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# Assessment and Evaluation in Special Education, Innovative Approach and Tools

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**ABSTRACT**

Diagnostic, formative and summative assessment are essential in special education. It helps teachers develop individualized education plans and measure progress. Special education is a type of program designed objectively to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities or other special needs. It provides specially designed instruction, support services, and accommodations to help these students succeed in school. This article looks at the purpose and process of assessment in special education, innovative approaches and tools used in assessment and evaluation of children with special needs in learning environment.

*Keywords:* *Assessment, Evaluation, Testing, Approaches, Tools*

T he new legislation in the field of education of children with special needs was adopted in 2000. According to the new legislation, inclusion is the basic principle of education of children with special needs. Since 2001, different programs have been developed together with compensation programs for pupils to help them achieve standards of knowledge.

Assessment is the systematic process for making inferences about the learning and development of students. It is the process of defining, selecting, designing, collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and using information to increase students' learning and development. An assessment and evaluation in special education is the process used to determine a child's specific learning strengths and needs, and to determine whether a child is eligible for special education services. Assessment and evaluation in special education is a process that involves collecting information about a student for the purpose of making decisions. Assessment, also known as evaluation, can be seen as a problem-solving process (Swanson & Watson, 1989) that involves many ways of collecting information about the student. According to Gearheart and Gearheart (1990; cited in Pierangelo and Giuliani, 2006), assessment is "a process that involves the systematic collection and interpretation of a wide variety of information on which to base instructional/intervention decisions and, when appropriate, classification and placement decisions. Assessment is primarily a problem-solving process".

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*Relevance of Assessment and Evaluation in Special Education*
In this modern period assessment is the cornerstone of effective special education as it provides us with valuable insights into a student's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development of children with special needs. To effectively address the sole needs of these learners, educators and professionals rely on a range of assessment tools and techniques. It helps us to intervene early, providing tailored support that maximizes student's development and learning outcomes.

In special education, there are many professional from different field that work as a team to determine the student learning, and these team are often referred to as a multidisciplinary team that tries to determine what, if any, disability is present in a student. The team's role is crucial because it helps determine the extent and direction of a child's personal journey through special education experience. Thus, the skills you must possess to offer a child the most global, accurate, and practical evaluation should be fully understood. The development of these skills should include a virtuous working knowledge of the following components of the assessment process to determine the presence of a suspected disability in an adolescent:

- **Collection:** It is the first step as it implies the process of tracing and gathering information from the many sources of background information on a child such as school records, observation, parent intakes, and teacher reports
- **Analysis:** The second phase is processing and understanding of information patterns in a child's educational, social, developmental, environmental, medical, and emotional history
- **Evaluation:** The third phase is the evaluation of academic, cognitive, intellectual, psychological, perceptual, language, emotional, and medical development of a child in order to determine areas of strength and weakness.
- **Determination:** The fourth phase is to determine the presence of a suspected disability and the knowledge of the criteria that constitute each category.
- **Recommendation:** This is the final phase of assessments as it implies recommendations concerning educational placement and program that need to be made to the school, teachers, and parents

*Aims of Evaluation and Assessment*
The main aim of assessment and evaluation in educational settings is to measurable and clear student learning outcomes for learning here are the main purpose primary purposes:

- **Screening and Identification:** the aim of assessment is to identify children and screen those who may be experiencing learning problems.
- **Eligibility and Diagnosis:** the purpose of assessment is to find out whether a child has a disability and is eligible for special education services, and to diagnose the specific nature of the student's problems or disability.
- **IEP development and placement:** Individualized Education Program (IEP) may be developed to provide detail information and appropriate decisions may be made about the child's educational placement
- **Instructional planning:** Instructional planning need to be developed for preparation of teaching and learning process of the child with special needs, as well as construction of goals, objectives and assessment methodology
- **Evaluation:** the main objectives is to evaluate student learning progress.

