

SPED 586

**Teacher Expectations For The Tennessee
Comprehensive Assessment Program Alternative
Portfolio Process**

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for
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Introduction

General Introduction

The Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program Alternative (TCAP Alt) became law in July 2000. The concept began much earlier with the former President Bush's Education Goals 2000 (Kleinert, Farmer Kearns, & Kennedy, 1997). The 1997 Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA '97) made statewide assessment of all students—including those with severe or multiple disabilities (Ysseldyke & Olsen, 1999)—required for the 2000/2001 school year. Tennessee piloted a portfolio assessment during the 1999-2000 school year—with voluntary participation by a few hundred Special Education teachers statewide—but this past school year was the first true year of implementation.

Why to assess is an important question to answer early in the implementation process. The first two reasons should be obvious: to continue receiving federal funds and because it is the law. Kleinert *et al.* (2000) caution, though, not to forget the needs of disabled students in this “rush to accountability.” They note that IDEA '97 requires all scores be included in assessments, but not in accountability measures. However, in statewide implementation, both Kentucky and Maryland felt compelled to include alternative scores in both (Kleinert, Haigh, Farmer Kearns, & Kennedy, 2000). Kentucky and Maryland were the first two states to implement IDEA '97; Kentucky's state law preceded the federal requirement by several years.

After why to assess, how to assess becomes the main issue. How will a state know if it is getting the right numbers of students and emphasizing the right categories (Kleinert, Farmer Kearns, & Kennedy, 1997)? Kampfer *et al.* (2001) offer a 0.5 to 1 percent of the student population taking an alternate assessment as a reasonable target. This is in addition to those students who may be eligible for the regular assessment with such accommodations as more time or a designated reader. Presumably, a student's eligibility is determined by his multidisciplinary team (Denham & Lahm, 2001). The IDEA '97 wording requires an “alternate assessment”

for those who “cannot participate” in statewide testing (Ysseldyke & Olsen, 1999). It further requires that this testing align with the general education tests timing (Kleinert, Haigh, Farmer Kearns, & Kennedy, 2000). Because this timing can be a moving target and because students in consolidated classrooms do not follow the grade to grade school career of their peers, Special Education students are being left out of the assessment process. Despite the arguable fairness of classroom-based rubrics designed with teacher and student input, at best right now, assessment is something done to the Special Education population, not with them (Serafini, 2001). Although the timing and level of student and caregiver involvement in the process will get clearer in the coming years, the National Center for Education Outcomes has already expressed its dissatisfaction with the out of sight/out of mind philosophy employed up to now (Ysseldyke & Olsen, 1999).

In addition to this lack of Special Education student and caregiver involvement, 63 percent of teachers believe alternate testing reform was implemented without their input (Kampfer, Horvath, Kleinert, & Farmer Kearns, 2001). Elliott (1997) points out that the alternate assessment process in Kentucky was implemented quickly, without a feasibility study being done first. Kampfer *et al.* criticize a more mundane aspect of the implementation, that it is an “enormous amount of paperwork” (Kampfer, Horvath, Kleinert, & Farmer Kearns, 2001). Indeed, the time and resources needed to implement this alternate assessment has been a major issue for teachers (Kleinert, Farmer Kearns, & Kennedy, 1997). Kampfer *et al.* add that even now some teachers lack a good understanding of how to develop and implement portfolio assessment (Kampfer, Horvath, Kleinert, & Farmer Kearns, 2001). Kleinert *et al.* blame a lack of descriptive analysis more so than a lack of teacher training, then point out what they believe are the key concerns: why assess, who to assess, what/how to assess, when to assess, how to use the scores, and how to improve the process (Kleinert, Haigh, Farmer Kearns, & Kennedy, 2000).

Who to assess should be left to the multidisciplinary teams that create the Individual Education Programs (IEPs). But how consistently this assessment decision is applied is not easy to gauge. Kentucky bases the type of assessment on

the severity of the handicapping condition while Maryland bases it on the type of diploma the student is aiming for (regular, special, or certificate of completion), with those desiring a regular diploma not eligible (Kleinert, Haigh, Farmer Kearns, & Kennedy, 2000). What and how to assess is only a little easier, since the functional academics involved are linked to the state's education frameworks and should be linked to the IEP goals (Kleinert, Haigh, Farmer Kearns, & Kennedy, 2000). However, academic expectations are only one aspect of the portfolio assessment. The portfolios often address "life domain activities" (self-help and vocational) and also have added requirements for tracking planning, evaluation, and monitoring progress (Denham & Lahm, 2001). Ysseldyke and Olsen (1999) admit that the portfolio is not the only way to assess which students are achieving these life skills. It could be done by observation, recollection, a records review, or other testing (Ysseldyke & Olsen, 1999).

