

## Practice Competence

### What is it?

### How do we evaluate it?

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## Competence

- The aim of social work education: to develop competent practitioners
- Universities serve as the gatekeepers for the profession
- Accountable for the quality of social work services provided in the community.



## 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)

## Competence in Social Work

- Movement in the 70s
- CBE at University of Toronto
- Canadian accreditation-not defined
- US accreditation-competency framework adopted in 2008
- Hartford Project

## Challenges to Defining Competence

- Diverse settings and a range of practice approaches
- Descriptions need to be general enough
- To capture specifics of a local setting, descriptions need to be specific enough to reflect practice
- Reduction to numerous discrete items

## Challenges to Defining Competence

- How to capture holistic nature of practice and performance
  - qualities
  - judgment
  - reflection



## Methods for Defining Competence

- Expert panels
- Empirically validated interventions related to positive client outcomes
- Surveys of practitioners, educators, researchers, and clients/consumers
- In depth qualitative interviews with field instructors-our first step

## Conceptualization of Competence

Meta-competencies: Higher order overarching abilities and qualities

- cognitive/conceptual
- inter-personal
- personal/professional

Procedural and operational competencies

- assessment
- intervention
- oral and written presentation skills

## 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!



## 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

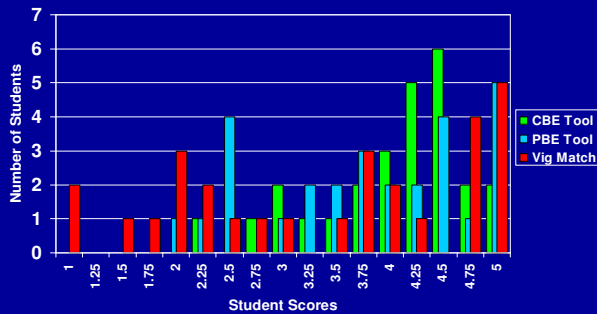


- Design and test innovative approach for field instructors to assess student competence
- New approach involves having field instructors represent students in a more holistic manner
- Asks instructors to match their student to set of standardized descriptions of typical students performing at various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

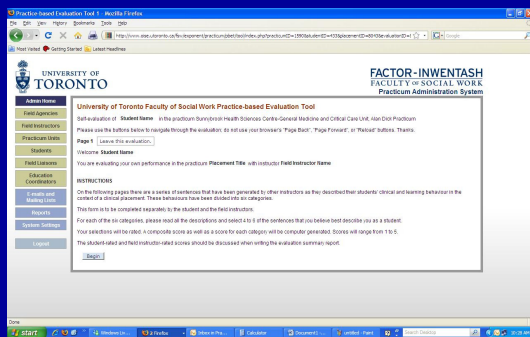
- Categories & descriptors taken from PBE tool
  - Based on dimensions identified by field instructors
- Descriptors no longer have 'rating', rather are listed alphabetically
- Six headings
  - Learning and Growth
  - Behaviour in the Organization
  - Conceptualizing Practice
  - Clinical Relationships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



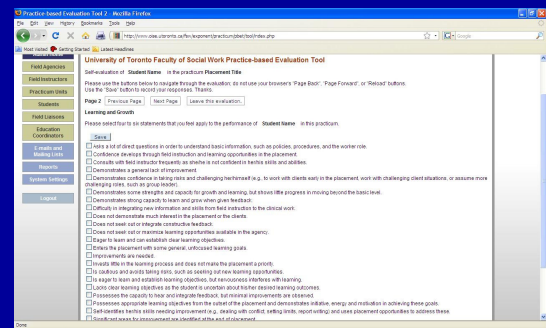
## Pilot of use of PBE tool in field instruction

- 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

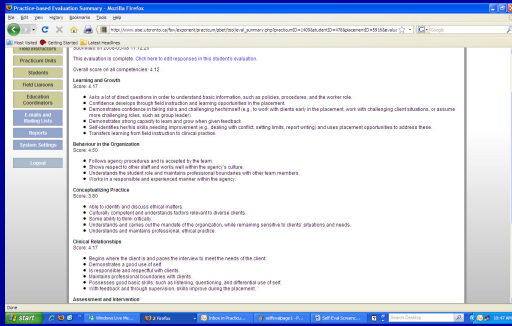
## New Tool Instructions Screen



## New Tool Assessment Screen



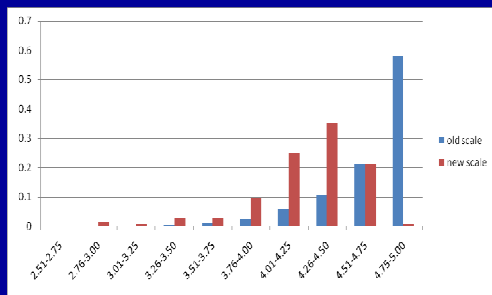
## New Tool Report Screen



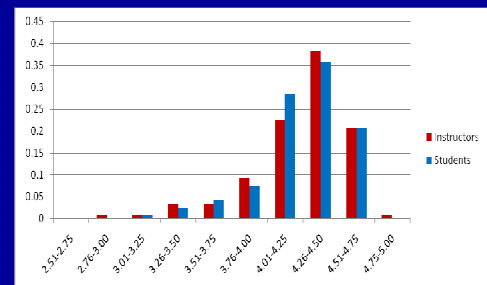
## Considerations...

- 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?

## 2008-9 Implementation Comparisons between CBE Tool and PBE Tool



## Comparing Student and Field Instructor Ratings on PBE Tool



## 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?

## Next steps

- Develop Competencies for Mezzo and Macro Practice
- Review of the literature
- Dimensions

## Dimensions

- Values
  - Diversity
  - Ethical principles
- Work with multi-stakeholder groups
  - coalitions, represent, advocacy, power
  - committees, task and process, manage conflict



## Dimensions

- Assessment and Intervention
  - Community work
  - Organizations – budget, planning, funding
  - Policy analysis and development
- Research, evaluation, analysis, and produce synthesis reports



## Next study

- Study 5 - External evaluators
  - OSCE (objective structured clinical evaluation)
  - standardized patients
  - five stations
  - performance rated on a 5 point scale
  - reflective dialogue