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ABSTRACT

This guide was developed to assist Oregon school districts in meeting revised minimum state standards for planning and assessment. The teacher's role in objectively judging student performance with respect to satisfying graduation requirements is discussed. Guidelines are given for implementing an effective system of using teacher judgments in assessing students' life skills competencies. Life Skills competency is defined as demonstrable ability to apply knowledge, understanding, and/or skills assumed to contribute to success in life-role functions. The steps involved in teacher assessment of student skills include: specifying and understanding the skills required, naming performance characteristics, developing valid means of collecting data, developing guidelines for making judgments, fairly judging student competency, and taking appropriate followup action. (MV)

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MEASURING PERFORMANCE: Verifying Competencies Through Observation and Judgment

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MEASURING PERFORMANCE: VERIFYING COMPETENCIES
THROUGH OBSERVATION AND JUDGMENT

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State Superintendent of
Public Instruction.

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1977

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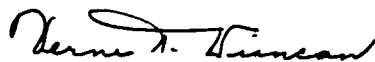
FOREWORD

In June 1976, the State Board of Education adopted revised minimum standards for Oregon public schools. A response to citizen concerns regarding what is, in fact, expected of schools, the standards call for a system of goal-based planning, which includes setting minimum requirements for graduation.

The Department of Education is committed to helping districts implement the standards. Current and anticipated problems are being identified, priorities set, and resources allocated.

One priority area centers on the assessment requirements found in the standards. Measuring Performance: Verifying Competencies Through Observation and Judgment is one of a series of publications dealing with assessment. It focuses on the teachers' role in judging student performance in their endeavors to meet school graduation requirements.

It is my hope that this and other publications in the assessment series prove useful in implementing district practices that will meet the intent of the planning and assessment requirements. For further information, contact the Department's Director of Evaluation and Assessment, 942 Lancaster Drive, NE, Salem 97310; telephone 378-3074.



Verne A. Duncan
State Superintendent of
Public Instruction

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INTRODUCTION

The revised minimum standards for Oregon schools, adopted by the State Board of Education on June 23, 1976, focuses the attention of schools on the outcomes of schooling. The standards require that desired outcomes be identified, instruction planned to attain them, and the performances of students assessed accordingly. Graduation requirements that include life-role related competencies and relevant performance indicators are to be established and processes for certifying their attainment implemented.

When these standards were being developed a wide variety of groups met as independent committees to consider problems of implementation. Of special concern to one of these committees was the certification of students in relation to competencies required for graduation. Five major observations were made:

1. It was recognized that carefully developed competency and performance indicator statements would provide a sound basis for reasonably objective assessment measures.
2. It was apparent that adequate measures did not already exist in many instances, and that the cost of their development was likely to be inappropriate or beyond the resources of many schools.
3. Many schools were planning to use "teacher judgment" in determining competency attainment.
4. The considered judgment of teachers is critical to the proper conduct of schooling.
5. The emerging competency and performance indicator lists being prepared by schools were beginning to raise justifiable and major concern over potential costs of record keeping.

These observations led to the recommendation that a guide be developed to assist districts in taking maximum advantage of teacher judgment as a rich source of assessment information.

This publication is the result of that recommendation. It begins with a "prologue," a light-hearted treatment of a conversation between two frustrated teachers. It finishes with an "epilogue" wherein the two teachers are not quite as frustrated. The characterizations may seem staged, maybe even humorous, but the intent is to draw upon and highlight the real feelings and frustrations that often accompany new policies that appear to change our way of doing things. In the "judgment" of the many teachers and administrators who critiqued this document along the way, these dialogues do just that.

TEACHER JUDGMENT
A Prologue

"Where's the sense in all this?" lamented Emmy. Her friends called her 'The Judge' because she was as fond of rendering decisions as arguing causes.

"I know," agreed Trudy; "I sometimes wonder the same thing." Her friends called her Trudy because that was her name.

Emmy and Trudy were catching a quick cup of coffee, having just finished a two-hour faculty meeting on measuring competencies.

"Technically though," Emmy continued, "the point came through didn't it . . . even though they tried to hide it?"

"What point?" asked Trudy.

"About teacher judgment; I gather we can't use our own judgment in deciding whether students perform in the way we think they should. Good grief! I really don't know what the district wants! We decided a while back that we couldn't afford to develop, let alone keep track of, all those performance indicators. We're doing well to just keep track of the competencies we wrote!"

"You mean you simply use your own judgment in deciding when a student has gained a required competency?"

"Oh well," said Emmy, "I do give tests and make observations, same as always, and they are a big help."

"Wonder if we use the same tests?"

"Oh, no! Probably not. After all, you and I teach things a little differently, so we each have to make up our own tests to fit."

Trudy pressed on: "How's it working out, using your own judgment I mean?"

"Beautifully! Just having all those competencies there to refer to has solved lots of problems."

I started out using my own judgment, along with my own testing, like you're doing," Trudy said, "but I've run into some problems. We . . ."

"Don't tell me . . ." groaned Emmy.

"Oh I don't think we need to spell everything out to the last little detail! That's about as helpful as asking 'How high's up?'"

"What's the problem then?"

"To start with, some of us teachers were talking one day and the name of a student was brought up in a kind of negative way, and I said I'd had a different impression of that student and, in fact, gave the student credit for the competency that another teacher said that student didn't have. It becomes a matter of territory."

"Same thing happened to me just the other day," nodded Emmy.

"Anyway," continued Trudy, "we kicked the question around a while and discovered we didn't understand the competency statement in the same way. So, besides teaching differently and giving different tests, we were actually teaching two different competencies while giving credit for the same one."

"Oh," said Emmy. She was doubtful; this was one aspect of the problem she hadn't really thought about.

"For one thing, a few of the faculty thought some of the competencies didn't seem all that important."