*Testing and Assessment*

Confusion regarding the terms "assessment" and "testing" is always a concept of discussion, while they are related, they are not the same. Testing is the administration of specifically designed and often standardized educational and psychological measures of behavior as it is part of the assessment process. Testing is just one piece of the assessment process while assessment encompasses numerous different methods of evaluation one of which is using tests.

*Role of Professional in the Special Education*

The professional involved in special education in today's schools plays a very critical role in the overall education of students with all types of disabilities. The special educator's position is unique in that he or she can play many different roles in the educational environment. Whatever their role, special educators encounter a variety of situations that require practical decisions and relevant suggestions. In the field of special education, it is always necessary to fully understand the assessment process and to be able to clearly communicate vital information to professionals, parents, and students (Pierangelo and Giuliani, 2006).

*Assessment and Federal Law*

There are 13 separate categories of disabilities under which children may be eligible for special education and related services as mention by The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Public Law 105-476, these include the following:

- **Autism:** It is developmental disability that is significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age 3
- **Deafness:** it is hearing impairment that is so severe that the child is impaired in processing linguistic information, with or without amplification
- **Deaf-blindness:** it is simultaneous hearing and visual impairments
- **Hearing impairment:** it is impairment in hearing, whether permanent or fluctuating
- Mental retardation: it is significantly sub average general intellectual functioning existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior
- **Multiple disabilities:** the manifestation of two or more disabilities (such as mental retardation-blindness), the combination of which requires special accommodation for maximal learning
- **Orthopedic impairment:** physical disabilities, including congenital impairments, impairments caused by disease, and impairments from other causes
- **Other health impairment:** having limited strength, vitality, or alertness due to chronic or acute health problems
- **Serious emotional disturbance:** it encompasses disability where a child of typical intelligence has difficulty, over time and to a marked degree, building satisfactory interpersonal relationships and responds inappropriately behaviorally or emotionally under normal circumstances; demonstrates a pervasive mood of unhappiness; or has a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears
- **Specific learning disability:** it is disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using language, spoken or written, which may marked itself in an imperfect ability to read, think, speak, listen, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations.
- **Speech or language impairment:** it is a communication disorder such as stuttering, impaired articulation, a language impairment, or a voice impairment

- **Traumatic brain injury:** Acquired injury to the brain caused by an external physical force that result in total or partial functional disability or psychosocial impairment, or both
- **Visual impairment:** Visual difficulty (including blindness) that, even with correction, badly affects a child educational performance in school.

*Approaches to Assessment and Evaluation*

There are many approaches to assessing student learning in special education including formal or graded measures of assessment, and more informal, often ungraded, feedback opportunities. A holistic plan of assessment is sustainable, providing formative and summative feedback within the course, and providing learners with the skills to meet their future learning needs. There are key similarities and differences between the 3 aspects of classroom evaluation and assessment children with special needs: assessment for learning (for teachers), assessment as learning (for students) and assessment of learning (for teachers). There are 3 approaches to assessment that contribute as a whole to student learning:

1. **Assessment for learning**

Assessment for learning involves instructor using evidence about students' knowledge, skills and understanding to inform their teaching. Sometimes referred to as 'formative assessment', it usually occurs throughout the learning process to clarify student understanding and learning.

2. **Assessment as learning**

Assessment as learning happened when students are their own assessors. It requires students to monitor their own learning, ask questions and use a series of strategies to decide what they know and can do, and how to use assessment for new learning.

3. **Assessment of learning**

Assessment of learning assists instructor in using evidence of student learning to assess achievement against outcomes and standards. Sometimes referred to as 'summative assessment', it usually occurs at defined key points during a unit of work or at the end of a unit, term or semester, and may be used to rank or grade students. The effectiveness of this for grading or ranking depends on the validity and reliability of activities and its effectiveness as an opportunity for learning depends on the nature and quality of the feedback.

