

Developing Competency-Based Assessments in Field Education Courses

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Competence

An individual's ability to use or translate the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and judgment associated with a profession into a set of complex behaviors and perform effectively within the scope of professional practice.

(Kane, 1992; Whitcomb, 2002)



Defining Competence

- How to capture holistic nature of practice and performance
 - skills and meta competencies
- Diverse settings → general descriptions
- Quest for specificity → reductionism





Evaluating Competence to Practice

Global narratives

- Highlighting strengths and areas for improvement
- Based on implicit criteria and the practice wisdom of evaluator
- Unstandardized

Competency-based evaluation

- Checklists explicitly defining practice in discrete behavioral terms
- Questionable reliability and validity, limited variability, ceiling effects
- Every student is above average!



Controversies in Competency

- Critical to self-regulation of the profession and public protection (Birnbaum & Silver, 2011)
- *“the birth of competencies in social work is yoked to the rise of neoliberalism in liberal democracies”* (Rossiter & Heron, 2011)
- *“uncritical tick-box approach to practice”* (Aronson & Hemingway, 2011)



Holistic Competence

- More than performance ability or **procedural** competence
- **Meta-competencies**
 - conceptual processing, critical thinking, judgment, decision-making
 - incorporation of social work values
 - aspects of professionalism such as self-awareness, emotional regulation, use of self
 - learning and growth as a professional

(Bogo et al., 2006)



An Online Tool to Evaluate Student Practice Competence in the Field

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Study 1 - Reliability of the FSW's competency based evaluation tool

N=480

- Used 27 years
- 100s of items
- Good internal consistency
- Scores significantly associated with academic grades
- Poor consistency between first and second year
- Reliably identified students in difficulty in first year of program
- Did not reliably identify students in difficulty in second year of program



Study 2 – Designed a new Practice Based Tool

- Reflect instructors' tacit or implicit conceptualization of student competence
- Use dimensions and language used by instructors to describe student performance



Step 1: Scale Development

- In-depth interviews with 19 experienced field instructors; 3 sectors
- Asked for detailed descriptions of their “exemplary student,” “average student,” and “student in difficulty”
- 57 descriptions were produced
- Researchers created 20 iconic student vignettes-used instructors’ language



Step Two: Ranking the Vignettes

10 experienced field instructors independently sorted 20 vignettes into as many categories as they chose

- Instructors placed into 2 groups.
 - Compared individual sorting.
 - Achieve consensus and construct and name a new set of categories.
- Five categories:
Exemplary,
Ready to practice,
On the cusp,
Needs more training,
Unsuitable





Step 3: Practice-Based Evaluation (PBE) Tool

Developed a tool based on dimensions identified by field instructors

- Learning and growth
- Behavior in the organization
- Clinical relationships
- Conceptualizing practice
- Assessment and intervention
- Professional Communication



Step 4: Testing the New Tool

Participants

- 43 field instructors; experienced practitioners and field instructors.



Procedure

- Recall most recent student
 - Evaluate student on standard CBE Scale
 - Evaluate student on new PBE Tool
- Focus groups about the tools



Results

- New PBE tool was **not** more effective at discriminating students than older CBE tool.

	CBE Tool	PBE Tool
Mean	4.08	4.20
Std Dev	0.53	0.63
Pct <3.00	2.4%	4.8%



Study 3 - Thinking outside the box

- Design and test innovative approach for field instructors to assess student competence
- New approach involves having field instructors represent students in a more holistic manner
- Asks instructors to match their student to set of standardized descriptions of typical students performing at various levels

