=112)
Classroom Behavior	87	85	89	88
Intelligence Test	78	77	78	95
Student's Work Habits	73	75	71	73
Achievement Tests	71	72	70	71
Parental Information	60	59	60	67
Medical Factors	59	60	58	61
Academic Diagnostic Tests	58	62	53	57
Educational Diagnostic Tests	57	71	39	37
Student's Learning Style	55	56	51	65
Classroom Observation	55	54	58	51
Referring Teacher's Evaluation of Previous Instructional Methods	51	55	45	50
Perceptual Tests	45	54	29	50
Behavior in Different Social Environments	45	54	29	50
Parental Programming Preferences	31	28	32	50
Autobiographical Data	31	28	33	35
Emotional Inventories	31	21	47	28
Speech & Language Screening	31	39	19	32
Hobbies and Interests	23	22	27	18
Vocational Interests	10	8	14	11
Attitude Scales	7	5	11	2

TABLE 4.

Significant Pairwise Comparisons for Availability of Information Sources by Roles

Information Sources	Roles >	Role(s)								
		Medical Personnel (M)	Speech & Hearing Clinician (SH)	Reading Consultant (RC)	Regular Education Teacher (ET)	School Counselor (C)	School Social Worker (SW)	School Psychologist (SP)	Special Education Teacher (SE)	Principal (P)
Intelligence Test	P, SP C				*	*			*	
Achievement Tests	SP P, C						*		*	
Academic Diagnostic Tests	RC									*
Perceptual Tests	SP SW		*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Speech and Language Screening	SH RC	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Educational Diagnostic Tests	RC									*
Emotional Inventories	SP			*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Medical Factors	M	*		*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Classroom Observation	SP			*				*		
Parental Programming Preferences	SW SP						*	*	*	*
Parental Information	SW SP							*	*	*

NOTE: For significant Scheffe pairwise comparison ($p < .05$), role(s) > indicates role(s) which were greater than those asterisked in the columns to the right.