

CERTIFICATION IN TESTING PROGRAM

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Abstract

In 1977, the Canada Employment and Immigration Commission (CEIC) implemented a Certification in Testing Program which is offered to all employment counsellors working in Canada Employment Centres (CECs) across the country. Employment counsellors enter the competency-based program on a voluntary basis and may elect to follow it in English or in French. The program includes (a) a 30-hour self-study package, (b) a 3½ day group training course, (c) a formal assessment of the participant's competencies in interpreting CEIC approved tests, and (d) the recognition of successful counsellors through the awarding of a CEIC certificate in testing. By June 1980, over 1,000 employment counsellors had been certified. This article outlines the history, development, implementation procedures and evaluation instruments used in the program.

History

The CEIC has been providing a testing service to its clientele since 1967. This testing service includes the *General Aptitude Test Battery* (GATB) of which the CEIC is the Canadian custodian, as well as the *Canadian Occupational Interest Inventory* (COII).² Prior to 1977, a number of testing training packages for employment counsellors existed and there was wide variation in training content. As a result, the quality of our testing services was not consistent. In 1976, the Commission commenced the development of a national competency-based training program in testing which would require counsellors who interpret tests to demonstrate an established standard of performance.

The characteristics of the CEIC setting determined the broad parameters of the program. It was essential that the established standard reflect the actual job performance requirements within the CEC setting. In addition, the program had to be designed to accommodate the diverse educational backgrounds of CEIC counsellors. Finally, the program had to recognize that while each CEC must provide a quality testing service to its clients, all clients do not require testing and, therefore, all counsellors need not be competent in test interpretation. Therefore, the following decisions were taken:

1. The program would be offered on a voluntary basis to all CEC counsellors.
2. The program would be competency-based. The competencies required to interpret tests within the CEIC setting would be defined and training would be based specifically on these competencies.
3. Successful performance on two evaluation instruments would qualify counsellors for a CEIC Certificate in Testing.
4. This Certificate in Testing would become a prerequisite for interpreting tests to clients, regardless of the educational background of the counsellors.
5. Counsellors with appropriate educational and/or experiential backgrounds could proceed directly to the evaluation instruments without having followed the training program.
6. Certified counsellors would be responsible for screening all clients requesting and/or recommended for testing by non-certified counsellors as well as for interpreting all test results.

Program Development

As employment counsellors working within the CEC setting use a restricted number of tests, do not conduct research, and are not required to perform statistical calculations, their knowledge requirements differ from those traditionally taught at the university level. In order to determine the theoretical and practical elements of tests and measurement to be included in the program, two procedures were used.

Following study of testing and measurement texts, an extensive listing of subject components

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2. The CEIC testing service uses "La batterie générale de tests d'aptitudes (BGTA)" and "Inventaire canadien d'intérêts professionnels (ICIP)" with French-speaking clients.

was compiled. Regional testing specialists, along with specialists from headquarters, independently selected those components considered necessary within the CEC setting. Knowledge and skill components on which there was majority agreement were retained and became the framework for the development of the training manual. The training manual is briefly discussed later in the paper. For the second procedure, two additional groups of subject-matter experts (one group within the CEIC, one university group), using Bloom's (1956) taxonomy, determined the levels of knowledge and skill considered essential within the CEC setting. Subsequently, these levels of knowledge and skill became the basis for developing the evaluation instruments for the program.

The training program is divided into two components — a self-study component and a training course component.

Self-Study Component

A two part self-study manual *Using Tests in Employment Counselling — Part I — Theory; Part II — Interpretation*, was written by CEIC experts. This manual covers introductory measurement theory, basic statistics, the nature of aptitudes and interests, CEIC tests with particular emphasis on the GATB/BGTA and COII/ICIP and on interpretive strategies applicable within the CEC setting. The manual assumes no previous testing knowledge and is designed to be studied gradually.