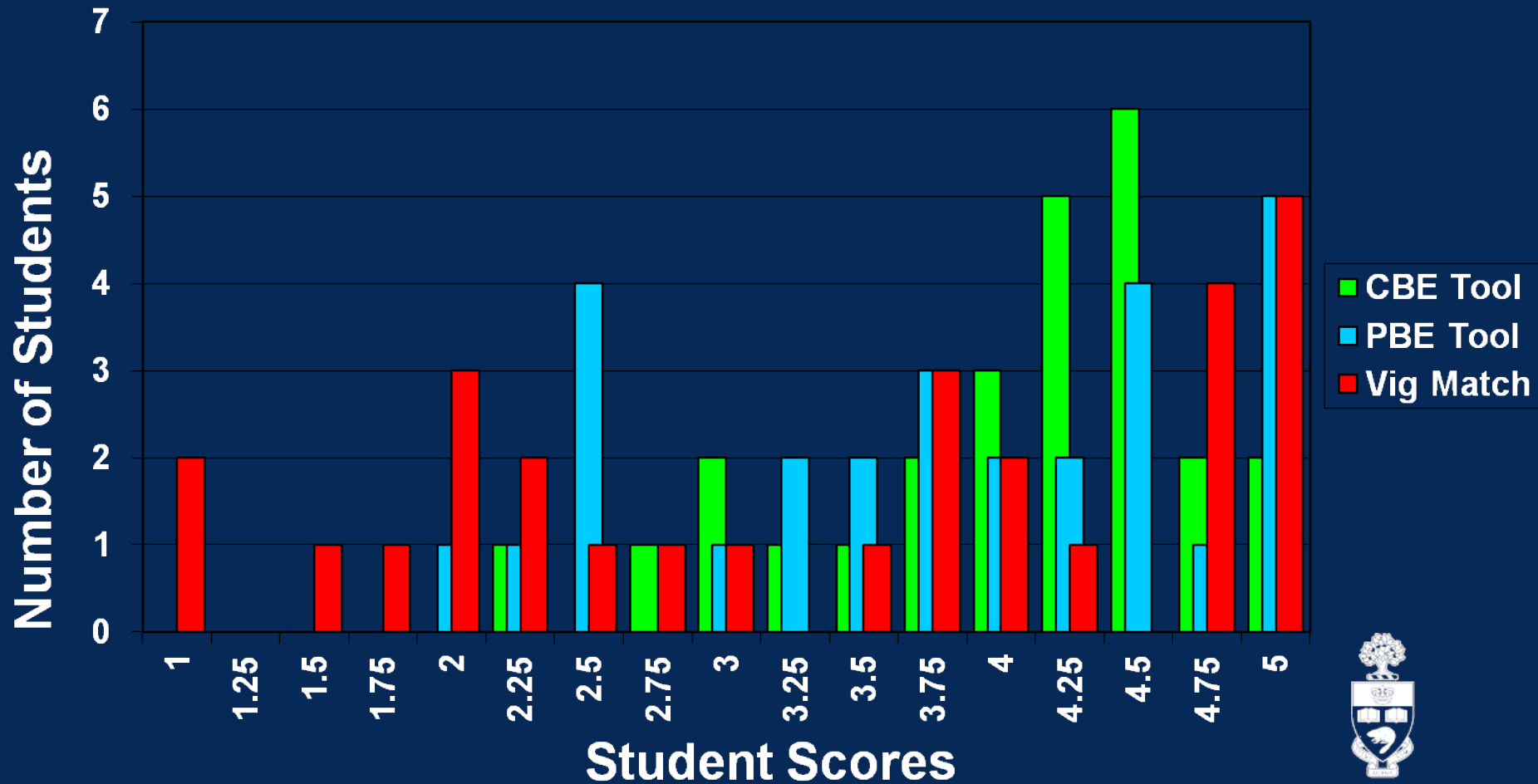


Study Procedure

- Recall most recent student
- Vignette matching process:
 - Given a package of 20 vignettes ordered randomly
 - Asked to read the vignettes and select those vignettes that are “similar” to their student.
 - Select from the “similar vignettes” one or two vignettes that are “most similar” to their student.
- Evaluate same student using Practice-Based Evaluation (PBE) Tool and Competency-Based Evaluation (CBE) Tool



Distribution of Student Scores for the Three Measures



Conclusions

- The matching method produced greater variability in student evaluations than either the CBE or PBE tool
- Field instructors were more likely to place students at both ends of the continuum
 - poorly performing students
 - exceptional students



Study 4: Pilot Online PBE Tool

- Categories & descriptors taken from PBE tool
 - Based on dimensions identified by field instructors
- Descriptors no longer have 'rating', rather are listed alphabetically
- Six headings
 - Learning and Growth
 - Behaviour in the Organization
 - Conceptualizing Practice
 - Clinical Relationships
 - Assessment and Intervention
 - Professional Communication



Pilot of use of PBE tool in field instruction

- Field instructor selects terms that best describe the student from a pull down menu
- The form automatically assigns a rating from 1-5 for each dimension based on the original PBE tool. The final score is the average score of all 6 dimensions.
- Students and field instructors independently rate the student and then meet to discuss their individual evaluations.
- Study examined
 - Experiences using the tool
 - Range of scores
 - Comparison of instructor & student scores



New Tool Instructions Screen

The screenshot shows a web browser window titled "Practice-based Evaluation Tool 1 - Mozilla Firefox". The address bar displays the URL: <http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/fsw/exponent/practicum/pbet/tool/index.php?practicumID=1590&studentID=433&placementID=8043&evaluationID=6>. The page features the University of Toronto logo and the text "UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO" on the left, and "FACTOR-INWENTASH FACULTY OF SOCIAL WORK Practicum Administration System" on the right. A sidebar on the left contains a menu with the following items: Admin Home, Field Agencies, Field Instructors, Practicum Units, Students, Field Liaisons, Education Coordinators, E-mails and Mailing Lists, Reports, System Settings, and Logout. The main content area is titled "University of Toronto Faculty of Social Work Practice-based Evaluation Tool". It contains the following text: "Self-evaluation of **Student Name** in the practicum Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre-General Medicine and Critical Care Unit, Alan Dick Practicum. Please use the buttons below to navigate through the evaluation; do not use your browser's 'Page Back', 'Page Forward', or 'Reload' buttons. Thanks." Below this, it says "Page 1" with a button labeled "Leave this evaluation.". A "Welcome **Student Name**" message follows, stating "You are evaluating your own performance in the practicum **Placement Title** with instructor **Field Instructor Name**". The "INSTRUCTIONS" section states: "On the following pages there are a series of sentences that have been generated by other instructors as they described their students' clinical and learning behaviour in the context of a clinical placement. These behaviours have been divided into six categories. This form is to be completed separately by the student and the field instructors. For each of the six categories, please read all the descriptions and select 4 to 6 of the sentences that you believe best describe you as a student. Your selections will be rated. A composite score as well as a score for each category will be computer generated. Scores will range from 1 to 5. The student-rated and field instructor-rated scores should be discussed when writing the evaluation summary report." A "Begin" button is located at the bottom of the instructions.