"There are a few on every faculty," agreed Emmy.

"We all took a serious look at those competencies to see what was so all-fired important . . . that helped. We saw that the students themselves didn't understand what the competency meant. And the teachers were sometimes 'guessing' whether a competency had been attained. Appearances, first impressions, attitudes about family, all that sort of thing causes a lot of inconsistencies in our judgments. And we wondered if it's fair to judge the basic competency of a student in terms of peer standing."

"Emmy had heard all this before, but suddenly it made sense. 'She sounds like she thinks something can be done about it;' she thought. Then she asked, "Well, what are you doing about it?"

"That's another story in itself," sighed Trudy, "and it would take longer to tell than we've got time."

"But did you get them worked out . . . the problems? Are you still using teacher judgment?" Emmy wanted at least an inkling of a solution.

"Yes, we're still using teacher judgment, but at least now we have a clearer idea about how. And in a way, today's meeting begins to answer the few remaining problems." Trudy stood up to leave. "I have an extra copy with me of some guidelines we developed that got us on a good track. Would you be interested?"

"I certainly would!" Emmy exclaimed. This was more than she had hoped for.

Trudy handed Emmy the material and concluded, "I really must be going now . . . if I can help, give me a call. As you can probably see, it's a district problem and we all need to talk to each other if the work we've done is going to mean anything."

"Thanks Trudy," responded Emmy. "I see what you mean about it being a district problem." Emmy skimmed quickly through the material Trudy had given her, searching for more clues of what Trudy said would help "clear up the few remaining problems."

A FRAME OF REFERENCE ON COMPETENCY ASSESSMENT

"Where's the sense in all this?" lamented Emmy . . .

Introduction

Emmy and Trudy are doing what they do best--teaching school; yet both are concerned. New standards for public schooling in their state not only require that school districts specify the competencies students must have in order to graduate from high school; but that the schools must also determine student progress toward, and attainment of, those competencies. To Emmy these requirements seemed simple enough. In fact getting the competencies written was helpful to her. Any problems that arose were viewed as being nothing more or less than the normal problems of academic freedom and professional autonomy, a problem of territory. This problem may exist, but left unattended, one would never know. Trudy, on the other hand, has chosen to pursue this problem of territory. Indeed, it may have been her persistence that prompted the district to conduct a meeting on the measuring of competencies.

In one brief conversation, Emmy and Trudy touched on many of the more pervasive issues involved in teacher judgment and the assessment of student competence. The following pages present a definition of competency assessment both as a term and as a process. Major sections thereafter deal more comprehensively with the issues raised by Trudy and Emmy. Discussions center on the role of teacher judgment in an assessment process and how this role is related to effective practices. An epilogue again presents Emmy and Trudy, this time reflecting on their intervening experiences and sharing notes on some limits "the best laid plans . . ." Appendix A contains a summary of "General Standards for Measurement" and is referred to at times in the text.

A Definition

A good working definition of competency assessment needs to identify the nature of the intended activities. Where public policy mandates that competency assessment activities be carried out, the definition also needs to clarify that policy.

In Oregon, policy gives definition to the term competency: "demonstrable ability to apply knowledge, understanding, and/or skills assumed to contribute to success in life-role functions." Policy also requires that school districts determine those competencies students must possess in order to graduate from high school. Further, districts must . . . determine student progress toward development of these competencies . . . (and) . . . provide the necessary instruction for those who need it."

¹Minimum Standard for Oregon Schools, Oregon Administrative Rules 581-22-200 through 581-22-300.

An adequate basis from which to define competency assessment has thus been established through Oregon policy:

Determination of the degree to which students can demonstrate the ability to apply knowledge, understanding, and/or skills in fulfilling the life-role functions selected and established by the district as requirements for graduation.

This represents a working definition of the competency assessment. It identifies the elements of a process and places it squarely within the context of public policy.

The Process

A process must be described that meets the requirements of policy and definition and, at the same time, leads to clarification of potential issues. Thinking in terms of policies and definitions is not very rewarding if that is as far as it goes. Trudy's "matter of territory" hints at the lack of reward that is experienced when thinking does not go beyond that point. Given these considerations, competency assessment should observe at least six steps:

- Specify the competency.
- Specify the performance characteristics of a competency.
- Develop the means to gather performance information.
- Develop the standards to be used in making judgments.
- Judge the performance.
- Take action.

Specifying competencies that students are to attain, is partly a logical task and partly one of expressing the values to be obtained from education. This step in the process must consider whose values are to be expressed and how those expressions of values can be translated into logical statements of the competencies to be required for high school graduation. To avoid Trudy's "last little detail," and to focus on the definition, competencies should express life-role functioning.

Specifying the performance characteristics of a competency is nothing more than clarifying how you'll be able to tell when a competency has been attained. This step is primarily a logical one that relies on mutual understanding of the intent of a competency. It must avoid specifying characteristics that are so narrow or loosely related to each other that the original intent of a competency is lost.

Developing the means to gather performance information is the step in the process in which measures suitable for gathering information on the competencies of students are identified and/or developed. Performance characteristics are analyzed, and objective tests, observation systems, rating scales, checklists, etc., are selected or developed accordingly. See Appendix A for a discussion of general standards for measurement.

Developing the standards to be used in making judgments, broadly speaking, is a matter of setting the qualitative limits on acceptable demonstrations of a competency. It considers the "how much" and "how often" questions associated with minimum acceptable levels of student performance.

Judging the performance of students is that point in the process at which a decision is made about the adequacy of a student's performance. "Rules of evidence" are applied to the information to determine which of the possible decisions might be most appropriate.

Taking action is the final step in the competency assessment process. It considers the consequences of the decision(s) made, and a report is made accordingly.