Traditionally, the focus of classroom assessment and evaluation has been on assessment of learning, measuring learning after the fact, using the information to make judgments about students' performances, and reporting these judgments to others. During the 1990's a groundswell of research emphasized the importance of assessment for learning (formative assessment). Teachers were using assessment for learning when they built in diagnostic processes, formative assessment, and feedback at various stages in the teaching and learning process however, often informal and implicit. From the noughties onwards, assessment for learning was separated in to assessment for learning, and assessment as learning, to emphasize the role of the student in the assessment and evaluation process.

Systematic assessment as learning where students become critical analysts of their own learning - is an important form of assessment that needs to go beyond incorporating self-assessment into teaching programs. It has become an assessment practice that is systematically used to develop students' capacity to evaluate and adapt their own learning.

*Tools for Assessment and Evaluation in Special Education*
Special Education evaluations guide districts in providing a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). A full evaluation should assess all areas that impact a child's school day. A special education evaluation must be completed by qualified, licensed staff for each area of assessment. Use of standardized testing will yield quantifiable information that can be used in screening eligibility for Special Education services, as well as identify areas of strength and need of a student when compared with same-aged/grade peers.

When planning an evaluation, a tool of assessment for each area must be identified, as well as who will assess. All areas of concern should be addressed in the evaluation process. It is important to know what is being assessed and what information an assessment tool may provide.

*Special Education Assessment Areas and Examples of Tools*
**GENERAL INTELLIGENCE/IQ** measure a child's ability to reason, use cognitive processing. IQ tests are typically administered by a school psychologist. Common IQ assessment tools may include:

- **Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC) (6–16 years)**

The WISC has been considered the most valid measure of intelligence because it contains language and symbol-based items, as well as performance-based items. The four index scores (verbal comprehension, perceptual reasoning, working memory and processing speed) allow for verbal scores to be compared to performance scores, which help identify disparity between language and spatial intelligence.

- **Woodcock-Johnson Test of Cognitive Abilities (WJ-III) (2-90+ years)**

The WJ measures disparities between achievement and predicted achievement based on cognitive ability levels. A General Intellectual Ability (GIA) is derived from cognitive performance clusters in verbal ability, thinking ability and cognitive efficiency. These scores relate to verbal comprehension, visual auditory learning, spatial relationships, sound blending, concept formation, visual matching, and numbers reversal.

- **Comprehensive Test of Nonverbal Intelligence (CTONI – 2) (6-89 years)**

The CTONI is a non-verbal format that measures analogical reasoning, categorical classification, and sequential reasoning. There are six subtests in two different contexts of pictures of familiar objects and geometric designs.

- **Differential Abilities Scale (DAS-II) (6 months–17 years)**

The DAS assesses cognitive abilities that are important for learning across a broad range of developmental levels. Diagnostic subtests measure cognitive abilities in verbal and visual working memory; immediate and delayed recall; visual recognition and matching; processing and naming speed; phonological processing; and understanding basic number concepts.

- **Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children (KABC-II) (3–8 years)**

The KABC assesses children from a mainstream cultural and language background with testing batteries that minimize verbal instructions and responses. There are two separate core battery forms – Luria model excludes verbal ability, CHC model is for children from a mainstream cultural and language background. The scales and subtests include: Simultaneous/GV (triangles, face recognition, pattern reasoning, block counting, story

completion, conceptual thinking, rover, and Gestalt closure); Sequential/Gsm (word order, number recall and hand movements); Planning/Gf (pattern reasoning and story completion); Learning/Glr (Atlantis/Atlantis delayed, Rebus/Rebus delayed); Knowledge/Gc (CHC model only) (riddles, expressive vocabulary and verbal knowledge).

**INDIVIDUALIZED ACHIEVEMENT / ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE** are designed to measure pre- academic and academic behavior / skills, and can be helpful in assessing academic learning needs. Academic Achievement assessments are typically administered by a Special Education teacher. Assessment tools may include:

- **Woodcock Johnson Test of Achievement (2–90+ years)**

This test provides diagnostic information as well as grade level performances on discrete literacy and mathematical skills, from letter recognition to mathematical fluency.

