

**Psycho-Babble 101
Understanding Psycho-Ed
Testing
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The Essential Message

- Assessment is just one of the many skills that a School Psychologist possesses.
- Assessment is not synonymous with testing and involves gathering information from a variety of sources so that the child's cognitive, academic, behavioral and social-emotional functioning is better understood.
- The focus of the assessment is on guiding intervention strategies and should not be seen as a single event, but as an ongoing process of monitoring to establish the effectiveness of intervention.

Overview

- Action on Inclusion and the roles of a School Psychologist
- Purpose of psycho-educational assessments
- Issues with assessment
- Response to Intervention
- Four pillars of assessment
- Differentiating LD from poor achievement
- Effective vs ineffective assessments

Action on Inclusion (Aoi)

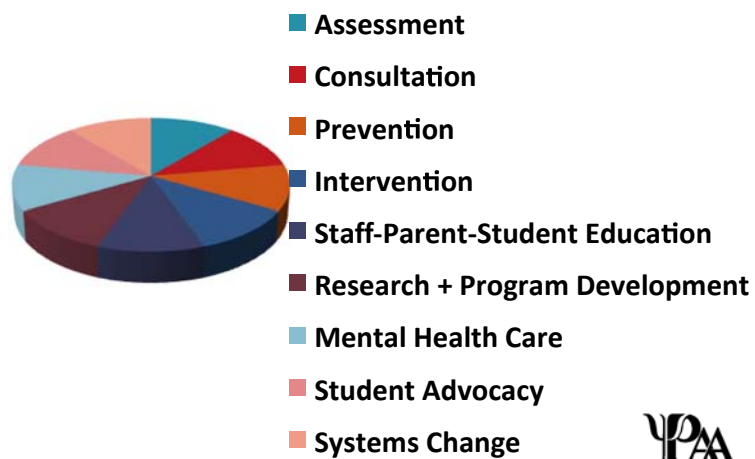
- Collaboration
- Learning Teams
- Capacity Building
- Strength-Based Programming
- Continuum of supports and services from districts
- Wraparound Services from other Ministries
- System indicators to determine success
- New funding model (expected Sept 2012)

Who are school psychologists?

School Psychologists are science-practitioners who possess skills and knowledge in the areas of:

- child and adolescent development,
- principles of learning and behaviour and individual differences,
- social/emotional/behavioural and academic interventions,
- assessment
- program planning

Roles of School Psychologists



Purpose of Psycho-educational Assessment

- The purpose of assessment of an individual who is experiencing academic, behavioural or social/emotional difficulties is to provide the individual along with his/her parents, teachers, school psychologists, and other professionals with information to assist them in making decisions that will enhance the student's development.

Issues with assessment

- The most serious flaw in the current process is the absence of direct link between assessment procedures used for identification and subsequent interventions that might be prescribed on the basis on these assessment procedures (Gresham, 2002).

Response to Intervention (RTI)

- RTI is a process of assessment and intervention that is focused on providing appropriate support and progress monitoring rather than assessment and labelling. It is composed of several essential features:

RTI

- 1. The use of rigorous scientifically based research to facilitate decision making.
- 2. Universal screening to identify students at risk for academic problems.
- 3. Assessment and progress monitoring to ensure student learning is monitored and appropriate instructions is provided.
- 4. Increasingly more intensive treatment of students through appropriate prevention and then intervention treatments.

(Wanzek and Vahghn, 2009)

Four Pillars of Assessment

- Norm-referenced tests
- Interviews
- Observations
- Informal assessment procedures

No diagnosis should be made by a test, but by a clinician (Sattler, 2002)

Norm-referenced tests

- A norm-referenced test (NRT) is a type of test, assessment or evaluation that yields an estimate of the position of the tested individual in a predefined population, with respect to the trait being measured.
- That is, this type of test identifies whether the test taker performed better or worse than other test takers, but not whether the test taker knows either more or less material than is necessary for a given purpose.
- These results are usually provided in Standard Scores and Percentile Ranks.

