Writing Modified Achievement Level Descriptors

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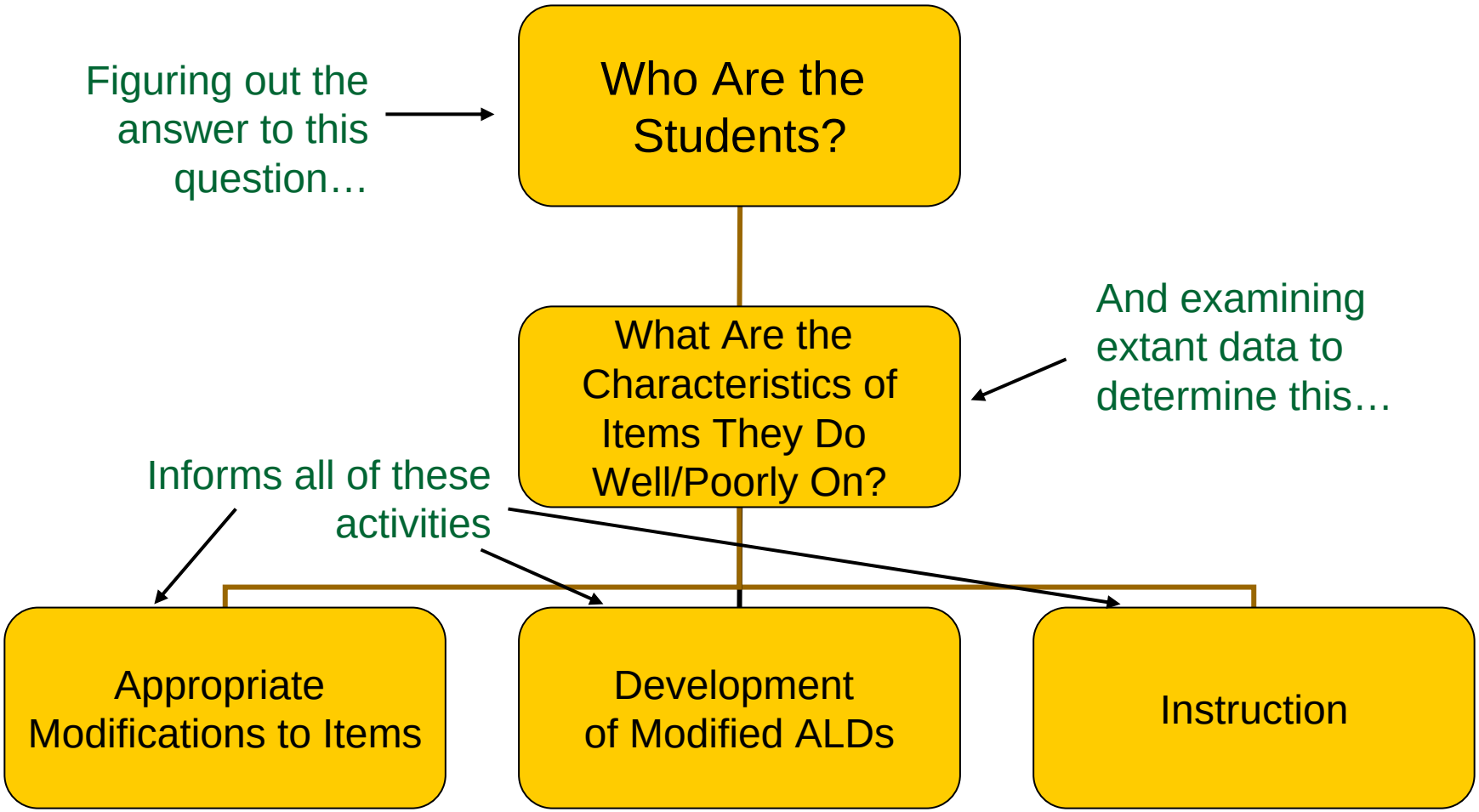
Purpose of this Presentation