Take another look at these six basic steps. The first five provide for each of the elements in the definition of competency assessment. The sixth step not only is the logical consequence of the other steps, it also provides for that part of the public policy "providing the necessary instruction to those (students) who need it." Reference will be made to those steps in subsequent discussions on the employment of teacher judgment in the process of competency assessment.

THE ROLE OF TEACHER JUDGMENT IN AN ASSESSMENT PROCESS

"I really don't know what the district wants!"

Emmy's Complaint

Since the judgment of teachers as individuals or as groups is at the heart of any educational program, school district personnel must carefully consider how and where it can best support the need to assess student attainment of competency. Specific alternatives may in fact be endless, but each should attend the steps of the assessment process being employed, as well as to the general standards that should be applied to measurement (see Appendix A).

Given the six steps of the process described earlier, it is possible to create a table of role specifications as follows (clarification of the roles appears in subsequent discussion):

ASSESSMENT STEPS	ROLE OF TEACHER JUDGMENT
Specifying the competencies	Determination that the competencies are clearly stated and their intent understood by all teachers involved.
Specifying performance characteristics	Determination that the characteristics are clearly stated, relevant, representative of the intents of the competency and understood by all teachers involved.
Gathering performance information	Determination that the measures selected or developed cover the required performance characteristics, and that the plan for collecting the information is consistent with the intent of the competency and is understood by all teachers involved.
Developing standards for making judgments	Determination that a reasonable range of anticipated student performance has been identified and adequate guidance for making judgment has been provided all teachers involved.

ASSESSMENT STEPS

ROLE OF TEACHER JUDGMENT

Judging a competency demonstration

Determination that a student has or has not attained a desired competency, and that sources of personal bias have been minimized or eliminated.

Taking action

Determination that an appropriate consequence follows a judgment.

Illustrated in the table is the fact that teachers have a vested interest in each of the steps of the assessment process, and that their judgments about each step are important to implementing a system of teacher judgment that works. The actual activities at some of these steps are more extensive than those implied by the judgments to be made, and these activities are discussed next.

IMPLEMENTING AN EFFECTIVE SYSTEM OF TEACHER JUDGMENT

"She sounds like something can be done about it."

--Emmy's Disbelief

Teacher judgment is exercised every instructional day. In certain areas of measurement, teacher judgment is most practical. The question, then, is not so much "Should teacher judgment be used within the district's measurement system?" as "How can teacher judgment make the measurement system efficient, comprehensive and useful?" Attention to three factors can help:

- Measurement system design.
- Staff training.
- Process management.

Design of the Measurement System

The design of the measurement system should be aimed at gathering trustworthy information. Some questionable "competency" statements may be directly measured by objective tests; e.g., "the student can read and comprehend material written at a fourth grade level of difficulty." For other competencies, and even performance indicators, judgment is necessary in determining the adequacy of a performance or outcome; e.g., "the student can read and comprehend articles selected at random from current newspapers," or, "the student will demonstrate entry levels of competence required in a given occupational cluster." In all cases, the faith one can have in the information produced will depend upon how carefully the measures and judgmental tasks are thought through. Below, the six steps of competency assessment (suggested on the previous pages) are discussed in direct relation to teacher judgment. Again, these steps are: specifying the competency, specifying the performance characteristics of a competency, developing the means to gather performance information, developing the standards to be used in making judgments, and judging the competency performance and taking action.

Specifying a competency: The district may have already "specified" its competency requirements. However, the measurement task draws a distinction between writing a competency and defining it such that its acquisition can be observed. The following distinction is suggested:

Writing a competency:

a process of determining a type of capability that is considered to be a desired outcome of education.

Defining a competency:

a process of reducing a type of capability to terms of the knowledge, skill, and understanding thought to make up that capability.

Competency definition is often overlooked for two reasons. First, competencies are often so specific that they become statements of independent units of knowledge, skills, etc.; they couldn't be further defined if you wanted. For example: the student will describe the symptoms of shock. If this statement is assumed to be typical, no one feels the need for further definition. Second, the need to define a competency may be overlooked with the assumption that everyone agrees on what it means to possess that competency. Defining competencies is crucial to the measurement task since it provides a common framework around which to design the measurement system.

When defining a competency two processes should be observed:

1. Identifying the specific knowledge, skills, and understanding required in order to be competent.
2. Clarifying the contexts in which it is expected the competency will be of use.

The first process simply asks for some assurance that everyone understands what is meant by the competency statement. Clarifying the context(s) helps explain how the competency has been interpreted in relation to life-role functioning. It also helps specify some of the conditions that should be created in order to measure acquisition of the competency. For example, knowledge of the relationship of pricing to packaging can be tested in the classroom. If that knowledge, however, is a secondary component of a competency dealing with planning and shopping for a month's worth of adequate meals for a family on a limited income, perhaps the acid test should be to observe whether that knowledge is used in the context of a planning and shopping activity. Furthermore, the teacher or someone else may want to judge the performance in terms of a balance between meal adequacy and purchasing economy throughout the month.

Specifying performance characteristics of a competency: Once competencies have been defined, student performance must be considered. Observation may span simply noting facts or occurrences to actually drawing a conclusion. The mode of observation depends largely on the specificity of a particular competency. The more specific, the more likely it is that observation can take the form of noting prescribed facts or occurrences. With more global definitions, observations may take the form of conclusions. Such conclusions are generally based on facts or occurrences that seem to the teacher to be supportive of the competency statement.

When observation takes the form of drawing a conclusion about the existence of a competency, the result is often viewed as subjective or nonanalytic. However, analytic forms of observation (noting facts or occurrences) are not always possible. Both forms of observation exist and each has a place in a competency assessment system. An example may help to clarify this point.

Suppose the student competency reads: "the student is able to contribute to and influence the efforts of a group in a constructive and considerate manner."