Practice-based Evaluation Tool 1 - Mozilla Firefox

File Edit View History Bookmarks Tools Help

http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/fsw/exponent/practicum/pbet/tool/index.php?practicumID=1590&studentID=433&placementID=8043&evaluationID=6

Most Visited Getting Started Latest Headlines

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

FACTOR-INWENTASH
FACULTY OF SOCIAL WORK
Practicum Administration System

University of Toronto Faculty of Social Work Practice-based Evaluation Tool

Self-evaluation of **Student Name** in the practicum Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre-General Medicine and Critical Care Unit, Alan Dick Practicum

Please use the buttons below to navigate through the evaluation; do not use your browser's "Page Back", "Page Forward", or "Reload" buttons. Thanks.

Page 1

Welcome **Student Name**

You are evaluating your own performance in the practicum **Placement Title** with instructor **Field Instructor Name**

INSTRUCTIONS

On the following pages there are a series of sentences that have been generated by other instructors as they described their students' clinical and learning behaviour in the context of a clinical placement. These behaviours have been divided into six categories.

This form is to be completed separately by the student and the field instructors.

For each of the six categories, please read all the descriptions and select 4 to 6 of the sentences that you believe best describe you as a student.

Your selections will be rated. A composite score as well as a score for each category will be computer generated. Scores will range from 1 to 5.

The student-rated and field instructor-rated scores should be discussed when writing the evaluation summary report.

Done

start Windows Liv... 2 Firefox Inbox in Pra... Calculator Document1 -... untitled - Paint Search Desktop 10:28 AM

New Tool Assessment Screen

Practice-based Evaluation Tool 2 - Mozilla Firefox

File Edit View History Bookmarks Tools Help

http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/fsw/exponent/practicum/pbet/tool/index.php

Most Visited Getting Started Latest Headlines

Admin Home

- Field Agencies
- Field Instructors
- Practicum Units
- Students
- Field Liaisons
- Education Coordinators
- E-mails and Mailing Lists
- Reports
- System Settings
- Logout

University of Toronto Faculty of Social Work Practice-based Evaluation Tool

Self-evaluation of **Student Name** in the practicum **Placement Title**

Please use the buttons below to navigate through the evaluation; do not use your browser's "Page Back", "Page Forward", or "Reload" buttons. Use the "Save" button to record your responses. Thanks.

Page 2 Previous Page Next Page Leave this evaluation.

Learning and Growth

Please select four to six statements that you feel apply to the performance of **Student Name** in this practicum.

- ☐ Asks a lot of direct questions in order to understand basic information, such as policies, procedures, and the worker role.
- ☐ Confidence develops through field instruction and learning opportunities in the placement.
- ☐ Consults with field instructor frequently as she/he is not confident in her/his skills and abilities.
- ☐ Demonstrates a general lack of improvement.
- ☐ Demonstrates confidence in taking risks and challenging her/himself (e.g., to work with clients early in the placement, work with challenging client situations, or assume more challenging roles, such as group leader).
- ☐ Demonstrates some strengths and capacity for growth and learning, but shows little progress in moving beyond the basic level.
- ☐ Demonstrates strong capacity to learn and grow when given feedback.
- ☐ Difficulty in integrating new information and skills from field instruction to the clinical work.
- ☐ Does not demonstrate much interest in the placement or the clients.
- ☐ Does not seek out or integrate constructive feedback.
- ☐ Does not seek out or maximize learning opportunities available in the agency.
- ☐ Eager to learn and can establish clear learning objectives.
- ☐ Enters the placement with some general, unfocused learning goals.
- ☐ Improvements are needed.
- ☐ Invests little in the learning process and does not make the placement a priority.
- ☐ Is cautious and avoids taking risks, such as seeking out new learning opportunities.
- ☐ Is eager to learn and establish learning objectives, but nervousness interferes with learning.
- ☐ Lacks clear learning objectives as the student is uncertain about his/her desired learning outcomes.
- ☐ Possesses the capacity to hear and integrate feedback, but minimal improvements are observed.
- ☐ Possesses appropriate learning objectives from the outset of the placement and demonstrates initiative, energy and motivation in achieving these goals.
- ☐ Self-identifies her/his skills needing improvement (e.g., dealing with conflict, setting limits, report writing) and uses placement opportunities to address these.
- ☐ Significant areas for improvement are identified at the end of placement.

Done

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New Tool Report Screen

Practice-based Evaluation Summary - Mozilla Firefox

File Edit View History Bookmarks Tools Help

http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/fsw/exponent/practicum/pbet/tool/eval_summary.php?practicumID=1409&studentID=478&placementID=5916&evaluat...

