A study to determine how many person hours are expended by learning consultants and school psychologists to complete an evaluation from initial referral to final placement

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A STUDY TO DETERMINE HOW MANY PERSON HOURS ARE EXPENDED BY LEARNING CONSULTANTS AND SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS TO COMPLETE AN EVALUATION FROM INITIAL REFERRAL TO FINAL PLACEMENT

by
Maria Mercedes Styron

A Thesis
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Arts Degree of The Graduate School at Rowan University May, 2003

Approved by:

Date Approved: May 19, 2003
ABSTRACT

Maria M. Styron
A STUDY OF HOW MANY PERSON HOURS ARE EXPENDED BY LEARNING CONSULTANTS AND SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS TO COMPLETE AN EVALUATION FROM INITIAL REFERRAL TO FINAL PLACEMENT 2002/03
DR. STANLEY URBAN
MASTER OF ARTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

This study was conducted in order to determine the number of hours that are necessary to complete an initial evaluation by a Learning Consultant and a School Psychologist. Surveys were distributed to a random sample of Learning Consultants and School Psychologists in South Jersey. The survey consisted of eighteen areas which are a part of an initial evaluation. Participants were asked to report the amount of time spent on each area in minutes. Fifty questionnaires were mailed out and 33 were returned. Of the completed questionnaires 15 were from School Psychologists and 18 were from Learning Consultants. Twenty six additional questionnaires were collected from Learning Consultants by Dr. Stanley Urban at a symposium of Learning Consultants held in Bridgeport New Jersey. Based on the responses, it was determined that both School Psychologists and Learning Consultants spend an average of fourteen hours on an initial evaluation. These results have implications for the number of staff members that school districts may need in order to provide quality services.
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My daughters Sarah and Deanna who have been very helpful and understanding while I worked on my Thesis.

And finally, to my mother who never stopped telling me that I could do it.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Providing equal educational opportunities for all children in the United States, including those with disabilities became a reality in 1975 with the passing of the Education for All Handicapped Children, (EAHCA) which in 1990, was replaced by the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). Before the passage of this legislation, it was not unusual for handicapped children to be refused entry into schools or sent to a state residential facility or “colony” for the disabled. The passing of the EAHCA had a major impact on general education. This law made it possible for all children, handicapped or not, to be given the same educational opportunities, in the least restrictive environment. It has drawn attention to the fact that children with disabilities can often function very well in a regular classroom environment, as long as adequate support is provided. One of IDEA’s major components is the guarantee that every disabled child that meets the eligibility requirements is entitled to a free and appropriate public education. A free and appropriate public education, (FAPE), in the least restrictive environment, (LRE), is guaranteed to all disabled children in the United States between the ages of 3 and 21. Since the passage of IDEA the trend has been for more and more children with disabilities to be placed in regular education classes for a greater portion of the school day( U.S Dept of Ed., 1995, p A-40). Much anecdotal information and some studies have indicated that these placements in the LRE have been successful.

Because of IDEA, regulations have been promulgated in each state that children with disabilities must be assessed in order to receive special services. The assessments are
focused on determining eligibility for special education, ascertaining an individual’s present level of performance, and establishing educational goals and strategies to meet these goals.

After the assessment is completed, an Individual Education Plan, (IEP), is developed. In New Jersey, Individual Education Plans are developed by Child Study Teams (CST). A child study team consists of a school psychologist, a learning disabilities teacher consultant (LDTC), and a school social worker. Other specialists, if required, are also involved in evaluations. Once parental permission is obtained, child study teams must evaluate and place all children that have been referred within 90 days. Referrals can come from parents, teachers, administrators, or other interested parties. But in all cases, parents or surrogates must give permission for the CST to proceed.

The number of public and nonpublic students with disabilities in local districts, charter schools, and state agencies in New Jersey in 2001 was approximately 229,000 (NJDOE). These numbers are overwhelming and indicate a high demand for Child Study Team members. These team members must invest a great deal of time in their initial evaluations in order to accurately determine eligibility and subsequent programming decisions. During the 1999-2000 school year, child study teams in New Jersey assessed 84,301 students. That number includes initial evaluations as well as reevaluations (Licciardello, 2002).

The trend has been for this number to increase which makes it more difficult for Child Study Teams to keep up with the demands of referrals, assessments, and placements. This study will attempt to show the average number of hours spent by
Learning Consultants and School Psychologists in completing initial evaluations.

Need for Study

This study is a replication of a previous thesis study completed by Lisa Hak Licciardello while attending Rowan University (Licciardello, 2002). In Ms. Licciardello’s study she indicated that only one other study on the subject of the time involved for a CST to do an initial assessment could be located. The need for further study is self-evident because this is an area that greatly impacts on all aspects of public education. Much time is spent on these evaluations and districts are often not aware of the demands that are placed on their Child Study Team members. Further research will inform districts of the extensive efforts to complete even one evaluation and allow for an examination of future personnel needs for Child Study Team members.