Observational criteria could be developed which includes such considerations as: did the student talk; did anyone acknowledge that the student modified an initially expressed opinion; did the student attend to the task at hand; did the student acknowledge the contributions of others and/or actually modify an initially expressed opinion, etc. Each of these criteria further clarifies the competency statement and enhances the objectivity of the information produced. In effect, these criteria specify how any observer can know when the competency is being demonstrated; as such, they represent those performance indicators that all teachers agree to look for in assessing attainment of the competency.

On the other hand, what about the word "influence" in the statement? The characteristics of "influence" are not all that clear from the performance indicators given. When such is the case, one of three options are available. First, teachers can deal with the nature of influence (in relation to the intent of the competency!) and try to agree on a set of indicators. A second alternative is to provide no further guidance and allow teachers to individually interpret the intent of the term "influence" as they observe different situations. The third ultimate alternative is to recommend that the word be dropped from the statement. The first is objective or analytic, the second is subjective and perhaps nonanalytic, and the third eliminates the problem altogether.

Gathering performance information: The preliminary work has been accomplished once the competencies have been specified, performance requirements (indicators) established and/or observation criteria set. Measuring student competence is the next step, and it has two parts: 1) eliciting a performance and 2) measuring the performance relative to desired indicators. These activities will produce information on the presence or level of a student's competency.

In preparing to elicit student performance, the following should be considered:

1. Identify and select existing measures appropriate to the performance indicators for a competency.
2. Establish the need for and construct other tests as appropriate.
3. Produce appropriate sets of observational checklists, rating scales, etc., that give structure to the variety of things that should be observed or judged. (These are developed directly from established performance requirements.)

Once the measures are selected or developed, it is necessary to plan for employing these measures. Who (will be involved), how and when are these measures to be applied? How will evidence that a student has acquired a competency be recorded?

Competencies and their performance indicators should be reviewed and identified as to how "broadly" a competency must be demonstrated. In the earlier example of working constructively in groups, one could decide that this ability must be demonstrated in several situations of group work supervised by different teachers. If this is the case, all the teachers could make judgments. It would then be necessary to indicate whether it was necessary for the ability to be demonstrated in all situations. As an alternative, only those teachers conducting group work where constructive participation is a primary course or program goal could have responsibility for making the judgments. In short, it should be decided how many judgments are necessary and who will be responsible for making them. Planning for recording competency attainment can then proceed in an orderly fashion for both the classroom teacher and district records as well.

Developing standards for making judgments: The measurement design should include some decision rules that anticipate variations in student performance. These decision rules clarify further what it means to possess a competency. For example, if a student passes the knowledge test but fails on other criteria, a decision rule might be that possession of the knowledge alone is insufficient. However, when a competency has been demonstrated but the student does not pass a knowledge-based performance indicator, decision rules may be needed which address the following questions:

If demonstration of knowledge is presumed necessary, is it in fact necessary to satisfy the requirement?

Does the test measure the dimensions of knowledge that are reflected by meeting all other criteria?

Is the knowledge reflected by meeting all other criteria sufficient to satisfy the requirement?

These questions may lead to the conclusion that further "knowledge" instruction is not needed for the student. Instead, what may be needed is further refinement of the competency definition, revision or exclusion of knowledge tests, revision of the observational checklists or rating scales, or even revision of instruction.

Other kinds of decision rules should address the quantitative characteristics of a performance. In the example of contributing constructively to group work, one question might be: How many "contributions" of a "constructive" nature are sufficient? And what about a performance that seems more than adequate but differs from prescribed indicators? The decision rules that are arrived at to answer such questions set the standard for the judgments made.

Judging competency demonstration: When it comes to actually judging whether a competency has been demonstrated, two points about measurement data should be kept clearly in mind:

1. The distinction between the objective data and the observational data that are descriptive of a given competency; and
2. The relationship between these two.

For some competencies, objective (test) data that indicates acquisition may be sufficient. For others, observational (judgmental) data may be all that is appropriate or necessary. For still others, both may be appropriate and necessary. When observational data is used, it should be made clear whether objective test data should also be considered.

Ensuring that judgments are not unduly affected by inappropriate influences is the most critical part of the competency assessment process. No matter how carefully planned the system, such influences are always present. Most people are aware of many of these influences and can respond accordingly. Some of these influences, however, are often so subtle that unless those making judgments talk about them from time to time, they escape detection. The following list reflects those conditions or influences that must be guarded against if there is to be an effective implementation of a well-planned system of teacher judgment.

1. Public and/or teacher indifference about the characteristics to be judged.
2. Differences in interpretation of the competency characteristics that are to be judged.
3. Friendships with students, parents.
4. Apprehension over possible lack of administrative support.
5. "First impressions" of students.
6. Student appearances (unrelated to competency characteristics).
7. Jumping to conclusions (based on unrelated observations).
8. Guessing on the basis of inadequate observation; gambling.
9. Prejudices; prior experiences.
10. Halo effects (coming from perceptions of general student abilities).
11. Comparing students to each other rather than to the competency characteristics to be judged.

12. "Knowledge" of students (and/or families) based on previous experience with other siblings.
13. Granting credit rather than asking for help in designing activities that develop the desired characteristics in students.
14. Having a need for the class to "look good" (i.e., everyone acquired the characteristics to be judged).
15. The "standing" of student's family in the community.
16. A lack of training and experience in the manner learners of varying characteristics may display desired characteristics.
17. Granting or withholding credit for competency attainment as a reward or punishment incentive, irrespective of student performance.

Taking action on competency demonstration data: Testing and/or observation provides information for a decision. If all criteria are met, the teacher may indicate the performances for a particular competency that have been demonstrated. If any competencies are not demonstrated, those that are not should be identified with recommendations made for further work. The point is that action must be taken. Granting credit is simply a matter of recording the student's accomplishment. Not granting credit, while it is a type of action, does not fulfill the policy to provide instruction to those who need it.