A companion booklet, *Study Guide for Using Tests in Employment Counselling*, was developed. This booklet contains a self-administered and scored multiple-choice quiz on each chapter of the manual plus a comprehensive review quiz covering all chapters. Counsellors who volunteer for training are given 30 hours of on-the-job study time during which they are required to complete the manual and study guide. It is recommended that they achieve 80% on each study guide quiz in order to ensure their readiness for the training course component.

Training Course Component

A 3½ day training course, the *Employment and Immigration Commission Training Course in Using Tests in Employment Counselling*, was designed to be followed by counsellors after completion of the self-study component. The focus of the course is on practicing interpretive skills and strategies. Time is also provided to allow for review of the manual and clarification of any comprehension difficulties. Practical application is achieved through the use of videotapes which demonstrate the interpretation strategies, case studies, recorded role plays, constructive feedback, and repeated practice.

Evaluation Component³

On the last day of training, counsellors are required to successfully demonstrate their testing knowledge on a multiple-choice examination covering the theoretical portions of the manual. The format of this 70-item examination is similar to the quiz format used in the study guide.

Within two months of success on the examination, counsellors are required to demonstrate their test interpretation skills by submitting an audio-taped recording of a GATB or BGTA test interpretation interview done with a CEC client. Recorded interviews are evaluated according to a test interpretation interview grid which is also used by counsellors during training in order to give and receive performance feedback.

An important element of the program is to provide sufficient practice and experience with the evaluation process such that counsellor apprehension is reduced and a high level of counsellor success is promoted.

Experimentation

All training materials were reviewed and critiqued by regional testing specialists of the CEIC and necessary revisions made prior to experimentation. Training was provided to all regional staff responsible for the delivery of the program.

This training involved taking the trainers through the step-by-step lesson plans including student workbook, hand-outs, suggested exercises and feedback materials. Each trainer was then encouraged to adapt the delivery of this material to his or her personal training approach.

The program was piloted in the regions of Ontario, Quebec, Manitoba and Alberta with groups of counsellors selected by regional testing specialists. Pilot counsellors provided comprehensive feedback on all training methodology and materials, training course presentation and evaluation instruments.

Following evaluation of the pilot projects and necessary revisions to the evaluation instruments, the program was offered nationally to counsellors who volunteered for the program.

Evaluation Instruments

Two evaluation instruments were developed to assess counsellor competencies — a theory exam and a test interpretation interview grid.

The Theory Exam

The *Theory Exam* is a questionnaire containing 70 multiple-choice items covering aspects of test-

3. This component was developed in cooperation with EDUCO-INTER Inc., CEDEC Inc., and Dr. C. Jean Léveillé.

ing found in the training manual. An English and a French version of the questionnaire were constructed. The minimum score required for success is 60%. Reliability of this instrument was estimated using an alpha coefficient for different groups of 100 to 150 subjects. Coefficients obtained varied between .82 and .94 for the English version and between .70 and .86 for the French. Concurrent validity was obtained by comparing counsellor results on the multiple-choice questionnaire with those on an oral examination. Correlation coefficients were in excess of .88. Predictive validity studies are planned to determine to what extent the test results are an indication of future job performance.

The Test Interpretation Interview Grid

The *Test Interpretation Interview Grid* is a rating scale comprised of 20 performance indicators which are most significant in a test interpretation interview. Specific indicators are supplied separately to clarify each performance indicator.

Judges rate each performance indicator on a 7-point scale. A non-applicable rating (N/A) can be used for certain indicators only. When in doubt, judges may request an additional evaluation. The total score is obtained by adding the 20 ratings. The minimum score required for success is 65%. Reliability of this instrument was investigated. The stability coefficient for repeat evaluations of the same tape by all judges at two-month intervals was .95. The internal consistency of ratings, as estimated by the alpha coefficient, varied between .85 and .94 when different groups of judges and different groups of counsellors were involved.

Judges are given a three to four day training session to ensure uniformity in ratings on the evaluation grid. The session includes study of and practice with the evaluation grid, performance feedback on selected tapes, common rating errors and preparing evaluation reports.