Research Question

This study will collect and analyze data to answer the following research question: How many person hours are expended by a school psychologist and an LDTC to complete an evaluation from initial referral to final placement. In answering this overall question it will be possible to determine the number of hours expended on each step in the CST evaluation process.

Definitions

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) This consists of any special education and related services that are provided at public expense under public supervision and direction and without charge; meet state and federal requirements, include preschool, elementary, and secondary school education and are provided according to an Individualized
Learning Disabilities Teacher Consultant (LDTC) The LDTC is an educational specialist who assesses students and then analyzes the results in order to ascertain a particular student’s strengths and weaknesses (Rubino).

School Psychologist A School Psychologist is responsible for assessing and analyzing educational, psychological, and emotional behavior in students. They also play a key role on a multi-disciplinary team as well as act as a source of information for teachers and parents (Fischetti, 1999).

Individuals with disabilities education act (IDEA) IDEA is the federal statute that calls for a free, appropriate public education for all students with disabilities. In New Jersey, local Child Study Teams evaluate children ages 3-21 (NJDOE).

New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) This department governs all New Jersey districts and their Child Study Teams (CST) (NJDOE).

The Child Study Team (CST) This consists of a school psychologist, a learning disabilities consultant, and a school social worker. Other specialists may be included if necessary. The CST is responsible for identifying, evaluating, and placing students. They are also responsible for developing IEP’s (NJDOE).

Individualized Education Program (IEP) IEP is a written plan developed by the Child Study Team (CST). The plan determines which special education programs are necessary for an individual student’s needs. The CST also develops specific ways in which certain goals will be met. The IEP also explains why a child was placed in special services and serves as documentation that the laws of the IDEA are being met.
Least Restrictive Environment means that whenever possible children with disabilities will be in classes with children that are not disabled. In some cases children need to be pulled out for some core subjects or a paraprofessional may be necessary. But whenever possible, these children will be included in the mainstream. Only severely disabled children who cannot function in a regular classroom even with the provision of special services will be removed to special classes.

Mainstreaming a term that does not appear in any legislation, but is used to indicate regular education classes in order to meet the “least restrictive environment” requirement of IDEA.

Limitations of the Study

The major limitations of this study are, the small sample size and non-respondents. Because of the sample size and possible bias of non-respondents the results should be cautiously generalized. Also the professionals being surveyed are self reporting and this may lead to inaccuracies in the time reported for each task. A third limitation is the rounding of the time increments. While this makes for more efficient analyses it also increases the error in time estimates.

There are also several other sources of error inherent in the present study which result in further cautiousness when generalizing the results. First the content of the questionnaire was determined a priori based on the researchers experience with the CST process as specified in the New Jersey Special Education Code Chapter 14 Title 6A and may not have included all the elements that occur in a “real world setting.”
Additional sources of error may be present in the survey technique in that a response set may be present. Finally, characteristics or bias of non respondents are unknown.
Chapter 2

Review of the literature

Before the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) in 1975 it was common for children with disabilities to be removed from the mainstream of education and placed in separate classes away from their non handicapped peers. It was not uncommon for children with disabilities to be placed in an environment based on classification, e.g. mental retardation, and not in an environment that would address their specific educational needs. The primary concerns were to feed and shelter these individuals, not to educate them (OSERS, 2001). It was in the 1960's that reform began in this area and people with handicaps began to be de-institutionalized and better solutions sought. This move toward change eventually led to the passage of the Education for all Handicapped Children Act in 1975, also known as Public Law 94-142, and later Amended to Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990.

Congress enacted the Education for all Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), (Public Law 94-192) in 1975 in order to mandate that states and local districts provide an individualized education program for all students with disabilities. Subsequent amendments to EAHCA included Public Law 99-457 enacted in 1986 which offered federal incentives to adopt programs for infants and toddlers. Public Law 101-467 (IDEA) which was enacted in 1990 added individuals with traumatic brain injuries, autism, and required a transition plan on the IEP for all children at age 14.

Before the enactment of the Education for all Handicapped Children Act many children with handicaps were not afforded an education. For example, in Massachusetts
as in many other states, parents could be told to keep the children home or institutionalize them, because there were no appropriate programs in the public schools. However, after the passing of IDEA, it was mandated that every local school district now had to provide an education for handicapped children in the least restrictive environment. This in turn put a great strain on individual districts because they now had to initiate evaluation programs and educational programs that may not have been in place before. Children that were previously outside the regular school environment were now expected to be educated within the regular school system.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), protects individuals from birth. If a child has a problem that is detected at birth or soon after, a parent, physician, or other knowledgeable person can refer parents to an Early Intervention Program (EIP) that will provide necessary services until a child reaches the age of 3 at which time the child becomes the responsibility of the school district in which he resides. By legal requirement School districts are notified by the EIP providers 90 days before the child’s birth date that an eligibility meeting must be held to determine if a child meets the criteria for preschool disability. It then becomes the responsibility of the particular school district to provide appropriate placement for the child at age 3 years and 0 months. In addition, each district board of education in New Jersey is required to develop, implement and maintain a system for locating, identifying, and evaluating children with disabilities in its attendance area (NJDOE,2001). School personnel and parents are urged to identify and report problems effecting children’s educational progress. If intervention by the general education system, e.g. remedial instruction, guidance counseling, etc, is not sufficient to
ameliorate the problem, a referral to the Child Study Team (CST) becomes necessary in order to evaluate the child and determine eligibility for special education and related services (NJDOE 2001).