What approach to take when credit for a competency cannot be granted should be clear if the competencies and their performance indicators have been well thought out. A listing of those performance indicators not demonstrated can be given to the student and/or his parent to show why credit has not been given. A statement of the instruction offered that will provide for the student's remaining need can be offered. The important thing is to employ positive action that reflects good planning, a sense of purpose and a concern for the continuing development of the student.

A perspective: Describing a process is often more complicated than implementing it. From a practical point of view, the system should be a help--not a hindrance. What has been suggested here is a systematic method of organizing to measure those competencies where reliance on teacher judgment is necessary and appropriate. The questions raised here are bound to arise sooner or later. If the district has a small number of competencies stated in broad, general terms, the principles presented here should help that district to logically address the measurement task. If the district has a large number of specifically stated competencies, the principles may help the district evolve a more limited yet manageable number without being afraid of overlooking specific components of instruction that are considered important to measure.

Staff Training

Teachers vary widely in their philosophies about the purposes of schooling; and sometimes these philosophies seem at odds with each other. More often than not, differences do not relate as much to the purposes of schooling as to how one serves these purposes. Nearly all teachers will agree that schooling should help equip the student to participate in life. It is because of these disparities and similarities that attention need be given to training that can sharpen teacher judgments about student attainment.

There are five important aspects to a training program designed to help teachers produce information that can be trusted as evidence of a student's acquisition of a competency.

1. Agreement that developing competence, however defined, is one of the goals of schooling.
2. An awareness that the same competency can be interpreted differently among teachers, and that strategies are needed to eliminate some differences and incorporate other differences where appropriate.
3. Identification of those elements of a competency that are best assessed through observation and the provision of criteria that provides teachers a common perspective.
4. Development of an awareness of sources of personal bias that can inappropriately affect a judgment.
5. Practice in using observation systems.

The first item is especially important in situations where there is uncertainty among teachers about the usefulness of specifying competencies. Without some consensus as to its utility, there is no point in proceeding further. It must be agreed that a competency statement provides a basis for students to demonstrate that they can apply what they are learning. People do not learn to be competent, they become competent as a function of learning.

Items 2 and 3 are crucial in designing the measurement system. Items 4 and 5 cannot be overemphasized in light of the various influences, listed earlier, that can bias judgment in undesirable ways.

Process Management

Nearly everyone is familiar with the occasional raised eyebrow when a teacher finds a student who cannot do something that competency records indicate that student should be able to do. Typically, this is a response to current performance measured in terms of personal standards held by the teacher making the "discovery." Such situations indicate that notes should be compared and interpretations clarified.

How one manages the teacher judgment process in competency assessment is a matter of individual choice, available time and readily available resources. The "lack of time and resources" often prompts a school to "leave it up to teacher judgment" in the first place. Recognizing these constraints, the following discussion focuses on two general but contrasting styles of management: 1) management by system monitoring, and 2) management by exception. Each of these has certain strengths and weaknesses. Both require a commitment to practices that will result in information that is trusted and has credibility.

Management by system monitoring: Monitoring is one approach to managing a system in which teacher judgment plays a significant role in determining competency acquisition. Planned and consistent monitoring can include:

1. Periodic review of sources of bias to develop and maintain awareness, and to identify any new or emerging sources; e.g., just before reporting or recording periods.
2. Periodic review of competencies and indicators of their acquisition to identify any that should be added or are troublesome.
3. Periodic review of competencies and their indicators to confirm their continuing relevance and importance to the student, school, parent, and community.

These monitoring activities can help maintain the mutual understanding among staff and faculty which is essential to the exercise of good judgment. Some weaknesses or trouble spots, however, should be avoided. All staff and faculty must participate. Monitoring should precede any formal reporting or recording period to assure best accuracy. Over time, monitoring can become redundant, ritualistic, and time-consuming for a large number of people. This redundancy can be avoided by identifying ahead of time any concerns that are developing and planning the activities so that participants are involved where need be.

Management by exception: Rather than attempting to control the entire system, the school may choose to deal only with situations in which someone takes exception. Some view this as "crisis management," not having the "strength-of-character" necessary for good management. However, the degree to which it becomes "crisis management" depends upon the extent students and parents raise exceptions. Teachers can and should anticipate possible exceptions. Just as clients have every right to raise issues, so do practitioners. Too, some students may not demonstrate the required performances in the natural course of events, but suddenly "can" when the matter is reported.

Management by exception should provide an outline of the various conditions under which teachers and administrators are expected to raise questions about the adequacy of the teacher judgment process. For example, if an unexpected number of students are shown as having acquired (or not acquired) certain competencies, there should be review and action. When students or parents challenge a judgment, there should be a prompt examination of the criteria,

performance, and possible bias that entered into the judgment. Parenthetically, such challenges tend to be minimized when appropriate action is taken on the basis of a judgment, since the reasons for the judgment are clear. If several teachers make different judgments about the same student relative to the same competency, the case should be examined. The student may be reflecting different faces or the teachers may be actually looking at different indicators. It is important to determine these probable causes since the action to be taken can vary dramatically.

Clearly there are many conditions that give rise to the need for some form of a management process. The effective use of teacher judgment in the assessment process will require management processes that nurture mutual respect among teachers, and a willingness to constructively challenge and be challenged. Whatever management process is used, there should exist the attitude that challenges of judgment can be healthy for the assessment system. Challenges can sharpen decision-making and promote mutual respect between school and home. Comparative displays of the performances viewed by the parent and those viewed by the teacher can, in fact, highlight sources of misunderstanding and/or how the student is typically behaving toward school requirements.