- **Brigance Comprehensive Inventory of Basic Skills (pre K–grade 9)**

Through normed individual achievement testing, the Brigance provides diagnostic information on reading, math and other academic skills. The four subtests look at academic readiness, reading, language arts and math.

- **Wechsler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT) (4–85 years)**

The WIAT identifies academic strengths and weaknesses through 9 subtests that measure oral reading, math fluency, early reading skills, listening comprehension, oral expression and written expression.

- **Peabody Individual Achievement Test Revised (PIAT-R) (5-22 years)**

The PIAT assesses children with severe disabilities that require pointing responses for most items. A multiple choice format assesses academic skill in general information, reading recognition, reading comprehension, written expression, mathematics and spelling.

- **AUTISM** testing is designed to help determine whether a child meets academic criteria for having an autism disorder. An ASD assessment is typically administered by a district ASD Resource Specialist. Assessment tools may include: Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS) (toddler through adult), Gilliam Autism Rating Scale (3–22 years), Childhood Autism Rating Scale ages 2+ and Social Responsiveness Scale (SRS) (4–18 years).

**SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, BEHAVIORAL** assessments help determine the behavior patterns, emotions, feelings, social issues as well as potential academic that may arise in the school setting. This assessment may typically be completed by a school psychologist. Common standardized assessments may include:

- **Behavior Assessment System for Children 1–21years**

The BASC-2 is a comprehensive set of rating scales that gather information from teachers, parents, a self-report, observation, and review of developmental history. Assessment subtests of behavior look at hyperactivity, aggression, conduct issues, anxiety, depression, somatization, typicality, withdrawn, attention issues, adaptability, social skills, leadership, activities of daily living, and functional communication. The Connors assesses behaviors, emotions, academic and social issues with a clear link to DSM. It includes a teacher and parent inventory for ages 6-17, and an additional self- report for students aged 8-17.

**ADAPTIVE BEHAVIOR/FUNCTIONAL SKILLS:** Assessments look at a student's behavior patterns and independent every day skills to help determine how they manage throughout the school day. Assessments are typically completed by the teacher and may include:

- **Adaptive Behavior Assessment Scale (ABAS) (birth-89 years for people with DD)**

The ABAS assesses adaptive skills across the life span. Rating scales are completed by parent, teacher and a self-report for adults. Ten skill areas measure independence and/or need for assistance. Three adaptive domains create a general adaptive composite. The domains include: Conceptual (communication skills, functional academics and self- direction); Social (social and leisure skills); and Practical (self-care, home/school living, community, work, health and safety).

- **Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scale (birth-90 years)**

The Vineland is a measure of social and personal skills necessary for everyday living, it assess five domains: Communication; Daily Living Skills; Socialization, Motor Skills and the optional Maladaptive Behavior Index.

- **Scales for Independent Behavior (SIB-R) (birth-80+ years)**

The SIB is a comprehensive assessment that looks at 14 areas of adaptive behavior and 8 areas of problem behavior. Assessment outcomes are used to regulate the support, supervision and resources a person may need throughout the day. The SIB can help determine support needs in broad independence, social interaction, motor skills and personal living skills, communication skills and community living skills.

**COMMUNICATION** tests evaluate communication abilities in specific areas, language usage and understanding. Tools are administered by a Speech Language Pathologist and can measure core language, expressive or receptive language, vocabulary, etc. Communication evaluation requires the integration of different information gathered through informal and standardized assessment procedures. Assessment tools may include:

- **Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals (CELF) (5-21 years)**

The CELF evaluates language performance and helps determine language disorders through norms that include: core language, receptive language, expressive language, language structure, language content, language memory, and working memory.

- **Oral and Written Language Scales (OWLS) (3-21 years for listening comprehension and oral expression scales; 5-21 years for written expression scale)**

The OWLS provides information (depending on age and scale) on a child's listening comprehension, oral expression and written expression skills by assessing vocabulary, grammar, pragmatic structures, and higher order thinking.

