



Prince Edward Island
Counselling Association

**PEICA Executive Team
June 2005 - June 2007**

President:

Sandi Duffield-King,
School Counsellor
Bluefield Senior High School
924 Colville Road
North Wiltshire, RR #2
PE C0A 1Y0
PH: 902-675-7480
FAX: 902-675-0465
sdking@edu.pe.ca

Vice-President:

Judy MacDougall
School Counsellor
Three Oaks Senior High School
10 Kenmore Avenue
Summerside
PE C1N 4V9
PH: 902-888-8460
FAX: 902-888-8261
jfmacdougall@edu.pe.ca

Secretary:

Joan Murray
School Counsellor
Summerside Intermediate School
247 Central Street
Summerside
PE C1N 3M5
PH: 902-888-8470
FAX: 902-888-8469
jxmurray@edu.pe.ca

Treasurer:

Maribeth Noonan
School Counsellor
Athena Consolidated School
150 Ryan Street
Summerside
PE C1N 6G2
PH: 902-888-8486
FAX: 902-888-8487
mhnoonan@edu.pe.ca

Past-President:

Jim Donovan
School Counsellor
Three Oaks Senior High School
10 Kenmore Avenue
Summerside
PE C1N 4V9
PH: 902-888-8460
FAX: 902-888-8261
jddonovan@edu.pe.ca

PEICA Position Paper Issues in Collaborative Practice for C Level Assessment in PEI

Submitted to the PEI Department of Education
by the PEICA Executive and
the PEICA Ad Hoc Committee on
C Level Collaborative Assessment Practices

October 16, 2006

“Assessment is a systematic process of gathering information from many sources in order to make appropriate educational decisions for a student. It is a collaborative and progressive practice designed to identify the student’s strengths and needs, and which results in the identification and implementation of strategies to assist educational planning for the student.”

Minister’s Directive No. MD 01-08

PEICA Ad Hoc Committee

Members:

Joyce Bayly-Inwood (Chair)
Arthur Adams
Kim Bailey
Sandi Duffield-King (ex-officio)
Steve Inwood
Judy MacDougall
June Sanderson (ex-officio)
Linda Thistle-McKenna

PEICA Executive Team Members:

Sandi Duffield-King, (Pres.)
Judy MacDougall, (VP)
Maribeth Noonan, (Treas.)
Joan Murray, (Secretary)
Jim Donovan, (Past-Pres.)
Ex-officio Members
June Sanderson (Dept. of Educ. Liaison)
Corrine Hendricksen-Eldershaw, (CCA Director)
Daphne Campbell (CCA-Atlantic Cd. Chapter)
Deborah Wood-Salter (TRI-PD Rep.)
Jill MacLeod (CCA-Pastoral Care Chapter)

Introduction

The Prince Edward Island Counselling Association (PEICA) recognizes that before proposing a model of collaborative assessment practices, a number of issues currently in contention must be addressed. The purpose of raising these issues is to clearly present the position of PEICA in these matters. The recommendations attached to these issues are intended to be positive and solution-focused. PEICA welcomes dialogue regarding any questions or perspectives arising from the issues or recommendations below.

The *Student Assessment Process, Standards and Guidelines Handbook for Educators*, published by the Department of Education (2004), clearly delineates the collaborative assessment process to be used in our school system (page 8). It also clearly delineates the standards used to determine competence in relation to the levels of assessment, and the professional qualifications required to administer them (page 9). For C level assessment, **both** graduate courses in educational psychology or counselling, with the specific courses described, **and** graduate course work with supervised practice in administering and interpreting individual assessments, are the foundation of the minimum professional qualifications needed to conduct such assessments (page 9). It is further noted that any additional requirement as stipulated by the test publisher as being necessary or desirable for the administration of each particular instrument must also be fulfilled. PEICA believes that school-based C level assessment, completed by qualified counsellors with the above competencies, is the most effective model to move efficiently from identifying students' needs to addressing those needs with programs and services. In the past this model has provided students with quality assessments resulting in improved programs and services.

There are counsellors currently in our system with levels of training, knowledge, and experience that significantly surpass the minimum qualifications. Some of these counsellors have been conducting comprehensive assessment of student abilities and learning strengths/weaknesses for over twenty years in our education system. The current moratorium on C level assessment by qualified and competent counsellors is a disservice to our students and our families. If counsellors are not providing this service as part of their role in the school setting, the immediacy of intervention is removed, students experience longer waiting times for assessment, and board level consultants or psychologists are less available for consultation, support and intervention in other areas of student issues, such as behaviour.

Issues and Recommendations

At the same time our Association (PEICA) does recognize that there are issues which need to be addressed within this model.

1. Despite the detailing of minimal qualifications in the Assessment Handbook (as described above) there has not been designated a body responsible for monitoring these qualifications. It is felt that some of the current impasse concerning counsellors conducting C Level assessment is based on the misperception that counsellors as a whole are not qualified or competent to do so. While not all counsellors have these qualifications, in fact there are a significant number of school counsellors within the association who are qualified and competent with respect to C level assessment. Some of this group have graduate degrees in psychology with specific training in C level assessment. Others have graduate training in C level assessment with graduate degrees in education (with counselling specialties) or counselling. The reputation of these counsellors has suffered as a result of this misunderstanding. The public's confidence in this group has further been eroded, particularly since School Districts decided that counsellors, regardless of their qualifications, are not to do C level assessment at least until these issues have been settled. This gives the appearance of a lack of confidence in the ability of the personnel within the school system as well.

