

Test Construction for the MI-AIMH Endorsement Project Melissa Kaplan-Estrin, Ph.D.

In the process of developing a procedure for endorsing infant mental health professionals, the MI-AIMH Endorsement Committee, Executive Director and Board members came to the conclusion that, in addition to relevant education, experience, and recommendations, candidates would need to demonstrate knowledge through some kind of testing procedure. Although it was clear that both developmental and clinical knowledge and decision-making should be demonstrated by each applicant, it was unclear just what kind of test would be most appropriate for this purpose. The Executive Director, Deborah Weatherston, contacted The Educational Testing Service at Princeton to investigate their ability to construct such a test. The person with whom she consulted felt that the content area would not be familiar to their staff. She suggested that another organization be contacted, the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Research Institute in North Carolina. The consultant at that organization felt that the focus of the training and practice of infant mental health is sufficiently different from the work of early childhood specialists that their organization would not be well equipped to construct an endorsement test for infant mental health specialists. She recommended that we use experts in our own organization who are intimately acquainted with the field and with the education/training of potential applicants.

Given that our organization needed to develop its own test, the Executive Director discussed the test construction project with several MIAIMH Endorsement Committee and Board members. After considering a number of possibilities, it was decided that two formats would be used to assess infant mental health-related knowledge and approaches to practice. The first method was simply that of an objective, quantitative approach employing a set of multiple choice questions designed to cover topic areas considered essential and aimed to be at a moderate, not high, level of difficulty. The second, qualitative method was aimed at clinical competence and recognition of principles related to relationship-based practice. For this section of the test, applicants would be asked to react to vignettes describing fictional case study material.

The process of constructing these two test components involved the Executive Director, University professors, experienced clinicians and infant mental health trainers, all long-time active members of MI-AIMH.* Some participated in the development of just one section of the test and others participated in both. Crucial to the success of this effort, 18 service providers and professionals who represented all levels of experience agreed to pilot the multiple choice questions and/or the case study material. Their willingness to participate enabled the test committee to develop, review, then review several times again, all test questions for clarity, relevance and level of difficulty. After several months of work, the MI-AIMH test committee members agreed that both sections of the test adequately and fairly reflect competency at levels 3 and 4 of the MI-AIMH Endorsement.

We are ready to go! We welcome your applications and applaud your willingness to be “pioneers” in this pilot year as together we help to strengthen the infant and family field. The first test will be given in May; the next will be given in October, 2003. Questions? Please call the MI-AIMH Central Office at 734-287-1700, Ext. 1133.

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