

Clinical Reasoning in Physiotherapists Motor Assessment of
School Children With Developmental and Learning
Disabilities

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PURPOSE: The purpose of this study was to identify theoretical assumptions and important characteristics of clinical reasoning in physiotherapists assessing children with developmental and learning disabilities. RELEVANCE: The study contributes to awareness and insight for reflective pediatric physiotherapy. Within special education individualized measures are often more suitable than standardized. Physiotherapists must rely on own reasoning, experience and critical reflexion. SUBJECTS: All pupils in 2 special schools, Copenhagen County: 177 pupils 6-17 years with moderate to severe developmental and learning disabilities in wide range of diagnoses. 125 reports on school-entry assessment. 6 physiotherapists recruited from those currently in same area willing to participate. METHOD AND MATERIALS: Schools represented target population. Physiotherapists for interview were chosen to represent practice area, varying seniority in area, variety of professional backgrounds, and as "good" informants. Triangulation: a) descriptive analysis of all reports re. assessment method, items, criteria for evaluation and language/terminology; b) in-depth analysis of strategic report sample, c) qualitative individual interviews. Small sample size of 12 reports resulted from criteria used to secure representativeness and to limit bias. ANALYSIS: Descriptive document-analysis lead to deeper text-analysis/microanalysis of sample and semi-structured individual interviews. Techniques applied for validity and empirical grounding included triangulation, informant-control, horizontal criticism and strict use of Constant Comparison Method. Initial theoretical framework evolved through interviews resulting in new conceptual model grounded in data. RESULTS: Identified characteristics were; 1. a theoretically pluralistic understanding of 2 child aspects; body/physical and pedagogical/ psychological, 2. a central unresolved theme is relationship between objectivity and subjectivity, 3. dimensions of expertise and professional communication are closely related and communication of complex professional knowledge in writing or speech is difficult. CONCLUSION: The dimensions of expertise and professional communication are closely related. Other studies support results. Physiotherapists found communicating complex professional knowledge in writing or speech difficult. This problem should be investigated further by studies related to professional language and communicational culture as well as