

3-17-2012

A Critical Analysis of the EPAS Competencies and Practice Behaviors

William A. Anderson

Minnesota State University - Mankato

Paul Force-Emery Mackie

Minnesota State University - Mankato, paul.mackie@mnsu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/sowk_fac_pubs



Part of the [Social Work Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Anderson, W.A., and Mackie, P.F.E. (2012). A Critical Analysis of the EPAS Competencies and Practice Behaviors. 29th Annual Baccalaureate Program Directors Conference. Portland, OR. March 17, 2012.

This Conference Presentation is brought to you for free and open access by the Social Work Department at Cornerstone: A Collection of Scholarly and Creative Works for Minnesota State University, Mankato. It has been accepted for inclusion in Social Work Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Cornerstone: A Collection of Scholarly and Creative Works for Minnesota State University, Mankato.

An Analysis of Language and Content in the 2008 EPAS Competencies and Practice Behaviors

Presenters

**William A. Anderson, PhD, LISW &
Paul F.E. Mackie, MSW, PhD**

**Department of Social Work
Minnesota State University, Mankato**

**Presented at the 29th Annual Conference of the
Baccalaureate Program Directors. March 17th, 2012.
Portland, Oregon**

Introduction: A shift of paradigm

Paradigm shift from previous focus on curriculum (EPAS 1994 & 2001) and objectives to new focus on Competencies and Practice Behaviors of EPAS 2008.

In response to EPAS 2008, many schools revised their syllabi and materials to fit new model with addition of new measurement events. Square pegs and round holes.

Others focused on rebuilding their programs, starting with Competencies and moving to assessment design, and then developing a new curriculum. A Herculean task...

A paradigm shift... but what about the language, validity, and consistency of EPAS 2008?

- What are language issues in new Competencies and Practice Behaviors, and how can content be critiqued?
 - This presentation offers strategies to critique 2008 EPAS language: One approach is analyzing verbs used in learning objectives via Bloom's Taxonomy AND at what levels EPAS 2008 language is aimed.
- Should there be an external reference point for defining what social workers can do?
 - ASWB national practice analysis contrasted with CSWE materials.
- Internal consistency of new paradigm
 - As most programs thus far have adopted Practice Behaviors as given, where are the gaps between explanatory paragraphs provided for the Competencies and choices of Practice Behaviors?

Importance of EPAS to programs, students, & consumers

- Programs. SOWK programs are bound to the EPAS. Must meet Educational Policy & Accreditation Standards to maintain accreditation. Changes in EPAS can result in changes to curriculum, faculty work loads, and student performance expectations.
- Students. EPAS establishes learning expectations/competency expectations for students. Negatively, students can be “caught” between EPAS changes and resulting curriculum shifts. Positively, changes in learning expectations/competencies better prepare students for future in social work.
- Consumers. Our true mission is to best serve consumers. EPAS reflects skills/competencies students need as practitioners in the field. Consumers are final “judges” of whether we have adequately prepared student for practice.

History of EPAS

- How far back in time does EPAS go? When did it begin?
- Johnson & Munch (2010) reviewed 1994, 2001, & 2008 EPAS to assess post-MSW experience requirements.
- Past EPASs focused on teaching and learning objectives. EPAS 2008 radically shifted to Competency-based education.
 - Instead of “did we teach it to students?” we now ask “Are students graduating with skill and knowledge competence?”