Kleinert, Farmer Kearns, and Kennedy (1997) point out the critical features of statewide assessment. It needs to be: based on key outcomes for all students; performance-based, real-life, and meaningful; driven by improvement, with accountability (rewards and sanctions); inclusive of all students. Sailor (1997) notes that inclusion is emphasized in the law. The reason portfolio assessment is considered best practice is that its content can show inclusion while assessing the lower range of abilities that need to be addressed. It can focus on the essentials while mixing in high expectations for low-functioning students (Kleinert, Farmer Kearns, & Kennedy, 1997). The portfolio's documentation should do better than observation or recollection at showing that the work of low-functioning students is age-appropriate and meaningful (Kleinert, Farmer Kearns, & Kennedy, 1997).

This assumes that state will continue to refine and improve the process year to year, with more targeted training for teachers and better technical assistance along the way. The best way to implement the alternate assessment is not yet clear, as is obvious from the preponderance of negative feedback from the teachers suffering through the early years of this alternate assessment ordeal.

Since Kentucky was the first to implement, many of its practices have been borrowed by later states (Kleinert, Farmer Kearns, & Kennedy, 1997). One is that the students show planning, monitoring, and self-evaluating of progress. Another is

documentation of “natural supports” (that is, do the Special Education students get to use the school and community services available to them in the same ways general education students do?). Peer interactions, a variety of settings, and how functional the activities are is also tracked. Functionality is in determining if the task itself is useful and meaningful, or a step toward a task that is (Kleinert, Farmer Kearns, & Kennedy, 1997). The portfolio score category qualifiers used by Kentucky (novice, apprentice, proficient, or distinguished) have also been borrowed by other states.

How to limit the subjectivity at every step and arrive at these scores objectively remains a tough issue. Kentucky started with the teacher who created the portfolio scoring it, with a follow up reliability check from the state. They have since moved away from this, in favor of a pair of teachers from Kentucky (but outside of the school district of the portfolio) doing the scoring (Kampfer, Horvath, Kleinert, & Farmer Kearns, 2001). Early on, obviously, the reliability of the scoring is a key problem to solve (Elliott, 1997). Sailor (1997) specifically addresses the need for improved scorer training and better discrimination among the score category qualifiers. This scoring reliability is a problem to solve early because teachers will not long endure what the Kentucky results have shown so far: that the hours spent on creating a portfolio only minimally correlate (.15) with its score (Kampfer, Horvath, Kleinert, & Farmer Kearns, 2001).

Kleinert, Farmer Kearns, and Kennedy (1997) are optimistic in noting that although we should expect some early problems, we can expect positives, too. The federal and state commitment to an inclusive, accountable system that will measure all students' progress with a common yardstick remains (Sailor, 1997), although the challenges of including all in measures of educational accountability are formidable. The required mix of academic, physical, social, and functional curricular frameworks to include those usually excluded looms large, but we can specify the knowledge and life skills these students will need to demonstrate. The multiple settings, use of technology, and measures of performance in nonacademic domains is improving, as are teacher perceptions of how portfolio development impacts instructional practice (Kleinert, Farmer Kearns, & Kennedy, 1997). In Vermont, the teachers are seeing the day-to-day benefit in the classroom from portfolio development (Kampfer, Horvath, Kleinert, & Farmer Kearns, 2001). This has not been the case in Kentucky, where

academics are emphasized more (Kampfer, Horvath, Kleinert, & Farmer Kearns, 2001). But even here, teaching to the portfolio does not conjure the same kind of negativity that surrounds the teaching to the test notion sometimes associated with the regular assessment process.

Research Questions

Due to conflicting messages from school administrators and a lack of familiarity with the changes in the 1997 Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA '97), teachers are submitting unwillingly to the now required alternate assessment process. The researcher has only anecdotal records from his own county and hearsay from three others on which to base the administrator pressure on teachers. However, very often it is those principals and vice principals most concerned about the influence of TCAP scores determining which Special Education students get an alternate portfolio and which ones take the "regular" TCAP. Elliott (1997) makes passing mention of schools wanting those with mild disabilities to have the alternate scoring, so these students' score will not pull down the school's overall scores. This despite Kleinert, Farmer Kearns, and Kennedy's (1997) observation that the correlation between portfolio score and the student's level of cognitive ability was very weak at .164. Even so, in practice taking statewide testing or having an alternative portfolio done is rarely ever a decision left to the multidisciplinary team.