This dictum is, in part, due to concern about possible liability issues related to assessment by unqualified personnel. In fact PEICA would share such a concern. The Association disagrees, however, with the notion that qualification and/or competency are inherent in the title of "psychologist" but not in that of "counsellor." It is felt that judgements of qualifications and competencies should be based on the knowledge, training and experience of each individual regardless of title. In fact, we believe this view is shared by the Department of Education and acknowledged in the wording of the Handbook.

At this point there is no statutory regulation in our province to validate or regulate persons engaged in any aspect of professional counselling. CCA has an optional certification process (CCC - Certified Canadian Counsellor - with all the components of a regulated body), liability insurance, and all the resources of a national professional organization of this size. Full membership in CCA and PEICA requires adherence to the CCA code of ethical practices. The Canadian Counselling Association (CCA) *Code of Ethics* is recognized by the PEI Department of Education as the standard for school counsellors. In addition to CCA certification, a number of provincial organizations and affiliates of CCA, including PEICA, are in the process of developing a list of counsellor competencies to further the goals of the organization in promoting ever-increasing professionalism among their membership. This year PEICA formed the School Counsellors' Chapter and the Professional Counsellors' Chapter. The Chapter constitutions are designed to promote the involvement and professionalism of member counsellors specifically in these areas. Registration or credentials pertaining to competency in C level assessment, and the maintenance of that competency, are not in place at this time with either CCA or similar professional organizations. The need for a process by which appropriate qualifications and competencies can be determined for all personnel conducting such assessments thus becomes evident.

Recommendation 1:

PEICA recommends that dialogue be directed towards a process by which monitoring of all personnel giving C level assessments can be maintained. We believe this dialogue should include all stakeholders and the resulting process should apply to all stakeholders. It is

recommended that this process be designed to encompass issues such as how to recognize persons having minimum qualifications for C level assessment, as well as monitoring the maintenance of competencies through professional development, consistency of reporting, and the use of appropriate and ethical procedures in the assessment process. Appendix A outlines one possible model for such a system.

2. In determining such qualifications there is also a concern that the criteria for C level assessment as described in the Department's Handbook for Educators should more clearly specify a period of supervised practice following graduate course work, like that expected in a similar regulated profession, even after completing supervised practice in association with that course work. Some counsellors have had this qualification as well, having been supervised in their practices for a period of time following degrees in counselling, education, or psychology, however there would be others where this has not been the case. PEICA believes that a number of issues would need to be discussed in this area including, for example, who would require supervision, the term of supervision (numbers of assessments completed versus time frame), how qualifications for supervision would be determined, and the nature of the expectations held during the supervision term (type of contact, consultation, consistency of expectations across supervising personnel, choices of supervisor, etc.).

RECOMMENDATION 2:

PEICA thus recommends that a Department committee be struck to consider a model of supervision for counsellors having completed graduate course work in C level assessment. It is further recommended that this committee consist of all stakeholders willing to work collaboratively in such an endeavor.

3. In recent years, some parents/guardians have felt they should request that a diagnosis of Learning Disability be made by psychologists. One motive is their need/desire to receive services at Post-Secondary institutions, access financial support from agencies such as Canada Student Loans, or qualify for Federal Tax benefits. At this time the applications relating to these services/resources require diagnosis by a registered psychologist. This requirement is based on the assumption that psychologists are the only professionals to have the qualifications and competency to recognize this type of profile. Counsellors in Newfoundland and Labrador have successfully challenged this assumption. PEICA believes this requirement should be reviewed in this province as well. The current practice in Newfoundland and Labrador has a process in place that results in the Department of Education maintaining a list of counsellors considered qualified and competent in the assessment of Learning Disabilities. Please see Appendix B for information regarding persons considered acceptable to carry out diagnostic assessments for learning disabilities for Canada/Newfoundland and Labrador Student Loans.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

PEICA recommends that the Department of Education consider how such a registry could be created in the province. PEICA would be willing to work with the Department to consider how such a registry may be developed. It is possible that a process similar to that described in Appendix A may evolve to serve this purpose.

Another motivating factor behind some parental requests for a Learning Disability diagnosis is the unfortunate confusion that the diagnosis is a necessary precursor to a student receiving additional services or interventions in our school system. It is important to note that this belief is presently contrary to the values and position of the Province, as articulated by the Department of Education. At this time the Department's Special Education philosophy states that educational services and supports are provided as a result of recognized student needs without requiring a diagnostic label. This is also known as a "non-categorical" approach. This policy differs from that of many other provinces or agencies where substantial resources can be used to identify and document diagnoses for students in order to determine eligibility for certain interventions or resources. Confusion among Island parents and the public concerning this philosophy has arisen from time to time in the past. At this time it appears to be a more pervasive confusion, perhaps due in part to the emphasis other agencies are putting on diagnosis for access to their resources and services. There may be a need for the Department of Education to clarify the position of the Province in this regard, particularly in the case of students with significant learning issues.