EPAS 2008

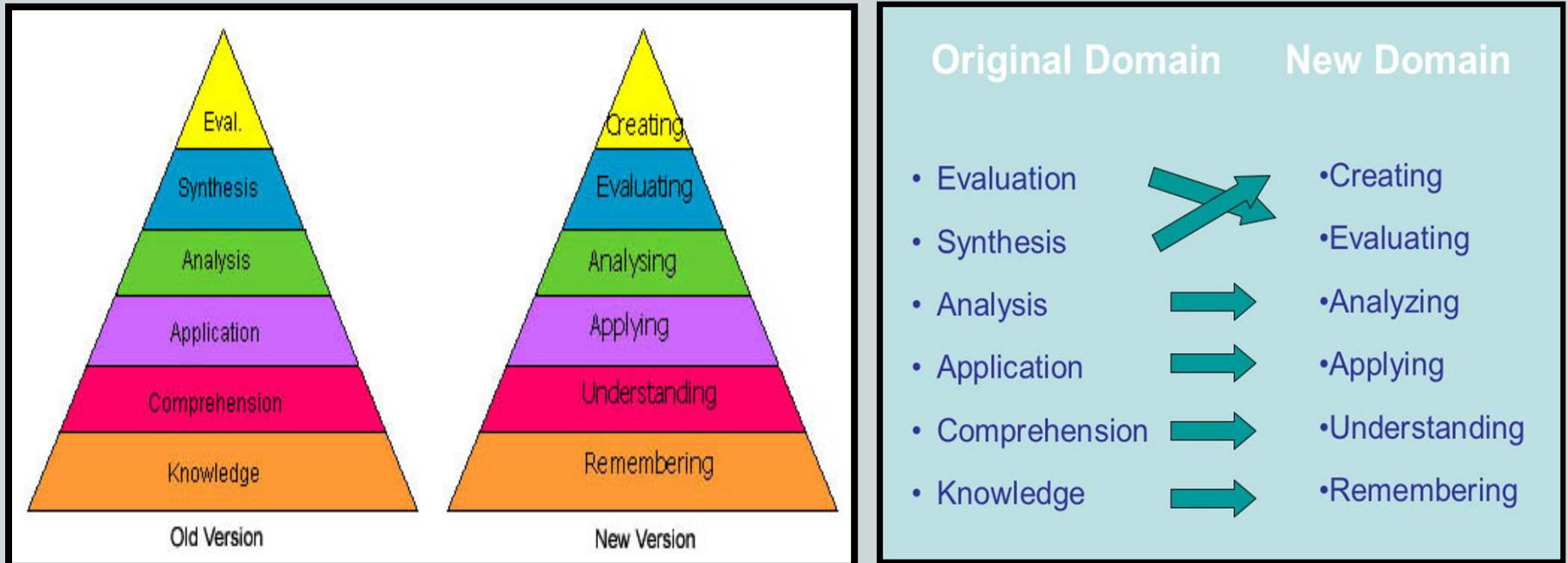
EPAS 2008: Potential for National Curriculum/Methodology for Development & Assessment of Competencies

- The current EPAS 2008 document was received with certain trepidation. BEAP and Mackie & Anderson (2011) responded.
 - BEAP response
 - Mackie & Anderson response

Rationale for this Study

- At 2010 CSWE conference, J. Holmes presented “Implementation of the 2008 EPAS: Quality Assurance Report and Discussion.”
 - 55 programs reviewed. Findings:
 - Self study ave length: 166.2 pages (Longest = 479 pages, shortest = 70 pages. 19 programs or 38% within page limit.)
 - All programs used all 10 competencies
 - 13 programs added at least 1 competency
 - 88% used all Practice Behaviors (PBs)
 - On ave, programs used 40.3 PBs
 - Least among used? 27 PBs
 - Ave # of assessments used to measure Comps/PBs: 6
- OK, but what are we assessing? How are questions structured? How does Comp/PB language measure up when assessed with Bloom’s Taxonomy of learning domains? Is EPAS 2008 structured to develop higher or lower ordered “competencies”?

Bloom's Taxonomy Old and New



Bloom's 3 domains of learning and educational activities:

1. Cognitive (mental skills/knowledge)
2. Affective (growth in feelings/emotional areas)
3. Psychomotor (Physical skills)

Old version: Bloom, (1956)

New version: Clark, (2002).

Other versions now exist as well

Bloom's measurable verbs that demonstrate critical thinking

					Evaluation
				Synthesis	Appraise
				Arrange	Argue
			Analysis	Assemble	Choose
		Application	Analyze	Collect	Compare
	Comprehension	Apply	Appraise	Combine	Conclude
Knowledge	Compare	Complete	Categorize	Comply	Estimate
List	Describe	Construct	Compare	Compose	Evaluate
Name	Discuss	Demonstrate	Contrast	Construct	Interpret
Recall	Explain	Dramatize	Debate	Create	Judge
Record	Express	Employ	Diagram	Design	Justify
Relate	Identify	Illustrate	Differentiate	Devise	Measure
Repeat	Recognize	Interpret	Distinguish	Formulate	Rate
State	Restate	Operate	Examine	Manage	Revise
Tell	Tell	Practice	experiment	Organize	Score
underline	Translate	schedule	Inspect	Plan	Select
	Compare	Use		prepare	Support
				propose	Value