In order to assess individual students enrolled in a school district, New Jersey Special Education code requires that every school district employ a Child Study Team (CST). These teams are comprised of individuals in varying fields whose ultimate job it is to determine a child’s handicap and ultimately place the child in any special programs that may be necessary to allow the child to function within a normal school environment. The basic Child Study Team is usually comprised of a School Psychologist, a Learning Disabilities Teacher Consultant (LDTC), and a social worker (NJDOE 2001).

Before a student can receive special services they must be referred to the child study team for evaluation. A referral is a written request to have a child evaluated. Referrals can come from a variety of people including but not limited to parents, school personnel, or an outside agency. After a referral is made to the Child Study Team the district has twenty days to meet and decide whether an evaluation will be conducted. The meeting includes a member of the Child Study Team, the child’s regular education teacher, and a parent. If a decision to evaluate is agreed upon an evaluation plan is formulated.

All assessments are conducted on an individual basis and are comprehensive in nature. Assessment include examination of all areas that may be affecting a child’s education including if appropriate, health, vision, hearing, social, and emotional status,
general intelligence, academic performance, communicative status, and motor abilities (NJDOE, 2001).

The testing must be done by at least two Child Study Team Members, and any other Specialist in the areas of suspected disability must be also included in the testing. Parental consent must be obtained prior to testing. Multiple tests must be applied and no single test must ever be used to determine disability in a specific area. All tests must be administered in the child's native language, by certified personnel (NJDOE, 2001). Once parental consent is obtained, the school district has ninety days to carry out the evaluation and if necessary to create the Individualized Education Program (IEP) for the child.

Once the evaluation process is completed, the Child Study Team must determine eligibility, that is they must determine which category of disability is appropriate, what services the students is entitled to, and finally, formulate the IEP.

A student will only be considered to be eligible if he manifests one of the categories of IDEA. It must also be shown that the student’s disability has a negative impact on his performance in school. If a student qualifies under these condition, then the CST has thirty days to develop the student’s IEP (NJDOE, 2001).

If it is determined that an IEP is necessary, an Individualized Education Plan meeting will be scheduled. At the meeting the Child Study Team will encourage the parents to help them formulate the IEP. The IEP. Will include a current performance level, specific instructional needs and annual goals. The IEP will also list any special services the student is entitled to and ways to implement the student’s educational program. When the IEP is completed it is then implemented and the student’s progress is
measured against the benchmarks set forth in the IEP. Student progress is reported to the parents at various times throughout the year and at the end of the year an annual review is held at which time revisions are made to the IEP if necessary. Parents must be informed of annual review meetings and are encouraged to participate in any revisions that are made to the IEP. Also, at least every 3 years the student must be reevaluated and may need additional testing to determine whether additional evaluations are still necessary.

As the process of referring, evacuating, and testing goes on and may eventually lead to writing and implementing of IEP, the involvement and importance of the Child Study Team and all it’s members become apparent. All the members of a CST must hold appropriate certifications issued by the New Jersey Department of Special Education and are highly trained individuals who have many years of educational experience.

One member of the CST is the School Psychologist. A School Psychologist has specialized training in both psychology and education. They use their training and skills to team with educators, parents, and other mental health professionals, to ensure that every child learns in a safe, healthy, and supportive environment (NASP,2002). The training necessary to become a school psychologist are a minimum of 60 graduate semester hours including a year long internship. This training emphasizes preparation in mental health, child development, school organization, learning, behavior, and motivation (NASP,2002). To work as a school psychologist, one must be certified or licensed by the state in which services are provided. School Psychologists also have the opportunity to become nationally certified by the National Psychology Certification Board (NASP,2002).
School Psychologists tailor their services to the particular needs of each child and each situation. School psychologists use many different approaches. Among the services that School Psychologists may provide are consultation, assessment, intervention, prevention, education, research, planning, and health care provision (NASP, 2002).

Consultation strategies used by School Psychologists may involve helping others to understand child development and how it affects learning and behavior. Assessment strategies may include such things as assessing academic skills, learning aptitudes, or social skills. In the area on intervention, psychologists may be called upon to work face-to-face with children and families in order to provide counseling. In the area of health care provision, School Psychologists are called upon to collaborate with school and community based personnel to provide a comprehensive model of school-linked health service, or to develop partnerships with parents and teachers to create healthy school environments (NASP, 2002).