4. Practically speaking, assessment will not be available to those students needing it unless issues of personnel time and the availability of sufficient assessment tools are resolved. Significant time is needed to conduct appropriate assessment. This need must be recognized by administrators, school boards, and the department in practical terms regarding caseload and job definition for persons conducting C level assessments. Keeping in mind that not all counsellors are qualified to carry out C level assessment, models of this kind of assessment intervention would need to find a way to make this service equally available to all students requiring it while maintaining equity in the availability of other school counselling services.

Due to chronic under-funding, assessment tools are currently increasingly unavailable or outdated for both level B and C level assessments. Assessment costs include regular purchase of protocols as well as replacement of outdated tools. The provision of these resources needs to be addressed in a realistic manner and responsibilities identified among Department, District and School partners.

Professional Development activities and updating are a necessary aspect of maintaining proficiency in this area. (Individual professional development would also be expected of those conducting assessments.) Counsellors have also expressed a need to have periodic opportunities for collegial group discussion, consultation, and debate of best practices in this area. Roles and responsibilities of the Department, the Districts, and PEICA need to be clarified and recognized in the appropriate

Professional Development budgets and practices. Recent efforts by the Department in supporting this type of professional development need are recognized by PEICA and have been greatly appreciated. As can be seen by the numbers registering for these opportunities, counsellors are interested in improving and maintaining their knowledge in this important aspect of school counselling.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

PEICA recommends that a separate and long-term funding strategy be developed in departmental budgets to address the reality of assessment costs in terms of personnel, time, tools, and professional development.

Conclusion

In closing, it is clear that the current situation is not in the best interests of our students and effective work within our schools as a whole. It is challenging for all partners to work collaboratively in the present atmosphere. As professionals committed to problem-solving and conflict resolution, PEICA believes that these C level assessment issues require a constructive and practical resolution process. Our intentions are that the issues and recommendations outlined above be understood as a meaningful contribution in such a process.

Appendix A

A Model for Monitoring C Level Assessment Practices

See Recommendation 1

It is recommended that the department of Education put a process in place to facilitate the development of a Standing Committee to monitor persons conducting C level assessment within the education system. This Standing Committee could consist of the Department Counselling Specialist, as well District representatives, counsellors, and psychologists. All members should have an understanding of the competencies required for these kinds of assessments. The Committee would need to work from a list of competencies and expected practices relating to C level assessment. This list would best be developed in consultation with representatives from all stakeholders, including relevant professional association such as the Prince Edward Island Counselling Association, the Psychologists' Association of Prince Edward Island and the Prince Edward Island Association of Social Workers.

- Initial competency could be defined by the minimum qualifications listed in the Department's Handbook on the Student Assessment Process. Applications for approval to do C level assessment would include information about courses, course work, practicum work, length and nature of other supervision, etc., as required.

- Further validation of qualifications can be recognized by persons having the ability to purchase and use C level assessments through registration with the company selling the assessment. (ex. Registering with Harcourt for the purchase of WISC-IV and other of their assessment materials.) Any individual has the right to apply for registration with these companies but most companies have restricted eligibility to purchase C level assessments in a manner consistent with the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* developed by the American Psychological Association (1999).

-The Standing Committee would also facilitate the development of protocols/standards and guidelines for supervision of those people in the education system working towards or in probationary periods of approval (including observation and reviewing report writing as appropriate).

- Periodic review of/renewal for approval (the term for review to be identified in conjunction with stakeholders) would take place providing established expectations concerning personal growth plans/professional development (refresher courses, readings, etc.) and minimum rate of involvement with assessment (ex., the requirement to do a certain number of assessments per year) had been met and/or minimum rate of involvement with assessment (ex., the requirement to do a certain number of assessments in a specified time period) had been met.

Appendix B

Learning Disability Guidelines from Canada/Newfoundland and Labrador Student Loan Application

Permanent Disability (learning disability guidelines for VPDF)

After a consultation with CSLP, effective September, 2005, the following documentation will now be accepted as confirmation of a Learning Disability.

A Learning Disability Assessment and accompanying VPDF will be accepted for consideration if:

- 1.. the assessment is conducted and the VPDF is completed and signed by a Registered Psychologist ***or***
- 2.. the assessment is completed by a guidance counselor and the VPDF is completed and signed by a registered psychologist, ***or***
- 3.. the assessment and the VPDF are completed and signed by a school guidance counsellor with a graduate degree in Educational Psychology (they should note the degree and date conferred). For example: MEd (Counselling psychology) 1998. (They should have specifically completed the graduate course "Assessment of Intelligence and learning Skills" #6709 at MUN or an equivalent course at another university), ***or***
- 4.. the standardized tests are conducted by a guidance intern, with the pre-assessment interview, interpretation and recommendations written by the guidance counselor possessing a graduate degree in Educational Psychology and/or the registered psychologist, indicating they have actively participated in the assessment process.