Each judge's performance is reviewed periodically to ensure quality over time. Three types of psychometric errors are studied using Guilford's (1959) analysis of variance: halo effect, leniency error, and reaction error. To date, none of these three common types of rater errors has been found to be significant for tapes evaluated by different groups of trained raters.

Implementation

Training courses commenced in all regions in 1978 and to date, over 1,800 counsellors have been trained. Group size ranges from 5-15 counsellors. Training is co-delivered by subject matter specialists and training specialists from national, regional and district offices.

Examination scoring is done at national head-

quarters (NHQ). Following scoring, each trainee is sent a personal letter containing exam results and details of his/her areas of difficulty, if any. If unsuccessful, counsellors are invited to retake the theory examination after 60 days have lapsed. If successful, counsellors are instructed to submit a taped interview within 60 days. As tapes are received at headquarters, they are forwarded to a cadre of tape judges (field counselling consultants and registered psychologists) for evaluation. Included with each tape is a comprehensive case report prepared by the counsellor covering reasons for testing, preparation of the client for testing, score analysis, interpretation strategies used, and various test result forms (score sheets, profile sheets, self estimate sheet, etc.). As tape evaluation results are received they are forwarded to the counsellor together with the evaluator's comments. Those who succeed are officially authorized to use CEIC tests and are awarded a Certificate in Testing. Those who do not succeed are asked to submit another tape within 60 days. There is no limit to the number of trials. Furthermore, a procedure for appealing the results has been established.

The implementation of this program has been a major undertaking by CEIC, involving considerable human and financial resources. Its magnitude can be envisaged from Table 1 which contains data on the number of counsellors participating to May 31, 1980.

The 1,838 counsellors who were trained represent approximately 45% of the total number of counsellors (4,000) who work in 551 CECs. Since the program is voluntary, this is considered to be a good participation rate, sufficient to provide an adequate test interpretation service in most CECs. In the few CECs where this is not the case, special travel funds may be used to send clients to a neighbouring CEC which provides the service.

With respect to the 600 cases referred to in the footnote of Table 1, this includes 231 counsellors from whom tapes and results are being awaited and 369 who have withdrawn from the program for various reasons (e.g., promoted, transferred, resigned, retired). In spite of this turnover, interest in the program is high and reactions from counsellors, managers, union officials and others indicate that it has been very effective.

Prospective

This first application of a competency-based approach to employment counsellor training in a specialized area has been accepted nationally by all levels of the organization. The Quebec region is now doing the evaluation of audio-taped interviews. Twenty counselling specialists have received training and most of them rate tapes inde-

Table 1
Data on CEIC Counsellors Participating in the
Certification in Testing Program to 30-05-80

Region	Trained	Passed Theory Exam	Passed Tape**
Nfld.	58	58	51
P.E.I.	19	19	16
N.B.	66	75*	44
N.S.	97	87	49
Que.	322	297*	141
Ont.	755	685*	500
Man.	81	69	43
Sask.	86	80*	60
Alta/NWT	180	168*	100
B.C./YT	174	160*	94
TOTAL	1,838	1,698*	1,098***

- * A few counsellors passed the Theory Exam without taking training.
- ** All counsellors who pass the tape are awarded a CEIC Certificate in Testing.
- *** The difference of 600 between those who passed the Theory Exam and those who passed the tape evaluation is due to counsellors from whom a tape is being awaited and those who have discontinued the program.

pendently. Their results are sent to NHQ for processing. Evaluations are still done at NHQ for other regions. Intermittent verification of judge performance continues.

Parallel forms of the theory examination are currently under development in both English and French and a revision of the self-study training manuals is planned. An evaluation of the impact of the certification of counsellors in test interpretation on client services is also foreseen.

The general acceptance of this program has encouraged CEIC to begin the development of another competency-based program which focuses on

providing counsellors with advanced training in employment counselling. Development has begun in the areas of assessment, individual counselling interventions and group counselling interventions. Piloting is anticipated for 1981.

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