The prevention component requires that School Psychologists identify potential learning difficulties, and design programs for children at risk of failure. And the education component allows School Psychologists to develop programs in areas such as classroom management techniques, substance abuse, crisis management, and teaching and learning strategies. While the research and planning aspect helps to generate new knowledge about learning and behavior, it also allows for the evaluation of existing academic programs (NASP, 2002).

The majority of School Psychologists are employed in public and private school systems. However, school psychologists practice in a variety of other settings including:
school based health centers, clinics, hospitals, private practice, university, community, state agencies, and other institutions (NASP, 2002).

The next member of the CST is the Learning Consultant. A Learning Consultant must also have a Masters degree and complete an internship program. In addition a Learning Consultant must possess a standard teaching certificate and have at least three years experience in the teaching field. Learning Consultants are also certified by the State of New Jersey following the completion of an approved course of study (ALC, 2002). The role of the learning consultant is an important one because the Learning consultant has experience as a classroom teacher and is therefore qualified to make assessments and to detect a student's strengths as well as his weaknesses. The Learning Consultant is also key in designing strategies to help the student succeed. Learning Consultants can also aid other staff in understanding a students particular needs. Learning Consultants like School Psychologists work primarily in public or private schools. They may also be employed in other places such as colleges and universities, or they may choose to be in private practice.

While a CST has many responsibilities, the majority of their time has been found to be spent on assessment. A seminal study done by Smith (1984) on the roles and functions of a School Psychologist found that they were spending about 55% of their time is assessment activities. However, despite this data, the literature has generally been deficient in investigating the time and components inherent in psychological evaluations. (Fischetti, 1999).
During the 1970's and 1980's, several critical studies found that School Psychologists spent approximately 30 to 60% of their time on student assessment (Anderson, Cancelli, & Kratochwill, 1984; Becker, McCoughlin & Kukic, 1975; Lacayo, Sherwood, & Morris, 1981). In the 1990's, School Psychologists continue to allot similar percentages of time to the assessment of children and adolescents (Huebner, 1993; Hutton, Dubes, & Muir, 1992; Roberts& Rust, 1994). McDaid and Reifman (1996) analyzed psychological assessments of 1,684 students in the San Diego (CA) schools and found that assessment consumed 35.1% of a Psychologists day (Fischetti, 1999). Despite the range of the previously mentioned studies, data on the hours devoted to separate components of the assessment process have been neglected in research.

A study conducted by Barbara A. Fischetti (1999), a member of the National Association of School Psychologists addresses time spent on some of these individual components of assessment. The study “sought to obtain information from suburban Connecticut school systems regarding time requirements for psychological evaluations and the components that comprise a comprehensive evaluation. Twenty-two school psychologists from nine suburban Connecticut school systems volunteered to participate in the study. School psychologists completed daily logs with respect to activities and time requirements for three evaluations. Daily logs tracked intervals in fifteen minute blocks for the following activities: folder review, classroom observations, conferencing, parent interview, parent conference, teacher conference, test administration, student review, outside agency contact, scoring of assessment results, interpretation of data, report writing and planning, and placement team meetings (Fischetti, 1999).
The school districts involved in the study were all affluent as demonstrated by per pupil expenditure which range from a low of $8,202 to high of $11,941. The percent of minority students was less than 10% for all but one system (22.9%). Special education enrollments ranged from a low of 9.5% to a high of 14.8%. The non-English home language percentage was considerably below the state average of 12% for all the systems (Fischetti, 1999).

The results of the study found that the average time spent on psychological evaluation was 15.66 hours with a standard deviation (SD) of 5.43. The range of hours for a psychological evaluation averaged a low of 7.25 to a high of 32.75. Test administration and report writing were the most time consuming activities, requiring an average of 3.24 hours (SD=1.49) and 3.37 (SD=1.43) respectively. The smallest amount of time was on actual child interviews. All the other areas listed fell somewhere between .56 and 3.37 hours (Fischetti, 1999).

Evaluation time for regular education students found eligible for special education services averaged 16.81 hours (SD=5.93). Regular education students deemed not eligible for special services required an average of 13.95 (SD=4.12) for evaluation. Evaluation time requirements increased by level with the elementary level requiring an average of 14.85 hours (SD=5.11), the middle school level requiring an average of 17.50 hours (SD=5.96). Not surprisingly, students exhibiting social/emotional difficulties required the longest evaluation time of 24.67 hours (SD=5.57) on average. The psychological evaluation of learning disable children on average required 15.92 hours (SD=4.86) (Fischetti, 1999).
A study done in New Jersey by Lisa Hak Licciardello (Licciardello, 2002), a graduate student at Rowan University, also sought to assess the amounts of time spent on individual aspects of psychological evaluation by Child Study Teams. The participants of this study were ten School Psychologists and fourteen LDTC’s from several counties located in Southern New Jersey. Questionnaires containing a delineation of various aspects of an evaluation were mail out to randomly selected participants. The various areas included in the questionnaire were as follows: review of referral, discussion of referral, review of cumulative file, review of other records, writing of evaluation plan, observations, preparation for testing, testing, test review, and correction, report writing, integration of findings with team, writing of integrated summary, meeting with parents, writing the IEP, follow-up meeting, and other. Participants were also asked how long they had been at their positions and whether they spend most of their time with elementary, middle school, or high school students.