Most Visited Getting Started Latest Headlines

Submitted on 2006-03-06 11:12:20

This evaluation is complete. [Click here to edit responses in this student's evaluation.](#)

Overall score on all competencies: 4.12

Learning and Growth
Score: 4.17

- Asks a lot of direct questions in order to understand basic information, such as policies, procedures, and the worker role.
- Confidence develops through field instruction and learning opportunities in the placement.
- Demonstrates confidence in taking risks and challenging her/himself (e.g., to work with clients early in the placement, work with challenging client situations, or assume more challenging roles, such as group leader).
- Demonstrates strong capacity to learn and grow when given feedback.
- Self-identifies her/his skills needing improvement (e.g., dealing with conflict, setting limits, report writing) and uses placement opportunities to address these.
- Transfers learning from field instruction to clinical practice.

Behaviour in the Organization
Score: 4.50

- Follows agency procedures and is accepted by the team.
- Shows respect to other staff and works well within the agency's culture.
- Understands the student role and maintains professional boundaries with other team members.
- Works in a responsible and experienced manner within the agency.

Conceptualizing Practice
Score: 3.80

- Able to identify and discuss ethical matters.
- Culturally competent and understands factors relevant to diverse clients.
- Some ability to think critically.
- Understands and carries out the mandate of the organization, while remaining sensitive to clients' situations and needs.
- Understands and maintains professional, ethical practice.

Clinical Relationships
Score: 4.17

- Begins where the client is and paces the interview to meet the needs of the client.
- Demonstrates a good use of self.
- Is responsible and respectful with clients.
- Maintains professional boundaries with clients.
- Possesses good basic skills, such as listening, questioning, and differential use of self.
- With feedback and through supervision, skills improve during the placement.

Assessment and Intervention

Done

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Reliability of the New Tool

	Learning and Growth	Behavior in the org.	Clinical relations	Concept. practice	Assessment and intervention	Profess commun	Total alpha
Instructor (n = 152)	0.587	0.521	0.663	0.516	0.642	0.690	0.997
Students (n = 151)	0.579	0.400	0.645	0.479	0.582	0.664	0.978

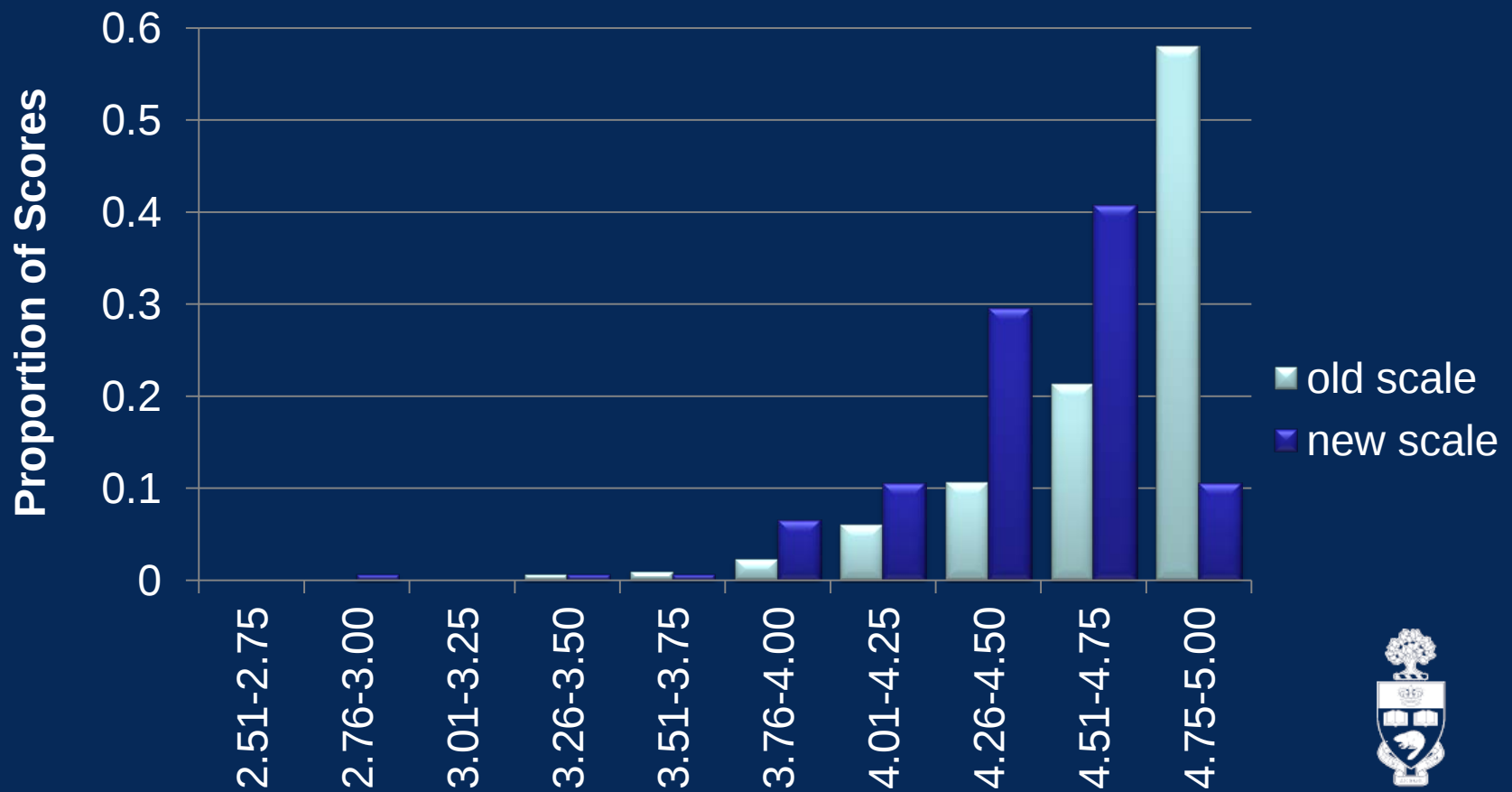


Considerations....