SOME LIMITS OF COMPETENCY ASSESSMENT

"... we all need to talk to each other ..."

--Trudy's Observation

The issues raised by Trudy and Emmy have been discussed above. Procedures for dealing logically and systematically with the issues were emphasized. There are some factors, however, that may limit what we can expect to achieve in any competency assessment system that depends on human judgment.

Words: As in all human interaction, words can be a limiting factor in assessing competence because such words often do not mean the same thing to all people. No matter how carefully we define a competency in a way that is clear and unambiguous, we are limited not only by the words used but by all other words that may be used in interpreting them. Elaborate attempts to develop statements of operational definitions through group work may help increase precision and common understanding; they can also be divisive and lead to more misunderstanding. Words alone cannot completely solve the problem of understanding competence. Competency is a concept that is most useful and meaningful when those responsible for its specification content themselves by including only those aspects on which they can all agree.

Reactivity of assessment procedures: Most, if not all, assessment of human behavior is reactive. That is, the procedures used to elicit and observe the behavior (e.g., competency) actually influence that behavior. When people know they are being observed, they are likely to engage in socially desirable activities (if it is to their advantage to do so). Many behaviors cannot be observed unless situations are created to provide the opportunity for such behaviors to occur. A simple addition test or a simulated test of driving skill are examples. However, such a limitation can be recognized without raising unnecessary alarm over consequences. After all, schools cannot be expected to control all the possible behaviors that students might exhibit following schooling.

The complexity of interpretive judgmental processes: Whether judgmental processes are highly mechanized (i.e., automated) or left to individual intuition, judgments will not be perfect. The diversity of information available, the preconceptions of the judge, and assumptions underlying the rules for combining information, all limit the certainty of judgments. As has been pointed out by Fiske (1974), "Any statement about a person is a function not only of that person's behavior but also of the observer and the interaction between the observer and the observed."

Limitations in perspective: A district should allow for reexamining all assessment practices and decisions. The limitations described above apply to the granting of course credit as well as to assessing competencies, and attention to one area will surely benefit the other.

TEACHER JUDGMENT

An Epilogue¹

"I hate to admit it, Trudy," confided Emmy as she was completing her turn at the duplicating machine, "but I'm finally seeing the sense in all this."

"In all what?" asked Trudy who was visiting with Emmy and hoping the machine wouldn't jam up again.

"Oh, all of the discussion about assessing competencies and how teacher judgment fits."

"Oh yes," Trudy said, recalling their earlier conversation. "I think we're all beginning to understand each other."

"We truly are!" Emmy responded with conviction. "It was a lot of work getting there but the way it worked out is really manageable. My committee has just finished outlining the procedures for keeping track of what is going on."

"I'd like to see it," said Trudy. "The group I was in outlined the conditions for relying on teacher judgment."

"I know," Emmy said, "and we used that outline in our planning. Here's how it looks." She showed Trudy the material she had just finished duplicating.

"Hey! That looks like it might work!" Trudy exclaimed, as she skimmed through the document.

"Well, it's a start anyway," Emmy responded. "We plan to review what's happening from time to time . . . just on general principles if nothing else."

"I see what you mean," Trudy said as she finished her skimming. "I'm sure we'll have some problems, but at least this way we ought to be able to see where the problems are and be better able to do something about them."

"Anyhow, we got the show on the road," said Emmy, as the two teachers prepared to leave.

"That we have," Trudy replied a bit distracted. Her thoughts had turned to a couple of her students that just might have a little trouble . . .

¹The "material" referred to by Trudy and Emmy in this epilogue will be found in Appendix B and Appendix C.

APPENDICES

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APPENDIX A

"You mean you simply use your own judgment in deciding when a student has gained a required competency?"

--Trudy's Question

General Standards for Measurement

Trudy's question of Emmy suggests that she recognizes that the exercise of teacher judgment in assessing a student's attainment of a competency is not a simple, intuitive matter. Even Emmy's response ("I do give tests . . .") indicates an awareness that something more is probably involved. But the question remains: "What constitutes a good assessment system?" If an assessment system is to be of any value, it must provide for the production of accurate and useful information.

It is helpful to review some general standards commonly used in identifying accurate and useful measurement instruments or techniques.¹ The standards described on the following pages are grouped in three general categories: conceptual, technical and pragmatic.

Conceptual Standards

Without some reasonable adherence to conceptual standards, the outcomes of assessment, even though accurate, may hold little meaning. These standards refer to specific properties of competencies and indicators of their attainment. The properties include:

- Relevance
- Representativeness
- Realism
- Understandability
- Acceptability

Each of these is briefly explained below.

Relevance: Competencies should have meaning in the life roles for which students are preparing. For example, the ability to compute can be demonstrated as a technical skill, but unless the student can identify a computational need as it might appear in problem-solving, identify the appropriate

¹For a comprehensively developed set of standards, the reader is referred to Standards for Educational and Psychological Tests (Washington DC, American Psychology Association, Inc., 1974). Another set, Applied Performance Testing: What Is It? Why Use It? (Portland, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1975); is also available and may be especially useful for those faced with developing their own performance-testing instruments.

processes and solve it as well, the skill has little meaning. The competency and the indicators of its attainment must both be examined for relevance. If the example cited arbitrarily required that a specific computational format be used, the relevance of that requirement might be questioned. The matter of the relevance of a competency and the indicators of its attainment should also be examined in terms of desired district and program goals.

Representativeness: This property also relates to indicators of a competency as well as the competency itself. Indicators should adequately cover the range of content or behaviors intended by the competency. A complete set of competencies, on the other hand, should adequately cover the entire domain of performance minimally expected of students when they graduate.

Realism: There should be some evidence (if only common sense) that acquiring the competency is not a trivial or impossible task for a student. In addition, the situations within which competencies are assessed should be as nearly realistic as it is feasible to create.