In this study, testing was again found to be one of the most time consuming components. 126 minutes was found to be the average amount of time spent on testing by LDTC’s, however, the range went from 60 minutes to a high of 240 minutes. School Psychologists reported spending an average of 126 minutes testing students with a standard deviation of 31 minutes, and a range that spanned from 90 to 180 minutes. Another time consuming component was writing reports. Learning consultants averaged 85 minutes in this area with a standard deviation of 29 minutes. The range extended from 60 to 120 minutes for this activity. School Psychologists allocated 134 minutes of their time on average to report writing, the standard deviation was 52 minutes and the range
went from 60 to 240 minutes. Other time consuming components included meeting with the parents, which averaged 60 minutes and writing the IEP's, which averaged 63 minutes (Licciardello, 2002).

The area reported by LDTC's as taking the least amount of time was preparing for testing. Only an average of 15 minutes is spent on this activity. Some of the other activities also required little time, some of these were reviewing the cumulative file, reviewing other records, follow-up meetings and writing the integrated summary all of which averaged less than 20 minutes each. The times for other components was varied. The average time spent on each activity ranged between 26 and 51 minutes for LDTC's and 22 to 57 minutes for School Psychologists (Licciardello, 2002).

Both the Fischetti and the Licciardello studies found that testing is the most time consuming component of an initial evaluation by a Child Study Team. Both studies also showed how time consuming an initial evaluation is over all. The results of both of these studies are significant because they bring attention to how much is expected of a Child Study Team. More research needs to be done in order to explicate the evaluation process and demonstrate the time demands. After all initial evaluations are not the only job that is expected of a CST.
Chapter 3

Design of the Study

Population

The population used to conduct this study were randomly selected School Psychologists and Learning Disabilities Teacher Consultants (LDTC's) from Burlington County, New Jersey. The participants were chosen at random by selecting every third name from a list of all the Child Study Teams in South Jersey. Also, the questionnaires were distributed by Dr. Stanley Urban of Rowan University at the Annual symposium for Learning Consultants held in Bridgeport, New Jersey on October 18, 2002. The meeting participants were encouraged to complete the questionnaire and return it to Dr. Urban.

Method of Sample Selection

Participants were selected by choosing every 3rd district from a directory that lists all of the School Psychologists and all of the Learning Disabilities Teacher Consultants (LDTC’s) in all the districts in Burlington County. Responses obtained at the October 18, 2002 Symposium were voluntary.

Instrumentation

Potential participants were either mailed a questionnaire or in case of the Symposium, given a questionnaire that required them to indicate amounts of time spent on various components of an initial evaluation. They were asked to write the amount of time spent in minutes and to round off to the nearest quarter hour.

The questionnaire included seventeen specific items and one open ended item that
asked for general comments. Participants were also asked to indicate whether they were a School Psychologists or an LDTC and to indicate how long they had been in their particular field. They were also asked whether they spent the majority of their time with elementary, middle, or high school students.

Collection of Data

The mailed surveys were sent to the Director of Special Services for each school district. Each director was sent a cover letter explaining the survey and the purpose of the study. Along with the cover letter (Appendix A), each director was sent two copies of the survey (Appendix B) and was also told that they could make more copies if necessary. Directors were given the option to participate if they were in any way involved in initial evaluations. Also included in the packet were two self addressed stamped envelopes. Participants were also given the option of providing their addresses in order to have the results of the study forwarded to them. Surveys were also distributed by Dr. Stanley Urban at the Annual Symposium for Learning Consultants in Bridgeport, New Jersey on October 18, 2002.

The survey consisted of eighteen questions which were to be answered by estimating the amounts of time that are spent on various components of an initial evaluation. The amounts of time were to be rounded off to the nearest quarter hour.

Research Design and Analysis of Data

Upon receipt of the completed surveys, the amount of time spent on each component of an initial evaluation will be averaged across all respondents. The results of each separate component will be reported for LDTC’s and School Psychologists. Results
will be reported in a table which will show the average, standard deviation, range, and number of responses. Any additional comments provided by the individual participants under the general comments section will also be reported in the findings.