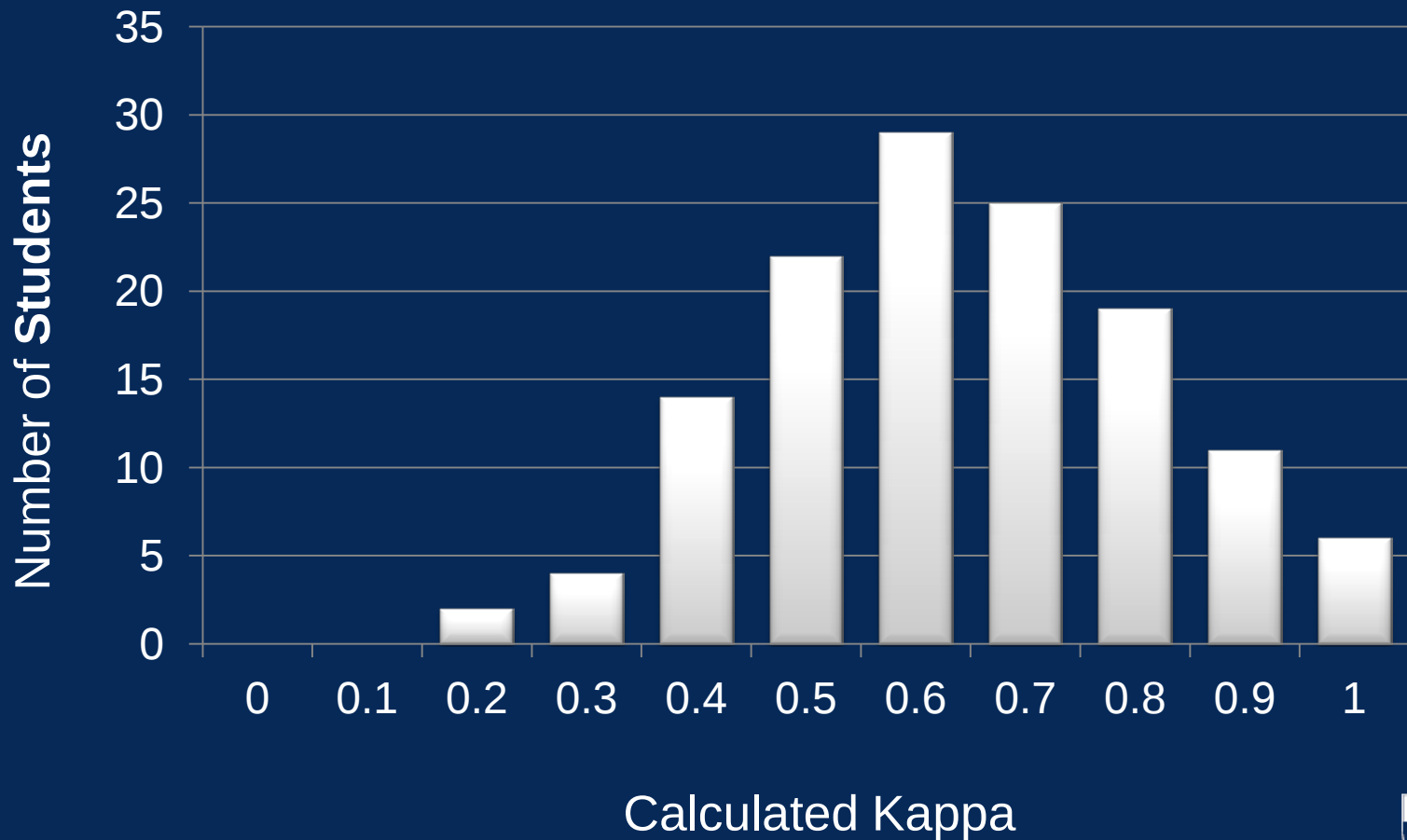
- Will evaluations of student competence differ when tool is more descriptive and 'ratings' not visible?
- Will ratings differ when instructor and student completes evaluations on-line, independent from one another, and without negotiation?
- Will the new tool be sensitive to change?