Understandability: Competencies and the indicators of their attainment should be reasonably clear in expressing the performances expected of students. Teachers, students, and/or parents should be able to read them with agreement as to meaning.

Acceptability: Competencies and indicators of their attainment should be viewed as appropriate and acceptable. The relevance, representativeness, realism, and understandability of the competency assessment system can do much to encourage acceptance. The key is mutual acceptance by a broad range of interests; e.g., teachers, parents, curriculum specialists, administrators and students. There may not always be agreement among these groups. In the absence of consensus, however, assessment efforts may be vulnerable to criticism (and to that extent, futile).

In summary, standards of relevance, representativeness, realism, understandability, and acceptability are essential characteristics of good performance measures. These characteristics provide a basis for discussing the role of teacher judgment in competency assessment and faculty exercise of sound judgmental practices.

Technical Measurement Standards

The technical standards presented here are not independent of each other. Technically, any measure that produces valid information in a reliable fashion meets the standard for good measurement. Evidence that a measure is reliable and valid is often initially developed through application of the conceptual standards suggested earlier. Eventually, however, the technical standards themselves need to be verified.

Validity: The most important technical standard is validity. Validation is currently viewed as a process of developing the information necessary to justify the interpretations one wants to draw from assessment data. For example, if a particular score on a math test is to be interpreted as evidence of a student's ability to deal with the computation problems of daily living, then there must be some evidence that this, in fact, is the case. This notion of validity differs from the traditional one: Are we actually measuring what we intend to measure? It is assumed the traditional question is addressed by applying the conceptual standards described above. The technical question is: Can we legitimately make the interpretations of the assessment data that we would like?

Reliability: In addition to being valid, measures of student competencies should be reliable. This means that the measure must consistently produce similar results when similar kinds of students are measured, regardless of who administers the measure. To illustrate, two teachers observing a small group of students perform a task and using the same rating scale to rate the performance of each student, should produce similar ratings for each student. Since measures of student competencies are to be used for individual decisions about student progress, they should be reliable enough that decisions can be made with confidence.

Expected Intercompetency Relationships: Various competencies in one area of development may be more or less related to competencies in other areas. Many of these relationships are obvious and expected; for example, competency in basic mathematics and the competent maintenance of checkbook balances. These may be called dependent relationships. On the other hand, when one examines the purpose and intent of other competencies, it becomes clear that no such relationships are intended. Functioning as a citizen on the streets and highways, for example, does not necessarily require competence in writing and verbal skills. Technically, this lack of a necessary and dependent relationship suggests that one should observe the student on the streets and highways. One could simulate a street or highway situation and observe the student's responses to it. A measure such as a written essay on "rules of the road," scored for accuracy and comprehensiveness, may be more convenient; but the ability to respond "with competence" may be as much a function of writing and verbal skills as it is of knowledge of the rules of the road. In fact, there may be a real question as to whether a written essay of any kind actually addresses the intent of being a citizen on the streets and highways.

Sensitivity to Instruction: It makes little sense to include in competency measures, performances that cannot be effectively taught. Such measures will provide little information on the effects of schooling. It is not always possible to know in advance what can be taught in the time available. When a variety of instructional approaches have been tried and a measure does not show student progress toward the desired outcome, the measure is of little use. It may be necessary to reexamine the competency and the indicators of its attainment in order to arrive at a more useful and instructionally sensitive measure.

Cross-Situational Stability: If it is expected that demonstrated indicators of competency are likely to occur in a science class as well as in an English class, then there should be no major differences in the expected outcomes of measurement in either situation. For example, imagine a competency measure on a student's ability to seek out and use available sources of information for various purposes. If the measure is properly constructed, the student's performance should "score" the same whether he is pursuing a science project or an English assignment.

Freedom from Contamination: Most criteria important to teacher judgment in assessing competency attainment appears under this standard. Therefore, it is discussed at greater length than the other measurement standards. Some generalizations from the research literature on the ability of persons to judge the performance of others are also presented.

"Contamination" results when influences other than the actual characteristics being measured color the final score or judgment. Human judgment is susceptible to a variety of influences that may cause particular kinds of measurement errors. Errors of leniency exist when the student is given the benefit of any doubt and is rated as more competent than other evidence might warrant true. The opposite error, one of severity, can also occur. Halo effects occur when students are rated or judged as being high on all competencies. This usually occurs when the rater believes that "good students" tend to be "good" in all areas. More general than halo effects are logical errors caused by relating two separate traits or abilities. For example, the rater who believes that academic ability and creativity are highly related may show a strong tendency to judge the two abilities in the same way. A contrast error refers to a rater's tendency to judge others in a manner opposite from the way in which they perceive themselves. A similarity error is the opposite of a contrast error. Errors of central tendency occur when a judge is hesitant to rate individuals at extreme ends of a scale (make extreme judgments about individuals). Proximity errors can be caused by placing two or more related items right next to one another on a checklist or rating form. A rating on the first might unduly influence ratings on the second.

A variety of factors may underlie these errors: teacher characteristics, teachers' preexisting knowledge about a particular student, teachers' role perceptions and teachers' perceptions of the consequences of the evaluation of student competency.

Little is known about the relationship between specific teacher characteristics and the ability to judge students. There is evidence that the age and sex of judges are not related to the ability to judge. Factors that appear to be positively related to the ability to judge are: intelligence, emotional adjustment, social skills, esthetic/dramatic interests, physical science pursuits, and insight into one's own status with respect to one's specific habits or peers.

One person's implicit "theory" of personality appears to influence judgments about others. This could cause logical errors, halo effects, etc., as well as judgments based on "first impressions," student appearances, foregone conclusions, guessing because of inadequate observation, and various forms of prejudice.

