Chapter 9 - Students' Behavior During the Assessment Process

A very important part of the assessment process is the observation of the student during the assessment process. These observations can provide valuable insight into the student’s learning style, areas of struggle, academic approach, stronger and weaker modalities (avenues through which information comes to us i.e. visual modality, auditory modality), self esteem, frustration levels, resiliency, communication skills and much more. It should also be noted that the way a child approaches different types of evaluations may be very similar to the style he/she uses in the classroom. There are many behaviors that should be observed when administering tests. That is why it is very important for the evaluator to write down these observations which will also facilitate report writing (next step)

A- Possible affects of Examiner variables

The evaluator will need to make sure that any conditions that may affect test outcome that are directly related to the examiner i.e. examiner style, gender, examiner tension, examiner expectations etc.) be considered. These types of variable can greatly affect a student’s performance since the child may be preoccupied with the examiner’s presence.

B- Observing overt signs of tension

Many students will exhibit signs of tension in many ways. Some internalize it and some externalize it. Overt tension are observable behaviors indicative of underlying tension that may affect the outcome of the test results. According to Pierangelo & Giuliani, some overt signs of behavior often manifested by children include:

- Oppositional behaviors (behaviors that test the limits and guidelines of the examiner)
- constant leg motion
- little or no eye contact with the examiner
- consistent finger or pencil tapping
- singing or making noises while being tested
- keeping jacket on or a hat almost covering his/her face etc.

If this type of tension is extreme you may want to explore the possibility that the results may be minimal indications of ability.

C-Behaviors that are observed in the Initial Adjustment to the Assessment Process

How students adjust to the testing situation can vary greatly depending on the student’s personality, age, level of struggle in school and at times gender. Several factors need to be considered when the student first encounters the testing situation with the evaluator. The evaluator will need to look at:
1. How the student initially adjusts to the testing situation: The key to any adjustment period is not necessarily the initial reactions but the duration of the period of maladjustment. Children are usually initially nervous and uptight but relax as time goes on with the reassurance of the evaluator. The evaluator will want to note the extent and duration of any discomfort throughout the sessions. This may indicate that the student may be harboring more serious problems that need to be explored.

D- Behaviors that are observed in the student’s verbal interactions with the evaluator

The evaluator will want to specifically make note of how the student verbally interacts with him/her during this process. The evaluator will want to be aware of: the following:

1. A student who is verbally hesitant may be so because of certain speech or language factors like immature speech patterns, and expressive language problems.
2. A student who is verbally hesitant may be so due to low intellectual ability.
3. However, on the other hand, some children with high levels of anxiety may tend to vent this through constant verbalizations. This behavior pattern will interfere with the process and the evaluator may have to constantly remind the student to focus on the task at hand.

E- Behaviors that are observed in the student’s attempt to adapt to the requirements of the assessment process

The evaluator will gain a great deal of insight into the student by observing his or her ability to adapt or shift from one task to another. This will be an important factor in determining learning style and may be one predictor for successful outcome of a task. Other factors that the evaluator will want to know include:

1. A child who loses interest quickly may be immature, overwhelmed or preoccupied. Some of these reactions may be normal for the early ages.
2. The ability of an individual to sustain interest or focus on a task may be the result of available psychic energy. This energy may be drained by emotional turmoil thereby leaving very little for sustained concentration. As a result this lack of energy will affect the child’s ability to adapt and shift from task to task.

F- Behaviors that are observed in the amount and type of effort shown during the assessment process

A student who tries hard to succeed may do so for several reasons. He/she may enjoy success and find the tasks challenging. This type of student is normally not thrown by a mistake and can easily shift to the next task without difficulty.

However, a child who is oppositional or uncooperative may be a child who needs to be in control. The more controlling a child is, the more out of control they actually feel and controlling everything makes life more predictable. If they can control a situation or person they know what
to expect. If they cannot they do not adapt well and are easily thrown by new situations or people.

**G- Behaviors that are observed in the student’s handling of time factors during the assessment process**

The rate in which a student answers questions on a test can indicate several things.

1. The student who hesitates, blocks or delays may be a child who is afraid of reaction or criticism and uses these techniques to ward off what he/she perceives as a failure or deflating situation.
2. The child who impulsively answers incorrectly without thinking may be a child with high levels of anxiety which interfere with his/her ability to delay and concentrate.

**H- Behaviors that are observed by the types of responses made during the assessment process**

The types of response a child gives during an evaluation may indicate the following:

1. A student who continuously asks to have questions repeated may have hearing difficulties and should always be ruled out first along with visual acuity prior to a testing situation. In fact, the evaluator will want to make sure that these tests were done prior to beginning the assessment process.
2. The child who asks to have questions repeated may be having problems processing information and may need more time to understand what is being asked.

**I- Behaviors that provide insight into the student’s organizational abilities during the assessment process**

A student’s organizational approach to the testing situation will provide a great deal of insight on how he/she attacks a task in the classroom. Organizational ability allows an individual to organize a pattern of approach that leads to a successful outcome.

Students with chaotic internal organization may appear as if they know what they are doing but the overall outcome of a task indicates a great deal of energy input with very low production. It's almost like "spinning wheels" and the energy output is a cover for not knowing what to do.

Some children may become less organized under the stress of a time constraint. The factor of style under time restrictions is one aspect in determining the child's overall learning style. The evaluator will also want to observe the child for the possibility of symptoms of Attention Deficit/Hyperactive Disorder which may also contribute to a confused sense of organization.

In conclusion, always keep in mind that all behavior is a message and the way a child interacts with the examiner may be clues to learning style or problem areas. If you can "hear" a child's behavior by being aware of significant signs, you may come to a better understanding of the child's needs.