- This won't give you the answers of what a "good" modified achievement level descriptor (MALD) looks like
- However, it should provide some thoughts and a process for your consideration
- States may choose different paths, resulting in different MALDs—what are the implications?
- Choices should be deliberate as they will have a strong influence not only on interpreting test results, but on instructional choices as well

Interrelation of All Activities



Importance of Writing Thoughtful MALDs

- MALDs guide the interpretation of the test scores of the AA-MAS
- MALDs influence teacher expectations (e.g., what students CAN do versus what they CAN'T do)
- MALDs guide instructional activities

Considerations in Writing MALDs

- Determine how the MALDs should reflect the content standards
- Decide on the relationship between the MALDs and the test blueprint
- Weigh the importance of skill development with content
- Think holistically about how a student moves from one performance level to the next, one grade to the next, and one assessment group (1% → 2% → general assessment) to the next

Reflecting the Content Standards and Test Blueprints

- Consider how the emphasis in the content standards is reflected in the test blueprint.
  - Strong emphasis on numbers and operations may result in a blueprint with 50% of the items assessing this content strand
- Consider how the emphasis in the content standards and test blueprints should be reflected in the MALDs
  - Do the learning descriptions in your MALDs mirror your assessment emphasis?
  - How should the weights in the blueprint be translated into descriptors?

Interaction between Content and Process

- In reading, “content” could be the level and type of reading passage
- Process would be how the student works with the information, such as recalling specific text or locating direct references to interpreting, analyzing, comparing, or making inferences and drawing conclusions.
- How do we expect greater knowledge and skill to manifest itself?
  - Does a student demonstrate greater understanding by staying at the same processing level, but increase the difficulty/complexity of the text?
  - Does a student demonstrate greater understanding by continuing to work with the same text, but increase the level of skill applied to that text?
  - Both? How do they interact?

Movement Across Grades and Levels

- Think about movement along content-specific learning progressions within and across grades
- How does a student who is Proficient at grade 3 continue to show progress?
  - Move to Advanced at grade 3, to Basic at grade 4, to Proficient at grade 4?
  - Over how long a period?
- Ask that same question for students who are below Basic at Grade 3
  - If a student moved from below Basic at grade 3 to Advanced at grade 3 in one academic year, we would call that progress, but he would then be operating off-grade level
  - So, how does Advanced at grade 3 relate to performance at grade 4?

Movement across Assessments

- Consider how the AA-MAS is supposed to fit between the AA-AAS and the general assessment
  - Do we expect to see smooth transitions from one to the next?
  - How do the content expectations relate?
  - Is Advanced on the AA-MAS similar in nature to Basic on the general assessment?
- Our expectation for the AA-MAS is that it may provide a stepping stone for students to reach proficient on the general assessment
- That expectation needs to be reflected in the AA-MAS
  - Consider the grade-level PLDs when writing MALDs

Scaffolding / Content Supports

- Think about the use of scaffolding.
- How true is it that a proficient student on the modified assessment may have a similar set of knowledge and skills as the proficient student on the general assessment, but may require more supports to demonstrate that knowledge.

Example of Scaffolding

- One student may be able to answer a broader/more generalized question, such as about the author's purpose or theme, immediately after reading a longer text.
- Another student may need to first consider questions more directly connected to aspects of the same text (e.g., about the main events, the conflict, the resolution) before being able to make an interpretive statement about the author's purpose or theme.
- Ultimately, the answers may be equally correct, but one student is able to produce a purpose statement without any supporting direction, while the other student needs to be directed toward the answer through a stepwise progression.
- Note that in neither situation is the instructor (or prior test items) providing the correct answer, only a way to think about determining the answer.