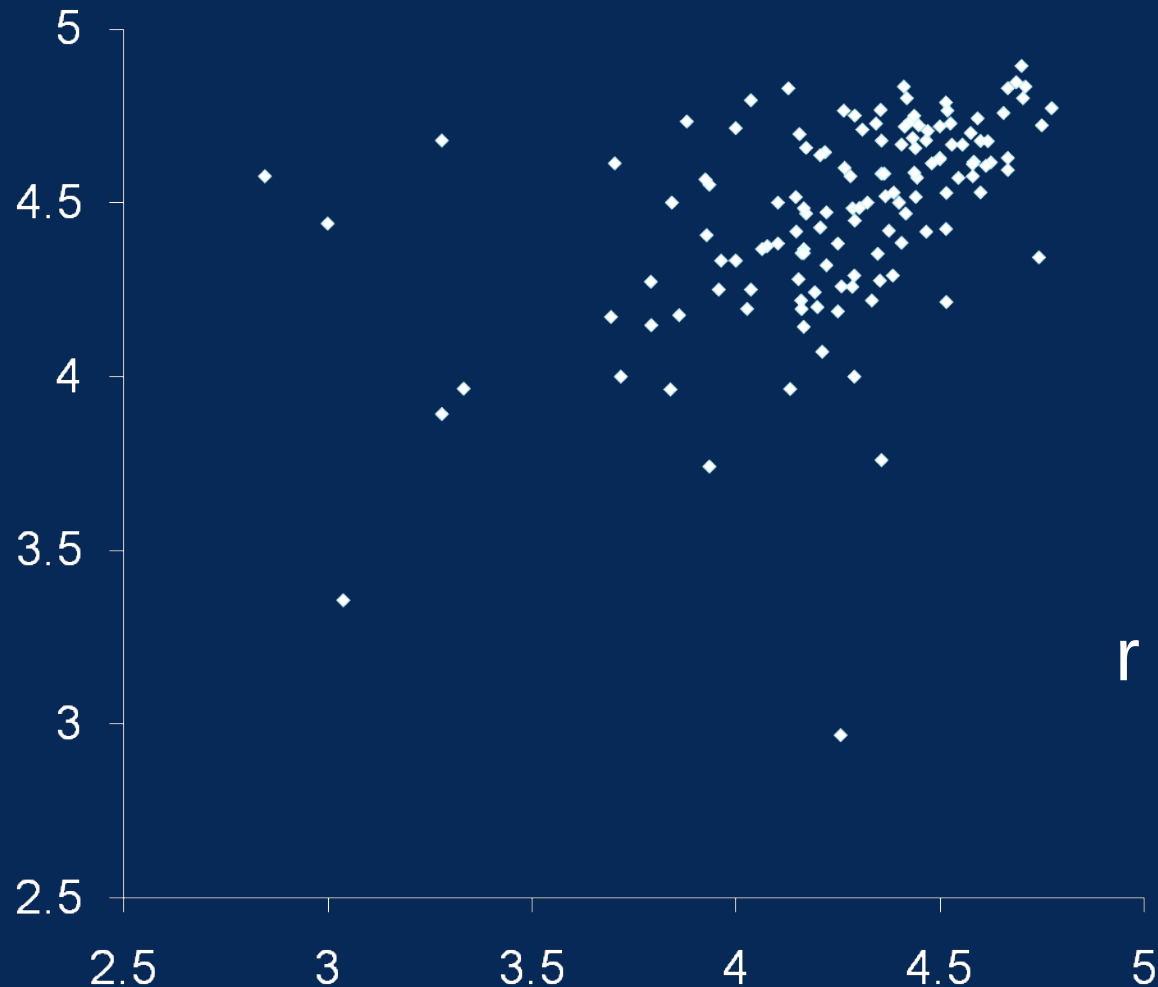
2008-9 Comparisons between CBE Tool (480) and PBE Tool (152)



Comparing Student and Field Instructor Ratings on PBE Tool



Correlation between Mid-term and Final Scores



$r = 0.459$



Evaluating an OSCE Adapted for Social Work

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OSCE: Objective Structured Clinical Examination

- Developed in medicine and used in health professions (Harden et al., 1975)
- Students conduct interviews with a series of standardized, simulated “clients”
- “Clients” are trained actors
- Each interview is 10-15 minutes
- Performance is observed and rated by a trained rater.