Knowledge of siblings or a family's status in the community provide awareness that can influence judgment, often in subtle "unconscious" ways.

Errors in judgment can also be caused by the teacher's perception of the teaching role. Some teachers may see their role as simply granting credit to students while others would use assessment to build student self-confidence. The latter may be inclined to make intentional errors of leniency; the former might be intentionally lenient or intentionally "tough" (severe), depending upon the value placed on the credit.

Another area affecting judgment lies in the perceived consequences of competency assessment. If competency assessment threatens to affect friendships with students or parents, then contamination may result. Presupposing a lack of administrative support for judgments made, or that the judgments will be used for "evaluating" teacher effectiveness can also jeopardize the assessment process.

A variety of factors tend to confound human judgment of the competency of other people. The chief problem, then, with the use of judgmental approaches is controlling the degree to which irrelevant factors "color" or "contaminate" the judgments made.

Pragmatic Standards

Pragmatic standards recognize particular realities imposed upon the measurement process. These standards are no less important than the others since any system that neatly meets all measurement standards, but cannot be implemented, is pointless.

Economy: Measures of competency should be developed, applied, and interpreted with a view to economy. Expenditures should be weighed against potential benefits. People must be considered in terms of the time and energies available. Ultimately, practicality will largely dictate much of the measurement activity in terms of competing activities and available budget.

Contribution to Instructional Improvement: Although competency assessment is primarily used to determine the status of student attainment of competence, there can be other benefits. One significant benefit is its usefulness in improving instruction. Performance information at the individual level, the course level, or the program level can be used to determine the degree to which instruction is working to develop student competencies.

Summary

The conceptual, technical, and pragmatic standards considered above are general standards that apply to all measurement activities. They have been discussed here to provide a nontechnical background for better understanding some of the "problems" Trudy was trying to explain to Emmy. Given a definition of competency assessment, understanding the standards to be met by measurement activities, and planning based on trust and respect, a reasonable and effective system of teacher judgment can be implemented.

APPENDIX B

Sample Conditions for Effective Utilization of Teacher Judgment in Assessing Competency Attainment

The outline Trudy's group had prepared (see Epilogue) was included in the material as an opening statement. It looked like this:

Rationale and Purpose

The judgment of teachers as individuals and as groups is vital to the responsible and efficient operation of any education program. The school district and its teaching staff must share a common understanding of when and how teacher judgment can best be exercised to meet district needs for assessment information. This is particularly true of the need to assess student attainment of the competency requirements for graduation.

Conditions

The following outlines the conditions under which teacher judgment may be expected to contribute significantly to the competency assessment task.

1. Each competency statement has been examined and:
 - a. Its continuing importance to the community and school verified;
 - b. The characteristics (or performance indicators) identified that are best measured by means other than teacher judgment.
2. The technical capacities of the district and its resources have been utilized to the extent possible in identifying appropriate nonjudgmental measures of each competency.
3. Each competency statement has been examined for those performance indicators that should be judged:
 - a. By more than one teacher;
 - b. At more than one point in time;
 - c. At all points in time.
4. Each performance indicator for each competency statement has been examined, identified as required or optional (alternative), and assigned to the courses in which they can or are to be demonstrated.

5. All teachers share in their understanding of the competency requirements and the performance indicators for which they have a responsibility.
6. All teachers are currently aware of those factors that can often bias their judgment.
7. Suitable¹ checklists or guidesheets have been prepared for use by teachers, to aid in making uniform judgments of the performances they are charged to assess.

¹By "suitable" is meant those that are necessary to adequate and uniform assessment and are understood and used by teachers.

APPENDIX C

Sample Practices Related to Competency Assessment, Teacher Judgment, and Record Keeping

The material that Emmy's group prepared (see Epilogue) looked like this:

Assessment, Teacher Judgment, and Record Keeping

Rationale

Available resources and personnel make it necessary for the district to carry out its competency assessment responsibilities within the limits of past assessment practices. The conditions have been established which permit teacher judgment to be focused on the information needs of the district in a uniform and considered way relative to each competency requirement. Certain standard practices are necessary to avoid the burden of increased record keeping.

Practices

1. All teachers having responsibility for observing the competency performance indicators assigned their respective courses shall, using prepared checklists as necessary, determine whether the required indicators (or approved set of alternatives) have been demonstrated by each student before finishing the course.
2. In the case of the student successfully completing a course:
 - a. No record need be made if all performance indicators assigned the course have been demonstrated as required;
 - b. A checklist report (pink sheet) will be prepared for the student's file reflecting any required performance indicators not demonstrated. (If a student passes the course this will be unusual, but there may be instances where approval of course credit is appropriate even though some indicators have not been demonstrated.)
3. In the case of a student failing to complete a course:
 - a. No record need be made if none of the performance indicators have been demonstrated.
 - b. A checklist report (green sheet) will be prepared for the student's file reflecting the required performance indicators that have been demonstrated.

4. In any case where the teacher feels a marginal judgment has been made:
 - a. In favor of the student, a checklist report (green sheet) will be prepared with an explanation of the marginal judgment;
 - b. Against the student, an explanation of the marginal judgment will be included on the checklist report (pink sheet).
5. The counselors shall monitor all checklist reports prepared for student files and interact with the administration and staff as necessary to:
 - a. Plan responsive instructional experiences;
 - b. Gain approval of alternatives; or,
 - c. Arrange review of the competency requirements and/or the fit between the instruction offered by a course and the performance indicators being observed there.

It should be noted that these practices have not been fully tested and that there may be problems. However, as experience is gained and the match between instruction in a course and the assigned performance indicators is sharpened, formal record keeping by individual teachers should be at a minimum.

**MEASURING PERFORMANCE: VERIFYING COMPETENCIES
THROUGH OBSERVATION AND JUDGMENT**

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