Information received from this survey will be examined thoroughly and an attempt will be made to interpret the results into an understandable summary. The question: How many person hours are required by a School Psychologist and a Learning Disabilities Teacher Consultant to complete an initial evaluation from beginning to end will ultimately be answered by the responses on the completed surveys.
Chapter 4
Analysis and Interpretation of Data

Introduction

Twenty four Child Study Team Directors from South Jersey were sent an introductory letter and a copy of the survey described in Chapter Three. The letter asked the Directors to provide their School Psychologists and Learning Consultants with a copy of the survey, and to return the completed surveys in the enclosed self addressed stamped envelopes as soon as possible. Each Director was sent two copies of the survey and two return envelopes. The Directors were also encouraged to complete the survey themselves if they were involved in assessments along with their other duties. Fifty surveys were mailed, and thirty-three were returned. Since multiple copies were made in several districts, and because district names and respondent names were not included, the number of districts that actually responded is unknown. The number of respondents from each district is also unknown. Twenty-six additional surveys were also completed by Learning Consultants at the Annual Symposium for Learning Disability Consultants held in Bridgeport New Jersey. The data collected both by mail and at the symposium resulted in 59 completed surveys. Responses were tabulated in order to determine the average quantity of time expended in completing each listed activity. Comments made by the respondents were content analyzed and reported.

Results

The average amount of time spent on each component of the Child Study Team process are reported in minutes. Results are reported in tabular form and include the number of responses, the mean, the standard deviation and the range of each response. For each of the areas that were surveyed, the mean, standard deviation, range and number of responses are reported. The completed surveys were segregated with responses from Learning Consultants, and responses from School Psychologists reported separately.
Learning Consultants responses from the mail survey and the Symposium were combined into one group.

The information in Table 1 shows the average amount of time spent by Learning Consultants in each surveyed area. There were a total of 44 learning consultants surveyed, however any item left blank was discarded. For example the review of the referral category had only 43 responses, therefore this was the number used when calculating the average for that particular category. An examination of the table shows that in our first category, review of the referral, the mean time expended was 27 minutes with a standard deviation of 15 minutes. The range of this category went from 0 minutes to 60 minutes. The area that seems to require the greatest amount of time for Learning Consultants, during an initial evaluation, is the testing of students. It was reported that 138 minutes was the average amount of time spent on testing, with a standard deviation of 40 minutes. The range of results in this category varied from 75 minutes to 270 minutes. Report writing was the second most time consuming activity. Learning consultants averaged 111 minutes in this area with a standard deviation of 57 minutes, with a range from 60 minutes to 270 minutes. There were several other areas that were time consuming, including, writing the IEP which averaged 72 minutes and meeting with the parents which averaged 62 minutes.

The area that seems to take the least amount of time is preparing for testing. Only an average of 20 minutes is spent on this area with a range going from 0 minutes to 60 minutes. Most of the Learning Consultants that reported spending time in this area reported that the time was spent selecting which tests to use. There were a few other areas with a relatively small amount of time expended. These areas include a review of the referral averaging only 27 minutes, discussion of the referral with others averaging only 26 minutes and follow-up meeting averaging 28 minutes.
Some of the numbers reported in the Learning Consultant surveys were surprisingly quite varied. For example the range in the “Writing the IEP” category extended from 20 minutes to 300 minutes. The area called “other” in the survey had various open responses including the following: case management meetings, researching for recommendations, unofficial counseling, and eligibility conferences.

The surveys included 2 questions for which the results were not reported in Table 1. The participants were asked how long they had been working as Learning Consultants, and whether they worked mostly with elementary or secondary school children or both. Of the 44 participants 40 filled in the amount of time they had spent working as a Learning Consultant. The number of years the Learning Consultants had as experience was an average of 10.2 years with a standard deviation of 7.21 years. The range went from a low of 1 year to a high of 30 years. Twenty-three of the Learning Consultants reported working with elementary school children, seven with secondary school children, and 14 with both elementary and secondary.

The information in Table 2 shows the average amount of time spent by School Psychologists in each surveyed area. The most time consuming area reported by School Psychologists was report writing. This area had an average of 140 minutes spent on it, with a standard deviation of 29 minutes. The range went from a low of 90 minutes to a high of 180 minutes. For School Psychologist and the Learning Consultants a large amount of time was spent testing. However for the School Psychologist testing came in slightly lower than report writing. The average reported by the School Psychologists for testing was 133 minutes with a standard deviation of 24 minutes. The range went from 105 minutes to 180 minutes. Meeting with parents was also a time consuming area for School Psychologists. The average reported in this area was 69 minutes with a standard deviation of 14 minutes. The range went from 60 minutes to 90 minutes. Discussion of the referral with various people also appears to be time consuming for the School
Psychologists. The survey separated the discussion question into 3 categories: discussion with parents, discussion with teacher, and discussion with other. When these activities are combined, the School Psychologist spends an average of 103 minutes altogether in discussion of the referral.