Other dichotomies between what the process was supposed to be and do and how it has evolved over the past school year have guided this research. The overriding question to the teachers involved: is the process what you expected? Related questions to be answered concern whether the process is what it should be, and if not, how can we get it to where it should be?

Hypothesis

The TCAP Alt portfolio process as it evolved during the 2000-2001 school year did not satisfy the expectations of the teachers involved in it. The teachers expected the process to be centered on showing student progress rather than showing IDEA '97 compliance.

Specific Questions

The thrust of the questions asked concerned how clear the process was at the start contrasted with how clear it became toward the end. The researcher also asked about how well distributed was the portfolio workload and when this documentation was done. See the questionnaire for the exact questions asked. Kleinert, Farmer Kearns, and Kennedy (1997) asked similar questions during teacher interviews in Kentucky. Unfortunately, the teachers' answers were not part of their article.

Significance of the Study

The TCAP Alt process is not what it is suppose to be, or even what it will be in another year or two. Teachers have little guidance from the State and even less locally. As a result, they are having to create their own structure. Speech teachers have been some help, but portfolio creation is far from the IEP Team process the law prescribes.

Literature Review

Introduction to the Literature Review

The researcher started with the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) database at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Library. The three main successful search terms were: alternate, assessment, and portfolio. Since the concept of alternate assessment was only introduced in the 1990s, the researcher did not limit the search by year spans. In fact, three of the sources used were primary sources available to the researcher and his colleagues, so recently published that they were not yet indexed in ERIC.

Selected Topics

The five subtopics tracked for the review of the literature were the law, implementation, scoring, teacher perceptions, and the benefits of alternate assessment.

Summary of Major Findings

The literature indicates that there is more left to settle than has been resolved concerning alternative portfolio assessment implementation, especially for states that delayed implementation of IDEA '97 requirements. Kentucky is far along

in refining its alternate assessment process, but most states (like Tennessee) are still fumbling for the light switch. On the bright side, no one would settle for Special Education students being left out completely now (Serafini, 2001). Sailor (1997) opened his article with a quote from Fullen that we “can’t change anything effectively without changing everything.” A year into alternate assessment, this is the threshold we are standing on. We have seen only the initial process changes. For there to be process improvements, the attitudinal changes have to come next.

Methodology

Subjects/Participants

While attending statewide alternate portfolio reliability scoring for Tennessee in June 2001, the researcher distributed a 10-question Likert scale questionnaire to the 66 teachers in attendance (see attached). Nearly all had done alternate portfolios the previous school year and all were very familiar with portfolio requirements. Of the 66 in attendance, 52 completed surveys. See Tables 1 and 2 for these summaries.

Data Collection

The data were collected on day two of the three-day statewide scoring gathering. The answers for each question were tallied (Table 1) and averaged (Table 2), with all comments added to the Table 1 tally.

Findings

Data Analysis

If there were any surprises in the data or in the teachers’ individual comments, these were in how positive the overall tone of the comments and Likert scale breakout was. (See the “Limitations” below for why this may be true.) The answers tended to span the scale, with four notable exceptions. No one strongly disagreed that the process met their initial expectations (which is positive) or that the portfolio development mostly took place outside of class time. Statement 9: “I did the majority of the portfolio layout and data collection” had no mild or strong disagreement.

Summary of Major Findings

The main finding is that the TCAP Alt process as implemented is not what the teachers envisioned it becoming from the start. The most lopsided result was also a positive one: 35 teachers agreed (and 3 more strongly agreed) that how the portfolios were to be organized was clear by March of the school year. Thirty-three teachers agreed (with 2 more strongly agreeing) that how the portfolios were to be scored was clear by March. Unfortunately, two other lopsided results concern the teacher doing a majority of the portfolio (29 strongly agreeing; 17 agreeing) and this development taking place outside of class time (30 strongly agreeing; 13 agreeing). Other than these instances, the midrange dominated. Although true for this sample, the researcher doubts the full target population would be so centrist or so positive.