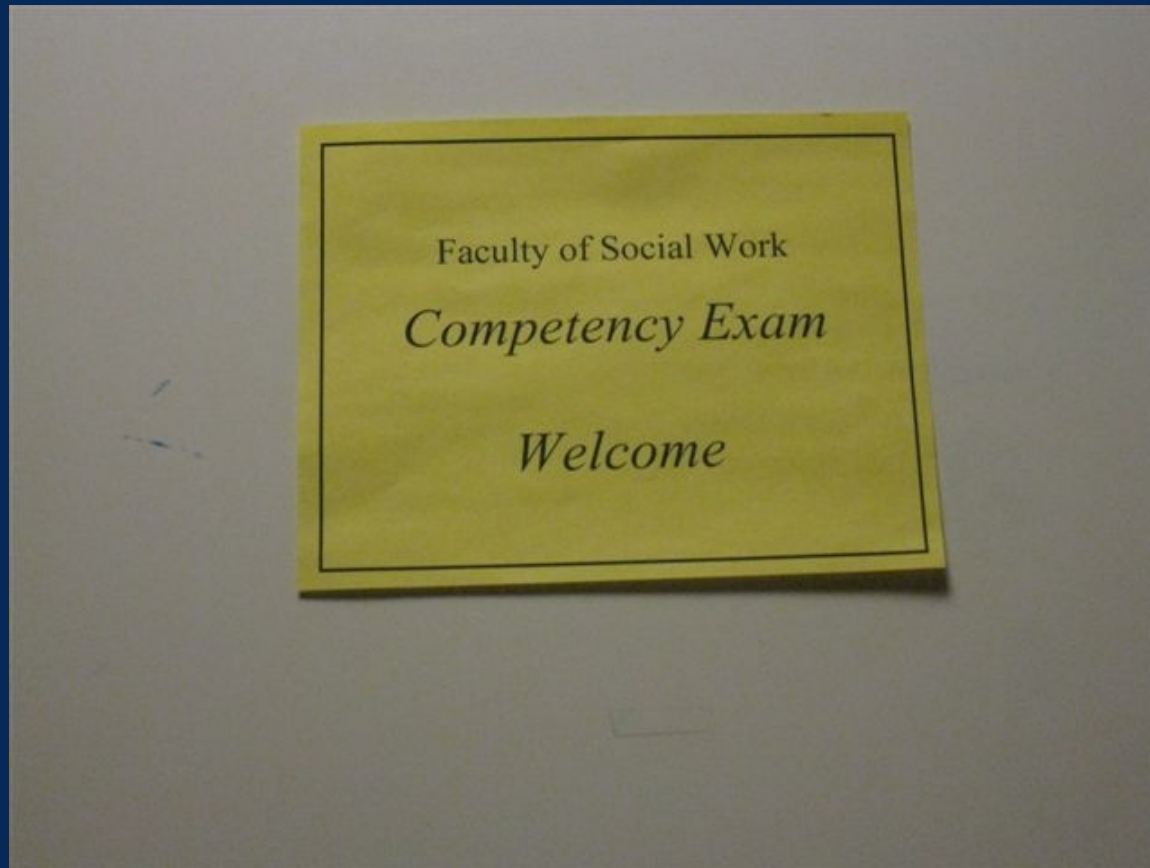


Study 1: Proof of Concept

Can we design an OSCE adapted for social work that will assess student performance and reflection in a reliable and valid way?



The Examination Day





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OSCE *Adapted* for Social Work

- An examination that would assess both components of competence
- Procedural Competence:
 - Performance – conduct of an interview
- Meta-Competence:
 - Reflection – a systematic dialogue about key ideas and experiences that guided performance.



OSCE Rating Scales

- OSCE Adapted for Social Work Performance Rating Scale
(9 dimensions)
 - Collaborative relationship
 - Conducts an eco-systems assessment
 - Cultural competence
- Scale of 1 (poor performance) to 5 (excellent)



OSCE Rating Scales

- OSCE Adapted for Social Work Reflective Dialogue Rating Scale
(8 dimensions)
 - Conceptualize practice
 - Self-awareness and reflection
 - Learning and growth: self-assessment
- Scale of 1 (poor performance) to 5 (excellent)



Participants

- Plan: Equal number of each level
- 11 students completed Year 1 of the MSW Program
- 7 recent graduates of the MSW Program
- 5 experienced social workers with 5-7 years of experience



OSCE Exam Procedures

Client 1	Client 2	Client 3	Rest Station	Client 4	Client 5
Interview	Interview	Interview		Interview	Interview
Reflective Dialogue	Reflective Dialogue	Reflective Dialogue		Reflective Dialogue	Reflective Dialogue



Results

- High internal consistency within stations:
Cronbach's alpha averaged across 5 stations 0.92 for Practice and 0.93 for Reflection
- Moderate reliability across stations :
Cronbach's alpha of 0.55 for Practice and 0.48 for Reflection
- Demonstrated construct validity in that it differentiated between social workers in training and experienced workers.



Results



Qualitative Analysis of Reflections

- Variation along a continuum distinguishes between different levels or types of reflective capacity
 - Concrete to abstract
 - Self focused to client focused
 - Personal/professional experience to use of concepts



Discussion

- Cautious optimism about using OSCE adapted for social work
- Can evaluate both procedural competence and meta-competency
- Scores not at high range as in field evaluations and course work
- Viewed positive by participants
- Improvement in scores during testing



Implementation

- Feasibility and Resources
 - Could we use a 1 station OSCE to assess student competence after the first term in a Masters Program?
 - Would an OSCE differentiate student levels of performance and reflection?