Implications for MALDs

- If scaffolding is important to a student's success, then it needs to be incorporated into the descriptors
- The knowledge and skills required to reach proficiency might not be very different between the general assessment and the modified assessment, but the supports may vary
- Consider scaffolding in addition to the learning progressions always keeping in mind transitions across levels, grades, and assessments

Now Let's Make this Practical

- Supplement theory with data
- Convene committees to draft MALDs

Data Analysis

- Supplement the conceptual understanding of learning progressions with data on what these students currently know and can do
- Once the population has been defined we can examine data on student performance that should already exist
- Data on how the students are currently performing may help those drafting the MALDs balance what the students currently know and can do with what they should know and can do
- Of course the data analysis will also help inform the modifications to the assessment, which is why these three pieces must be considered together

Gather Data to Inform Development of MALDs

- Identify the population to be assessed under the 2% assessment (e.g., students with IEPs who are consistent low performers on the general assessment)
- Then, examine their general assessment results
  - What are the characteristics of items that this population does well on?
  - What are the characteristics of items that this population struggles with?

Item Characteristics

- Have content experts summarize findings considering both the content standards measured and specific item features such as
  - Conceptual understanding, fact-based content, or processes/skills
  - Level of reasoning required (locate vs. infer)
  - “Closeness” of distracters to each other
  - Vocabulary load within items (not the vocabulary term being tested)
  - Difficulty/abstractness of vocabulary (e.g., use of figurative language) or ideas presented
  - Concepts tested in items (e.g., fact versus opinion, author’s purpose)
  - Reading: genres, text structures, and length of the passages
  - Mathematics: multi-step problems, and/or supports with graphics

Committee Meeting

1. Bring together a committee of content experts (e.g., classroom teachers and curriculum leaders) and special education teachers.
   - Content experts should make up about 2/3rd of the committee.
   - Need around 5–8 participants per subject area, but if you're developing MALDs for multiple grade levels, consider inviting more participants and splitting them into teams
2. Start with background information on this population and discuss what you have learned about this population giving specific examples
   - Disaggregated assessment data
   - Teacher perceptions

Committee Meeting (continued)

3. Discuss interactions of process and content and what it takes to move across both performance levels and grade levels
   - Are the knowledge and skills required of Proficient on the MAS the same as on the GLAS but more supports are scaffolding is needed, or are the knowledge and skills different?
   - If they are different, is the content different or the processes?
     - e.g., both can make inferences at the Proficient level but the GLAS requires that the inferences are made in a more complex context than the MAS, or GLAS can make inferences, while MAS can only draw basic conclusions from concepts presented directly
     - How do they map to the grade-level content standards?

Committee Meeting (continued)

4. Discuss the transition from this assessment to the general assessment – how are they linked?
5. Focus first on the proficient level and brainstorm what a student should know regarding each content strand (or substrand/benchmark/indicator) in order to be proficient
   - Keep a list of the ideas in bullet format
6. Move to Basic and write statements for that level
   - Should be parallel to a degree, although all skills and content might not be included at all performance levels
   - Compared to Proficient, does Basic imply a different breadth/depth of content, a different level of processes, or the ability to apply knowledge to different contexts
7. Move to Advanced (and any other levels) and repeat

Committee Meeting (continued)

8. Now consider adjacent grade(s)
   - How should Advanced in the prior grade relate to Below Basic/ Basic/ Proficient in the subsequent grade?
   - How do you envision students moving across grades?
   - How does Proficient in one grade compare to Proficient in the next?
9. Write “final” MALDs
   - Format could be the bulleted list, or you could rewrite that into a descriptive paragraph.
10. End the meeting with a summary of all MALDs across all levels and applicable grades.
    - Can you see a clear progression?
    - Will this be translatable to instruction?

(Just as in the general assessment, states will then need to have MALDs adopted formally)

Concluding Thoughts

- A lot of work needs to go into developing a theoretical model of learning progressions
  - Should be based on research in this field
  - Model can then drive development of both the assessment and the descriptors
- Data on current achievement can be examined once the population has been identified to help inform the MALDs
- Possibility that states could go different ways – what are the implications?
  - One state chooses to require higher inferences on lower-level texts while another chooses to require lower-level inferences on more complex text
- This work has the potential to influence the instruction of all students
  - Consider low achievers who are not special education students