Limitations

The audience chosen may have been predisposed to be more positive about the TCAP Alt process than the overall Special Education teaching population, since these are the teachers who volunteered to attend the summertime reliability scoring session. At the very least, their negative comments may only mildly reflect the broader negativity in the target population. Another limiting factor is that only a post-process questionnaire was used, rather than pre- and post-implementation questionnaires. The teachers were asked to remember how clear the process felt in the beginning versus how clear it became toward the end. A final limiting factor is that some of the teachers in attendance either got involved in portfolio development late in the year or left it before the end. As a result, some left questions blank that the researcher converted to “neutral” during the tally. Since these omissions are better classified as “not applicable,” this column heading was changed on the tally though it was not given on the questionnaire.

Conclusions

Conclusions

It is still early. Although the temptation to say “this is not working” and table it is great, all concerned need to keep in mind that is only the first year that an alternative to assessment has been required for all states. It is and will be refined in

the coming years and this finessing, at least in Tennessee's case, does have plenty of teacher input.

Recommendations

This researcher does not believe, as many of the sources have stated, that simply saying the teachers need more training is going to solve the issues presented. What needs to happen for the alternate assessment to work and last is that it needs to be embedded in the teaching day. In Vermont it is, apparently, and in a few isolated instances in other states. However, if a majority of the portfolio is being completed when no students are around, we are obviously on the wrong track for meeting this train.

A harder problem to solve is the imbalance in the workload. Teachers in consolidated developmental classrooms are bound to get a majority of those students who are right for alternate assessments. In Sevier County, three teachers accounted for more than half of the 39 portfolios done in 2000/2001, with one teacher responsible for 11. A start toward solving this is better administrative support and full IEP team involvement.

The initial correlations are not encouraging. If the time spent on the portfolio only minimally positively correlates with its score (Kampfer, Horvath, Kleinert, & Farmer Kearns, 2001) and the correlation between portfolio score and the student's level of cognitive ability is very weak (Kleinert, Farmer Kearns, & Kennedy, 1997), the temptation to say why bother going to the extra trouble of creating a portfolio becomes great. Add to this the paranoid impression voiced by many teachers in Sevier County and elsewhere that the real purpose of the portfolio is to see if "we are doing our jobs," and the alternate assessment seems doomed.

If it were not the law, it likely would be doomed or at least suffering from serious public relations breakdowns. However, the teachers involved need to get past viewing the portfolio scores as their teaching scores. Granted, the "novice," "apprentice," "proficient," and "distinguished" monikers do not do much to dispel the idea that it is the teacher, not the learning, that is being evaluated. However, it is even less true with the alternate assessment as it is for the regular assessment that a low score implies poor teaching. When a portfolio scores low, the teacher's next steps

should be to look at the areas that brought down the score and get supports for next year to bolster these components.

References

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Table 1 TCAP Alternative Portfolio Completion Process Questionnaire Compilation

Item #	Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral or N/A	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	The TCAP portfolio process as carried out this year met my initial expectations.	4	21	13	14	0
2	How the portfolios were to be <i>organized</i> was clear to me in September 2000.	3	13	7	23	6
3	How the portfolios were to be <i>organized</i> was clear to me in March 2001.	3	35	8	5	1
4	How the portfolios were to be <i>scored</i> was clear to me in September 2000.	3	15	7	20	7
5	How the portfolios were to be <i>scored</i> was clear to me in March 2001.	2	33	10	6	1
<p>Comments:</p> <p><i>All information changed from speaker to speaker, visit to visit. We need consistency! Guidelines. There were inconsistencies in the answers to questions—depending on who was asked. I've worked on the portfolio project since the initial pilot in 1999. Experience has helped clarify. I was new at this.</i></p> <p><i>[My expectation was] of extra paperwork. The quarterly meetings were helpful. The extra work, when your caseload is 30+ is overwhelming and takes away from instruction.</i></p> <p><i>Because information “trickles” down (received second-handed) there is a very large opportunity for passing misinformation. Also, there is continuous change that disallowed continuity.</i></p> <p><i>A lot of work! My student's performance and involvement allowed her to make gains. It took all year to really figure out the process. It depends on previous experience. It has been much easier since Christy took over.</i></p> <p><i>I participated in the pilot program (1999-2000). I also was a scorer last year.</i></p> <p><i>I participated in the pilot and understood what needed to be in there.</i></p>						
6	The portfolios on my students demonstrate their degree of progress over the year.	2	8	11	22	9
7	The portfolios on my students demonstrate the degree of IDEA '97 compliance.	1	21	18	11	1