Study 2: Practical Implementation

- Purpose: To evaluate an Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE) Adapted for Social Work to:
 - assess student competence after the first term in a Masters Program
 - to examine the degree to which it predicts performance in the practicum
 - comparison with scores on Online Practicum Tool



Method

- 125 students
- One-scenario OSCE, 15 minute interview
- Two types of scenarios; mother with potential child neglect and senior female
- Observed and rated
- Reflective questions in computer lab; rated



Results

	PERFORMANCE	REFLECTION
Possible score	50	45
Range	11-28.5	10-38
Mean	20.65	27.14

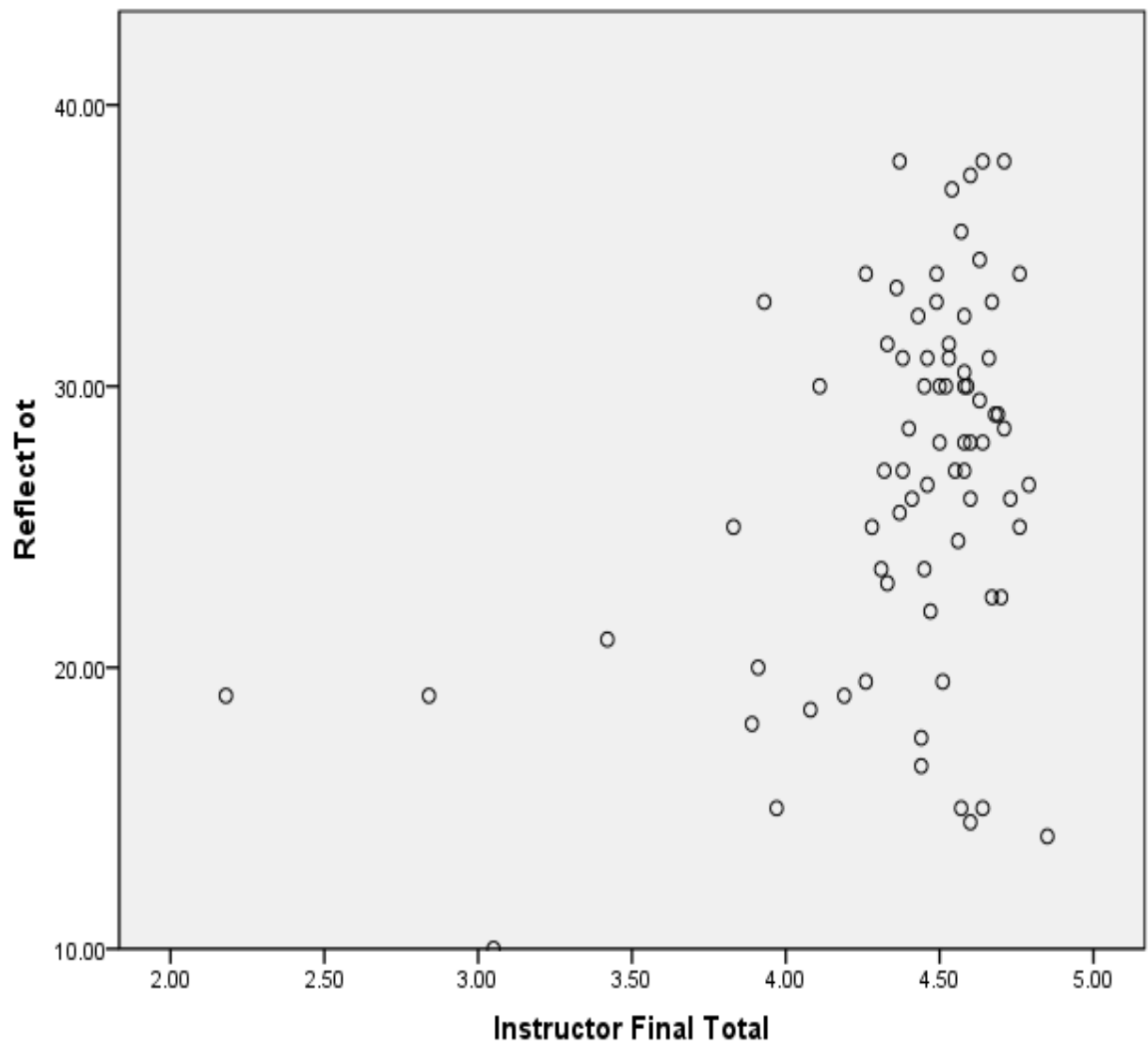
- Wide range of scores indicating that differences in student abilities were captured by the scales



Association between OSCE and Practicum PBE Tool

- Association between the final practicum score and the OSCE Performance Scale total score
 $r=.23$ ($p=.027$)
- Association between final practicum score and the OSCE Reflection Scale total score
 $r=.38$ ($p=.004$)





Discussion

- Competencies map well onto EPAS 2008 and assesses ability to link theory and practice.
- OSCE adaptation captures wide range of student competence on both scales.
- Extremely well received by students
 - Fair method for assessing competence
 - Contributes to learning through practice
 - More confident re: entering practicum.



Issues

- Students who did poorly in the practicum did poorly in the OSCE
- Students who did well in the OSCE did well in the practicum
- Doing poorly in the OSCE did not predict poor performance in the practicum



Bridge to the Practicum

- Can information from the OSCE be used to enhance learning in the practicum
 - To begin developing the learning contract
 - To provide supports



Curriculum Refinement

- Analysis of student performance and reflections identified areas for further emphasis in our teaching
 - Greater emphasis on conceptualizing practice
 - Emotional self-regulation of student
 - Balance of strengths and exploration



Conclusions

- Promising method and challenges: One possible approach in a suite of assessment tools
- Note: Student learning in the context of assessment of learning
 - High level of student preparation for using skills in practice
- More research is needed.

