



POSITION PAPER ON THE USE OF THE MOST CURRENT ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENTS – REVISED 2014

The New York Association of School Psychologists (NYASP) endorses a broad framework for using “recent” normative data and assessment instruments. NYASP believes that the decision on the use of the most appropriate assessment instruments must be made after weighing several factors, including but not limited to qualitative changes within the instrument, type and purpose of the assessment, standardization sample, professional ethics and/or cost. NYASP recommends using an active discovery process of two years from the release of a new instrument, allowing schools, professionals, clinics and administrators time to explore, train staff for proper implementation, and budget for the cost of the new instrument.

Background

A position paper on the Use of the Most Current Assessment Instruments was first issued in May 1993 by the Ethics and Professional Standards Committee (since renamed the Ethics and Professional Practices Committee). It advocated for an assessment professional to “obtain the most current and psychometrically sound instrument *within a reasonable time period*” and that “school psychologists not base decisions on tests that are obsolete or outdated for the current purpose.” Many school psychologists informally adopted a one year time frame for obtaining the revised version of a test.

A challenge to this issue is that “recent” and “current” are not defined. Nor are they specified in NASP’s Principles of Ethics (2010), APA’s Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct (2010), or in the most recent edition of Ethics and Law for School Psychologists (2011), according to a June 2010 article in the Communique by Lichtenstein. He notes that “all three of the leading sources on ethics advocate for the use of current assessment measures . . . none propose a specific period of time in which tests become outdated.” (p. 12).

There are a number of reasons that tests are revised. These include updating test content, test language and the normative sample. In addition, the Flynn Effect, which is an increase over time in the normative performance on tasks used in IQ tests may cause scores to be increasingly inflated as test norms become older.

Discussion

The NASP Principles for Professional Ethics (2010) includes the following:

(Standard II 3.2) Responsible Assessment and Intervention Practices

School psychologists use assessment techniques and practices that the profession considers to be responsible, research-based practice.

School psychologists select assessment instruments and strategies that are reliable and valid for the child and the purpose of the assessment.

If using norm-referenced measures, school psychologists choose instruments with up-to-date normative data.

School psychologists carry an ethical responsibility to review the validity and reliability when considering the most current assessment instruments. Once new tests are on the market, the consumers (school psychologists) must decide that the test is clinically useful and appropriate. Attending conferences, participating in listservs and becoming knowledgeable about the new measures is necessary in order to feel confident in its regular usage. To be sure that the new measure is an improvement or at least the equivalent to the “outdated” measure is at the discretion of the school psychologist. This process may take more than a year after the new measure is released. After two years, however, different versions of assessment instruments and the reports that are based on the administration may no longer be considered current.

In the Communique article (2010), Lichtenstein notes that “the number of tests on the market and the frequency with which they are revised continues to accelerate.” As an example, he notes that “the intervals between the four editions of the WISC have steadily declined, from 25 to 17 to 12 years, respectively” (p.12). This suggests that tests are considered outdated more frequently and districts must spend more of their budgets in order to be considered current.

Since the original Position Paper (1993) was released, there have been significant changes in our field as well as in the larger society. With new mandates in federal and state law such as Response to Intervention (RTI) as well as economic issues that have forced school districts to take a discriminating look at their expenditures, supplying school psychologists with the newest version of a test can be cost prohibitive.

School psychologists are uniquely trained to integrate the knowledge and skill base of psychology with specific expertise in education, child development, and educational systems. School psychologists should be viewed as the primary resource for an informed voice in the use of current instruments.

Recommendation

Though there are practical concerns that weigh on school psychologists and school districts in terms of when to begin using a revised test, NYASP advocates for the active determination of whether to use the most current assessment instruments within a two year time period of its release. Two years allows for school professionals to attend conferences, read professional journals, seek professional development, discuss within online communities, explore the validity of a new assessment, and/or budget accordingly to purchase the new measure. If after this two year process of discovery, the school psychologist determines that the most current assessment instrument will not be used, best practice obligates that a different measure be used rather than rely on an outdated version of the test. Should a portion, or subtest, of an outdated test be used (e.g. the subtest is no longer used or the construct of the subtest has changed on the newer version of the measure), it is necessary that the report include a debriefing of this usage.

References

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