Bloom's verbs to avoid (not measureable)

Notoriously ambiguous words & phrases

Words to Avoid

- Believe
- Hear
- Realize
- Capacity
- Intelligence
- Recognize
- Comprehend
- Know
- See
- Conceptualize
- Listen
- Self-actualize
- Depth
- Memorize
- Think
- Experience
- Perceive
- Understand
- Feel
- Improve

Phrases to Avoid

- Appreciation for...
- Acquainted with...
- Attitude of...
- Adjusted to...
- Awareness of...
- Capable of...
- Comprehension of...
- Cognizant of...
- Enjoyment of...
- Conscious of...
- Feeling for...
- Familiar with...
- Interest in...
- Interested in...
- Knowledge of...
- Knowledge about...
- Understanding of...
- Self-confident in...

EPAS 2008 not based on “evidence” – No way to analyze external validity beyond content and face

- How does EPAS 2008 contrast with EPAS 2001 language? (BILL - NEED HELP W/THIS)
- How does EPAS 2008 language contrast with ASWB job analysis? (BILL - NEED HELP W/THIS)

EPAS 2008: Verbs by Competency language (NOT Practice Behavior)

CORE COMPETENCIES (briefly stated)

- 2.1.1: Identify as a professional social worker
- 2.1.2: Ethical principles to guide practice
- 2.1.3: Critical thinking to inform & communicate professional judgments
- 2.1.4: Diversity & difference in practice
- 2.1.5: Human rights & socio-economic justice
- 2.1.6: Research-informed practice/practice-informed research
- 2.1.7: HBSE
- 2.1.8: Policy
- 2.1.9: Contexts that shape practice
- 2.1.10: Engage, assess, intervene, evaluate with consumers (across systems)

VERBS

- 2.1.1: Identify, conduct, serve, commit
- 2.1.2: Apply, conduct, engage, knowledge(able)
- 2.1.3: Apply, knowledge(able), use, communicate
- 2.1.4: Engage, understand, understood, appreciate
- 2.1.5: Advance, recognize, knowledge(able), incorporate
- 2.1.6: Engage, use, employ, evaluate, use, comprehend, understand
- 2.1.7: Apply, knowledge(able), apply, knowledge
- 2.1.8: Engage, advance, understand, engage, know
- 2.1.9: Respond, recognize
- 2.1.10: engage, assess, intervene, evaluate, knowledge, skills, identify(ing), analyz(ing), implement(ing).

How do EPAS 2008 verbs withstand Bloom's
Taxonomy assessment?

Note: show how EPAS language fits in Bloom's taxonomy on this panel. Consider also displaying "words/phrases to avoid" here or on next panel.

But what about the Practice Behaviors? Verbs by PBs

PB 1: advocate

PB 2: practice, assure

PB 3: attend

PB 4: demonstrate

PB 5: engage

PB 6: use

PB 7: recognize, manage

PB 8: make

PB 9: tolerate

PB 10: apply

PB 11: distinguish, appraise, integrate

PB 12: analyze

PB 13: demonstrate

PB 14: recognize

PB 15: gain

PB 16: recognize, communicate

PB 17: view

PB 18: understand

PB 19: advocate

PB 20: engage

PB 21: use

PB 22: use

PB 23: utilize

PB 24: critique, apply knowledge, understand

PB 25: analyze, formulate, advocate

PB 26: collaborate

PB 27: discover, appraise, attend to

PB 28: provide, promote

PB 29: prepare, use, develop

PB 30: collect, organize, interpret, assess, develop, select

PB 31: develop

PB 32: collect, organize, interpret

PB 33: assess

PB 34: develop

PB 35: select

PB 36: initiate

PB 37: implement

PB 38: help

PB 39: negotiate, mediate, advocate

PB 40: facilitate

PB 41: Analyze, monitor, evaluate

The Question of Exhaustiveness...

- Do PBs under each Competency catch ALL the content identified in the Competency paragraph?
- Are there missing “pieces” from EPAS (e.g., history of SOWK, statistics, evaluation, conducting supervision).
- The syntax problem: Addressing five levels in one PB (assessment problems). **BILL – NEED SOME HELP ON THIS ONE.**

Conclusion

- Problems for programs when standards aren't clear?
- Are ASWB and CSWE drifting apart?
- Ongoing development process that could benefit from our insights...