*Test of Auditory Comprehension of Language (TACL) (3-9 years)*
The TACL measures a child's ability to comprehend English language through 142 items divided into three subtests vocabulary, grammatical morphemes, and elaborated phrases and sentences by having the students point to the image that best represents what is spoken to.

*Test for Social Language Development (elementary version)*
This test is designed to assess language-based skills of social interpretation and interaction with peers, and predict language development. The elementary subtests look at making interpersonal negotiations, multiple interpretations, and supporting peers. The adolescent subtests look at making inferences, interpreting social language, problem solving (stating and justifying solutions), social interactions, and interpreting ironic statements.

- **Comprehensive Assessment of Spoken Language (CASL) (3-21 years)**

Assessment provides precise issues with language processing skills and structural knowledge. There are core tests that garner a global language composite with supplementary tests that provide additional diagnostic information. There are 15 tests that measure language processing skills in comprehension, expression, and retrieval.

There are four language structure categories that include: Lexical/semantic (knowledge and use of words through basic concepts, antonyms, synonyms, sentence completion, and idiomatic language); Syntax (syntax construction, paragraph comprehension, grammatical morphemes, sentence comprehension, and grammaticality judgment); Supra linguistic (comprehension of complex language through nonliteral language, context meaning, inference, and ambiguous sentences); Pragmatic (awareness of appropriate language, situation context, and ability to modify language). Verbal or pointing responses require no reading or writing.

- **Goldman-Fristoe Test of Articulation-2 (GFTA-2) (2-21 years)**

The GFTA measures a child's articulation ability through sampling of both spontaneous and imitative sound production. Sample speech identifies misarticulation in initial, medial and final positions through sounds in words, sounds in sentences, and stimbility (ability to correctly produce a previously misarticulated sound).

- **Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-4 (PPVT-4) (2.6-90+ years)**

Paper and pencil test of 228 words per form, which measures receptive vocabulary and helps for direct comparisons between receptive and expressive vocabulary performance of students.

- **Assessment of Basic Language and Learning Skills-Revised (ABLLS-R)**

It is an assessment tool, skills tracking system and curriculum guide to help guide the instruction of language and critical learning skills for children with ASD and other DD. Assessment information can help facilitate the identification of skills to effectively communicate and learn from everyday experiences through 544 comprehensive review of skills in 25 skill areas used in social interaction, academic, language, motor skills, etc. Assessment tasks are arranged from simple to complex and it help in tracking child's progress in critical skill acquisition, as well as in identify obstacles that prevent child from acquiring new skills. The curriculum is used in guiding development of a comprehensive, highly personalized language-based program and develop IEP goals and objectives that target learning needs.

**MOTOR (GROSS/FINE)** looks at the development and utilization of large muscles (arms, legs, torso, etc.) and fine muscles (hands, fingers, etc.). Both motor skills are important in order to function through a typical day. Assessments are typically administered by a Developmental Adaptive Physical Education teacher and may include:

- **Bruininks Oseretsky Test of Motor Proficiency (BOT) (4-21 years)**

The BOT measures gross and fine motor skills by evaluating 46 items for physical performance. The complete battery is concern with, fine motor integration, fine motor precision, manual dexterity, bilateral coordination, running speed, balance and quickness, upper limb coordination, and strength. The complete battery will give scores in fine manual control, manual coordination, body coordination, strength and agility, and a total motor composite.

- **Beery-Buktenica Developmental Test of Visual-Motor Integration (2-100 years)**

This is a paper and pencil test that measures the ability to integrate visual and motor abilities by assessing basic gross motor, fine motor, visual, and visual-fine motor skills.

- **Gross Motor Development Test (3-10 years)**

This assessment has only two subtests – loco motor and object control – mostly measuring ball skills.