The area where the least amount of time was reported was the review of other records. This area had an average of 21 minutes with a standard deviation of 14 minutes. The range went from 0 minutes to 60 minutes. Another area which appears to consume very little time is preparation for testing, which averaged only 22 minutes. This area had a standard deviation of 13 minutes and a range that went from a low of 15 minutes to a high of 60 minutes. The area labeled “other” showed an average of 15 minutes expended; however, most participants did not provide specifics as to what “other” meant to them.

The average times spent on the remaining areas varied. The averages ranged from 24 minutes to 59 minutes. Like the Learning Consultants, School Psychologists were also asked two questions that were not reported in Table 2. They were asked the length of time they have worked as a School Psychologist, and whether they work with elementary school children, secondary school children or both. All fifteen participants answered this question. The average amount of time working as a School Psychologist by the participants was 9.07 years. The standard deviation was 8.77 years with a range that went from a low of 2 years to a high of 30 years. Of the fifteen participants 7 reported working with the elementary school children, 6 with secondary school children and 2 reported working with both.

In comparing the results of both the Learning Consultants and the School Psychologists, several similarities can be seen. Both groups had very similar times for several areas. For example the area of testing was extremely close with Learning Consultants averaging 138 minutes and School Psychologists averaging 133 minutes. Report writing was also an important areas for both. The areas of report writing and
testing were the most time consuming for both groups. However while testing was first for Learning Consultants it was second for School Psychologist and report writing was first for School Psychologists and second for Leaning Consultants. The average results for all areas were very close for both groups.

If we look at the ranges in both groups it is apparent that time expended ranged from 0 minutes to sometimes as high as 300 minutes. This was due to the fact that some participants combined several areas which in turn left some other areas as zero. Both the inflated numbers in some areas and the zeroes in others had a large effect on the means of several areas.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Review of referral</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0-60</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion of referral with teacher</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5-60</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion of referral with parent</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0-90</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion of referral with other</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0-60</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of cumulative file</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>8-180</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of other records</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>0-180</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing of evaluation plan</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0-300</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>15-120</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation for testing</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>0-60</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testing</td>
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<td>40</td>
<td>75-270</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test Review and corrections</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>15-150</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report writing</td>
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<td>57</td>
<td>60-270</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration of findings with team</td>
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<td>29</td>
<td>10-150</td>
<td>42</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing integrated summary</td>
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<td>0-120</td>
<td>42</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meeting with the parents</td>
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<td>20-105</td>
<td>44</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing the IEP</td>
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<td>20-300</td>
<td>44</td>
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<tr>
<td>Follow-up Meeting</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>0-60</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0-120</td>
<td>44</td>
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Table 2
School Psychologists
Average Time of Each Component (in minutes)

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Component</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Discussion of referral with</td>
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<tr>
<td>teacher</td>
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<tr>
<td>parent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discussion of referral with other</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>0-120</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of cumulative file</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15-30</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Review of other records</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>0-60</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing of evaluation plan</td>
<td>28</td>
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<td>0-60</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>23-135</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation for testing</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15-60</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Testing</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>105-180</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test Review and corrections</td>
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<td>40</td>
<td>0-180</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report writing</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>90-180</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration of findings with</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>0-60</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>team</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing integrated summary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meeting with the parents</td>
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<td>60-90</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing the IEP</td>
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<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Follow-up Meeting</td>
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<td>29</td>
<td>0-90</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0-90</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

There were fifty nine completed surveys collected. Forty - four were from Learning Consultants, and 15 were from School Psychologists. The collected surveys were divided into two separate groups and the mean, standard deviation and range of responses was calculated for each item. When the results of the 59 surveys were inspected it became apparent that the responses from both The Learning Consultant and the School Psychologists were very similar. The same two areas, testing and report writing, were reported by both groups as their most time consuming areas. Both groups also indicated similar expenditure of time in discussion of the referral. Meeting with parents also seemed to be a time consuming area reported by both groups. One area that was surprisingly low was preparing for testing. The overall amount of time spent on an initial evaluation by a School Psychologist was 829 minutes or about 14 hours per case. Similarly Learning Consultants spent an average of 840 minutes per case which is also about 14 hours per case. There was no meaningful difference in the overall time spent on evaluations by either group.
Chapter 5
Summary, Findings, and Conclusions

Summary

A random sample of Learning Disabilities Teacher Consultants and School Psychologists employed in School districts in South Jersey was obtained to determine the number of person hours necessary for a Learning Disabilities Teacher Consultant and a School Psychologist to conduct an initial evaluation as mandated by New Jersey special education code and federal law. Eighteen areas of an initial evaluation were identified and participants were asked to report the amount of time spent on each area in minutes. Of the fifty surveys which were mailed, 33 were returned. Twenty-six additional Learning Consultant surveys were collected at a symposium by Dr. Urban. Based on the responses we can ascertain that both Learning Consultants and School Psychologists spend an average of about 14 hours on completing an initial evaluation. These findings have definite implications for future staffing of Child Study Teams.

