The five principles of needs based assessment

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Regional school cluster “Together to school again”

- 50 regular schools mainstreaming, 1 special school with supportive function
- Schools intend to work according to principles of adaptive education and a needs based approach or assessment (NBA)
- Teachers and special needs coordinators → coaches and schoolpsychologists (assessment-teams)
Teacher and special needs coordinator: NBA

They systematically follow a needs-based cycle, goal-directed, e.g.:
1. Plan for the entire group
2. Plan for subgroup(s) of students with same needs
3. IEP for several students with specific needs

Ongoing assessment to evaluate and adjust the plans, according to the five principles of NBA (a problem solving strategy)
Assessment team

‘Special teachers’, coaches, schoolpsychologists, social workers, and others; all work according to the 5 principles of NBA

→ All involved in and outside the school:
  - same mission and same language
  - ongoing cycle of planning and evaluating
Principles needs-based assessment: assessment

1. is transparent, operating in accordance with systematic procedures
2. is goal-directed; aims at solving problems & recommendations on learning and teaching
3. uses a transactional frame of reference
4. promotes collaborative partnership with the teacher, parents and child
5. focuses on positive aspects of child, teacher, peers, school and parents
1. Systematic procedures

Assessment and planning = complex processes
Decisions have a large impact on student
Therefore: systematic procedures
- Clear stages, step by step
- Checklists as a reminder, per stage
- Rules to protect against common mistakes, e.g.:
  - consider only one possible diagnosis and only find evidence to confirm
  - consider only one solution or recommendation
  - make decisions that someone else should make (responsibilities)
Five stages

1. Intake

2. Strategy

3. Diagnosis

4. Needs assessment

5. Recommendations
5 stages

- Intake: questions, requests and expectations? what do people involved want to achieve?
- Strategy: what decisions have to be made? what do we already know? what more do we need to know?
- Diagnosis: collect information to answer selected questions
- Needs assessment: goal of plan: what do student, teacher (and parents) need to achieve goal?
- Recommendations: a desirable educational plan: is this achievable for this student, this teacher, these parents?
Transparant procedures

- It is clear how the special needs coordinator and school psychologist work and why:
  - Stages are clear (no mystification)
  - Teacher, student and parents actively participate in each stage
  - They can follow the process with checklists
  - Information is written down and all involved have a copy (no misunderstandings)
2. Goal-directed recommendations

Goal = to answer question and solve problem. Often too much irrelevant data collected, therefore:

- What exactly is the question?
- How can we best answer this question?
- What do we need to know and why?
- If we know that ..., then we can recommend ... (plan).
Goal = recommendation accepted by teacher & student

- What does teacher want to achieve?
- What does student want to achieve?
- What do parents want to achieve?
- Which ideas do they have themselves?
- Recommendation assessor: do they agree? Decisions and appointments

→ Flexible application of stages: range 2 – 20 hours!
3. Transactional frame of reference

- Ecological assessment
- Not only ‘this student’, but: “this student in this school, this classroom, with this teacher and these parents”
- Goodness of fit between student’s needs – the learning environment:
  - Risk factors (problems)?
  - Protective factors (strengths)?
Implications: child’s needs are central theme

- Interactions are crucial: teacher – student compatibility
- Not only assessing the child (labels), but also assessing the quality of the learning environment and – if necessary – the parenting situation
- Not only testing the child in a separate room, but also observations in the classroom: teaching practices, such as: organisation, instruction, feedback, behaviour-rules
Goal: what does this student need to acquire this goal?

- This student needs:
  - Tasks that are ...
  - Instruction that focuses on ...
  - Feedback that stresses ...
  - Material that is ...
  - Classmates that ...
  - A teacher who ...
  - ........................................
4. Partnership with teacher, student and parents: Together

- Goal of assessment is to answer the questions of teacher, student, parents and to make decisions in the benefit of the child
- Teacher = educational expert
- Student = owner of learning process
- Parents = hands on experts
- Assessor benefits from their knowledge
- They can function as co-assessors
Partnership school – parents: communication

Training for special needs coordinators and teachers: Communicating with parents, according to principles of NBA

- This is how we work (steps) and what we expect and value
- Together we share the same goal: the benefit your child; our pupil
- There are difficulties and also good news
- Children usually behave differently at home and in school
## A student’s own plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I can already ...</th>
<th>In ... weeks</th>
<th>I want to be able to ...</th>
<th>I will ....</th>
<th>My teacher can help me by ....</th>
<th>My parents can help me by ...</th>
<th>Peers can help me by ...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

In ... weeks, I want to be able to ... and I will .... My teacher can help me by .... My parents can help me by ... Peers can help me by ...
5. Positive aspects: strengths

- Child: capacities, interests, intelligence, social skills, creativity, sports, drawing
- Instructional environment: good teaching skills, e.g. differentiated instruction, extra help well organised, extra time for practice, effective motivation techniques
- Classroom & peers: acceptance, social climate
- School: good teaching methods, good communication with parents
- Parents: stimulate and support their child
Function of positive aspects

- They improve communication school – student – parents
- Enhance feelings of competence and motivation, give hope
- Shed light on diagnosis
- What does work well? This can be elaborated in educational plans
- Enhance the chance of successful mainstreaming (committee decisions for SE with and without positive aspects)
Meeting in Brussels (nov, 2005): Trends in assessment

1. Assessment clear process, transparent and understandable for teacher, parent and student.
2. On the one hand standardized procedures, on the other hand flexible application, only when necessary. Assessment should be goal-oriented \( \rightarrow \) decisions concerning the student’s benefit.
3. Contextual approach. Not only focus on student, but also on classroom practices, teacher-behaviour and parents.
4. Partnership with teachers, parents and students; they should be involved during the assessment process. Self-assessment by students and the use of portfolio’s.
5. Also focus on the strengths of students, peers, teachers and parents.