**SENSORY PROCESSING** is assessed to evaluate how sensory input is received and perceived through sights, sounds, touch, tastes, smells, movement and balance, body position and muscle control. Emotional and behavioral issues can stem from the misinterpretation and misperception of sensory input. Assessment of sensory processing is completed by a district Occupational Therapist and may include:

- **Sensory Profile (3-10 years with ASD and intellectual ability in mild/moderate range)**

It is a standardized assessment that is used to detect behaviors or sensory reactions that differ from average peers. Profile questions may be answered by parents, and/or self-reported.

- **Sensory Processing Measure (elementary aged children with varying abilities)**

This assessment contains three parts – Home Form, Main Classroom Form, and School Environments Form. The standardized questionnaires report behaviors or performance observed in the classroom, home and other school environments (may include art, music, PE, cafeteria, recess/playground, etc.), allowing comparison between environments. This assessment has a team-focused approach that looks at the child in all usual environments/contexts. Because the test is performance-focused, it can be used to determine differing behaviors reactions and measure progress.

**TRANSITION** assessments relate to training, education, employment and when appropriate, independent living skills. Transition assessment should be an on-going process for the Special Education teacher to collect information on a student's strengths, needs, preferences, and interest's base on the demands of current and future living, learning, and work environments. Transition must be addressed in 9th grade. Information gathered from transition assessment, should be used as a basis for IEP and transition planning. Standardized assessment tools may include:

- **Enderle Severson Transition Rating Scale (middle and high school students)**

This assessment generates a narrative description of a student's strengths and possible areas of concern in the five transition areas of employment, recreation and leisure, home living, community participation, and postsecondary education. There are different of versions so the assessment can match a student's language and skills. It is geared to address desired future goals, current skills, skills needed to achieve goals, and planning for success in vocational, residential, and community environments.

*Brigance Transition Skills Inventory (middle and high school students)*
The Brigance is an inventory of life skills and employment skills that assess the four transition skill areas of: Academics (planning for post-secondary education/training); Post-Secondary (includes employment and education/training); Independent Living (managing food, clothing, housing, finance, etc.); Community Participation (interact with community resources, good citizenship, etc.).

- **Transition Planning Inventory (14-22 years)**

This inventory generates a student planning statement profile of over 600 transition goals through results gathered from student, parent, and school staff. The inventory uses rating scales and open-ended questions to identify student preferences, interests, and strengths, based on ability and experiences. The assessment compares responses to observe whether they align with each other, and identifies areas of transition and instructional need.

- **Casey Life Skills (CLS) (14-21 years)**

The CLS assesses the behaviors and competencies necessary to develop healthy, productive lives. The self-evaluations look at healthy relationships, planning and goal- setting, using community resources, daily living skills, budgeting and paying bills, computer literacy, and permanent connections to caring adults. This assessment is intended to be used in collaborative conversation with an educator, mentor, case worker, or other service provider.

**ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY (AT)**
An AT evaluation of the needs of a student, including a functional evaluation of the children in their customary environment and must be completed by an Assistive Technology Specialist and/or a district member with knowledge and experience in AT. As outlined in IDEIA (§300.105), all students birth through 21 years of age with an IEP must be considered for Assistive Technology (AT). There is not a standardized assessment tool, but assessment should include consideration of strengths and limitations that AT tools will help bypass, and play to the strengths of a student.

Assessment should consider appropriate AT tools to assist with reading, writing, math, memory, organization, listening, etc. Observation and comparison of the student with and without the use AT tools should be completed. Assessment for AT usage in setting and context (classroom, home, other) needs to be completed. Also, a review of AT tools for reliability, compatibility with other technologies, ease of operation, staff familiarity with AT use and function, visual/auditory output, etc., must be completed.

## CONCLUSION

Assessment in special education is a complex, but important process that helps teachers develop individualized education plans and measure progress. By using a different type of assessment approaches and tools, involving parents and other professionals, and regularly assessing, evaluating and adjusting teaching strategies, teachers can help their students succeed. Every student is unique and has their own strengths and challenges. By taking different approach and tools to assessment, teacher can help all students reach their full potential, with this educator, took step by step through the assessment process in special education.

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