Discussion and Implications

As stated in Chapter I this study is a replication of a previous thesis project done by Lisa Hak Licciardello at Rowan University (Hak-Licciardello, 2002). The original survey was revised, and the number of surveys that were distributed was increased. Consequently the validity and generalizability of the results increased. While the original study had 24 respondents, the current study has 59 respondents. However the results of both studies yield very similar findings.

For example, the original survey showed the amount of time spent on an initial evaluation as fourteen hours by School Psychologists and ten hours by learning Consultants. The current study found that fourteen hours are expended by both occupations. Also several of the areas were extremely similar in their results, these areas
included: testing, meeting with parents, and writing the IEP. These areas were nearly identical for both professions in both studies.

While the results of this second study may provide reliability to the first study, problems still arose in the current study. The original survey was revised for the second study, however many respondents were still confused by some areas of the survey. For example, like in the original study respondents were again asked to round their estimated average time spent on a particular areas to the nearest quarter hour using .15, .30, .45, and .60. However, some respondents still used numbers like .25, .50, .75 and 1. This made some of the results difficult to interpret with any degree of accuracy. Therefore some of the results may have been incorrectly reported in the tables.

Even though the original survey was revised for this study in order to make it more understandable, further revision may be needed until all the respondents are able to understand how to correctly report the time increments. This would allow for the results to be more accurate.

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that School Psychologists and Learning Consultants are spending a great deal of time conducting initial evaluations. The majority of the time spent by both Learning Consultants and School Psychologists is on testing children or writing reports. There are however other areas of the initial evaluation which are also very time consuming. Some of the other most time consuming areas were: meeting with parents and writing the IEP.

The initial evaluation is only a small part of the Learning Consultants and School Psychologists role. They also must act as case managers, consultants to teachers and in-service providers, as well as doing re-evaluations, and annual review conferences. With the number of children that need initial evaluations growing according to the New Jersey State Department of Education, the need for further study of Child Study Teams becomes
a necessity if the intent of the federal and state mandates are to be implemented. School districts and the State Department of Education must develop realistic staffing ratios of CST members to children if quality services are to be provided. Hopefully this study will contribute data that will justify increased staffing of CST’s in order to provide quality services in a timely manner.
References


New Jersey Department of Education (2000). Office of Special Education programs. District Resident Enrollment, Speech and Child Study Team Classification Rates for the Last Five Years.


Appendix A

Cover letter to Child Study Team Director
October 16, 2002  
To: Special services coordinator  
Re: Survey  

Dear Colleague,

I am a graduate student at Rowan University and I am currently working on my Thesis. The research question to be answered in my thesis follows here: What is the amount of time necessary for a School Psychologist and an LDTC to complete an initial evaluation from start to finish. I would greatly appreciate it if you would pass this questionnaire on to the School Psychologist and the LDTC on your Child Study Team. If you also participate in evaluations, then you may copy the survey and complete it as well. I have also enclosed a self addressed stamped envelope to make it easier for you to return the completed surveys.

Anonymity is guaranteed as the questions are not coded in any way. Because of the lack of coding it would be impossible for me to follow up with you, so your initial cooperation would be greatly appreciated. If you would like to be informed of the results then you may either put your name on the questionnaire or mail me your address separately.

Once again allow me thank you in advance for taking the time to assist me with this survey. If you have any questions or concern please do not hesitate to call me at (609) 268-3118.

Thank You,

Maria M. Styron
Appendix B

Survey
**Survey of Person Days Necessary to complete an initial Child Study Evaluation**

Dear Colleague,

We are interested in completing an exploratory study of the person days necessary to complete a CST evaluation from initial referral to final disposition. Please respond to each item by rounding your time to the nearest quarter hour (ex. Review of cumulative files .45hrs. If you do not perform an item listed below, please enter 0hrs. We realize that each case is different and time spent can vary greatly, so we are asking for the average amount of time spent on each item. We are seeking realistic data, so please be as accurate as possible.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Spent</th>
<th>to the nearest quarter hour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(i.e. 1.30 hrs = 1 and 1half hours)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Review of referral
- Discussion of referral with teacher
- Discussion of referral with teacher
- Discussion of referral with other
- Review of cumulative file
- Review of other records
- Writing of evaluation plan
- Observations
- Preparing for testing
• Testing

• Test review and corrections

• Report writing

• Integration of findings with other team members

• Writing integrated summary

• Meeting with parent

• Writing the IEP

• Follow up meeting with teachers

• Other

• Are you an LDTC or a School Psychologist?

• How long have you been working in this position?

• Do you work primarily with elementary, secondary, or both age levels?

• Name and school district (optional)

Your help with his survey is greatly appreciated. If you have any other thoughts or comments, please list them below. Thank You in advance for your time and assistance with this study.