<p>Comments:</p> <p><i>Just more paperwork.</i></p> <p><i>Did more things with student than was shown in portfolio.</i></p> <p><i>I am not fully aware of the IDEA guidelines.</i></p> <p><i>My program includes the child anyway under 97 IDEA and I will continue. This Alt didn't increase the amount of inclusion.</i></p> <p><i>There is not a single piece of information gathered that shows progress nor IDEA compliance because events may occur for information gathering, but not be ongoing inclusion.</i></p> <p><i>These portfolios can be totally fabricated and manipulated to make any <u>image</u> you want to portray.</i></p> <p><i>Total extra work.</i></p> <p><i>I started my portfolios in January when I replaced a teacher who had not done anything. They didn't show as much.</i></p> <p><i>My students are so far below grade level and had very short attention spans that the portfolio does not reflect their progress.</i></p>						
8	The student and the IEP team had a lot of involvement in the portfolio layout and data gathering.	1	8	11	19	13
9	I did the majority of the portfolio layout and data collection.	29	17	6	0	0
<p>Comments:</p> <p><i>I did it all.</i></p> <p><i>This year I'll know to do more all during the year. Fixing the schedule and organizing and getting everything compiled at the end of the year took much extra time.</i></p> <p><i>The students completed the work and helped to a degree with what went into it and the making of secondary evidence—those with the ability to.</i></p> <p><i>Being new at the process, my involvement in this process was very time consuming. It was just a learning process that took time to fully grasp the whole concept.</i></p> <p><i>Students did the work, filled out the PMEs, but the extra planning for creating sheets was mine.</i></p> <p><i>No, no one was interested. "Tell me where to sign" was the assistance I received.</i></p> <p><i>Regular and Speech teacher have not been taught the process.</i></p> <p><i>With some TA help.</i></p> <p><i>Creating my forms was time consuming and tedious and frustrating because of all the ambiguities in the forms.</i></p>						
10	Most of the portfolio development took place outside of class time.	30	13	4	5	0

Comments:

Too many weekends were given up to develop a system that had to be changed after every training session.

There is no time during the day to keep up with all other teaching requirements and paperwork. The portfolio was “extra” work.

I think the overall idea of the portfolio is good, partially in that it lets more general education personnel see what we do.

My primary responsibility is instruction. I’ve incorporated forms into instruction, but development, assembly, and completion was done on my own time.

As an end result, I feel that the outcome of getting my students into the mainstream and social interacting with their peers and other faculty members has been outstanding. This program design element is extremely beneficial for my students.

Great idea for those who didn’t include their students but did prompt some making up of sheets and activities with more severe children.

So as not to take time away from students, development has to take place outside of class time. It would help if data sheets were developed by the State Department with all components present :)

The positive result is that I have changed the way I view the students. I offer more choices, even to the lowest functioning student.

I spent many nights working on the portfolios until 7 and 8 pm at night in my classroom.

At home on my personal computer.

I am not convinced that this process is the most clear way to show [the] progress of our students. It needs to have a clear-cut uniform way of completing the portfolio. I do not like it.

There was not time during class to do the portfolio. . .It took many extra hours.

The portfolio development is very time consuming. I felt like it took more time away from my teaching.

Table 2 TCAP Alternative Portfolio Completion Process Answers Averaged (for 52 Respondents)

<i>Item #</i>	<i>Item</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Neutral or N/A</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
		5	4	3	2	1
1	The TCAP portfolio process as carried out this year met my initial expectations.			3.3		
2	How the portfolios were to be <i>organized</i> was clear to me in September 2000.				2.7	
3	How the portfolios were to be <i>organized</i> was clear to me in March 2001.			3.7		
4	How the portfolios were to be <i>scored</i> was clear to me in September 2000.				2.8	
5	How the portfolios were to be <i>scored</i> was clear to me in March 2001.			3.6		
6	The portfolios on my students demonstrate their degree of progress over the year.				2.5	
7	The portfolios on my students demonstrate the degree of IDEA '97 compliance.			3.2		
8	The student and the IEP team had a lot of involvement in the portfolio layout and data gathering.				2.3	
9	I did the majority of the portfolio layout and data collection.		4.4			
10	Most of the portfolio development took place outside of class time.		4.3			