Standard Scores

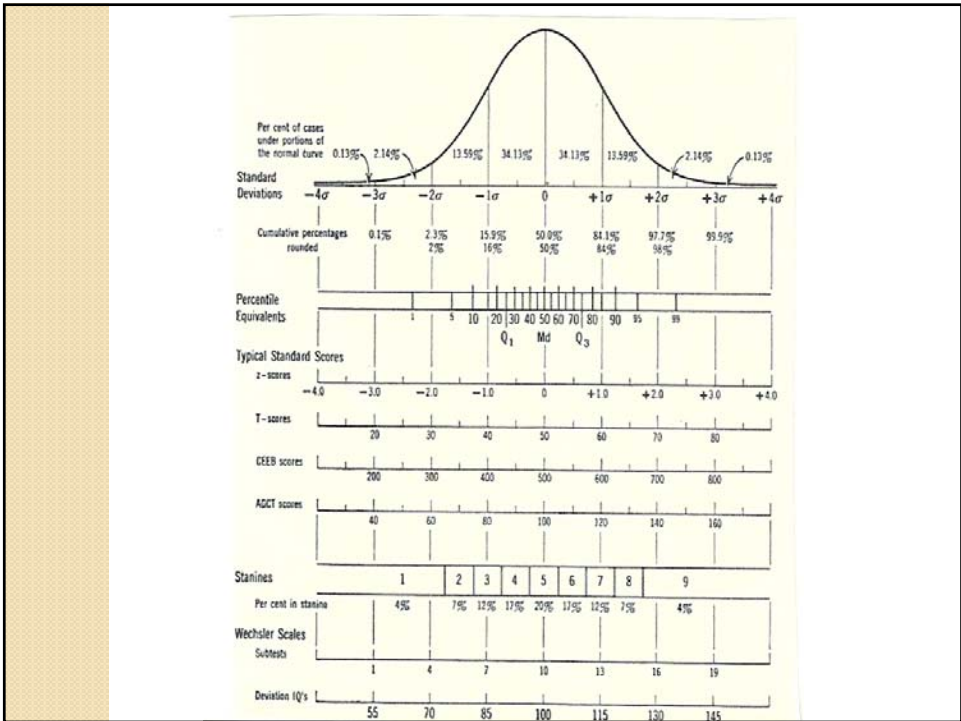
- Z scores: mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1
- T scores: mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 10
- Deviation IQ's : Mean of 100 and a standard deviation of 15 (usually)

Percentile Ranks

- These scores are ranking, or relative position scores.
- Major problem with percentile ranks is that they are not equal at all points (differences are smaller nearer the mean than at the extremes).

Grade/Age Equivalents

- While they seem more meaningful, these scores are more open to misinterpretation.



Norm-referenced tests

- Examples of commonly administered norm-referenced tests:

Cognitive Assessments

- Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children, Fourth Edition (WISC-IV)
- Stanford Binet Tests of Intelligence, Fifth Edition (SBV)

Achievement Tests

- Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-educational Battery, Third Edition (WJ-III)
- Wechsler Individual Achievement Test- Third Edition (WIAT-III)

Behavioral and Emotional Assessments

- Personality Assessment Inventory-Adolescent (PAI-A)
- Behavior Assessment System for Children, Second Edition (BASC-2)
- Connors' Rating Scales, Revised (CRS-R)

Cognitive Testing

- Currently, many school districts require the administration of a cognitive assessment or IQ test for diagnostic and funding purposes.
- There is a movement away from this type of testing towards assessment that provides information regarding skill development and hence better informs intervention strategies.

Cognitive testing continued

- There is an abundance of evidence that suggests that children who experience reading, writing, math, and/or other difficulties, are of average intelligence, are not distinct in processing from the general “run of the mill”, poor, garden variety, slow, or cognitively delayed learners.
- Alberta Education’s Special Education reform, Action on Inclusion, is addressing this issue by removing the connection between diagnostic label and funding.

Cognitive Testing

- IQ tests do inform us about aspects of functioning. The Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children, Fourth Edition, for example provides information in four areas:
- 1. The **Verbal Comprehension** score indicates how well an individual performs on tasks that required him to listen to questions and give spoken answers. These tasks evaluate his skills in understanding verbal information, thinking and reasoning with words, and expressing thoughts as words.
- 2. The **Perceptual Reasoning** score indicates how well he did on tasks that required him to examine and think about things such as designs and pictures, and to solve problems without using words. These tasks evaluate his skills in solving nonverbal problems, sometimes using eye-hand coordination, and working quickly and efficiently with visual information.

Cognitive Testing

- 3. The **Working Memory** score indicates how well a child performs on tasks requiring him to learn and retain information in memory while utilizing the learned information to complete a task. These tasks measure his skills in attention, concentration, and mental reasoning. This skill is closely related to learning and achievement.
- 4. The **Processing Speed** score indicates how well he did on tasks requiring him to quickly scan symbols and make judgments about them. These tasks measure his skills in speed of mental problem-solving, attention, and eye-hand coordination. This skill may be important to his development in reading, and ability to think quickly in general.

Cognitive Testing

| WISC-IV Results | Standard Score | Percentile Rank |
|----------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Verbal Comprehension | 95 | 37 |
| Perceptual Reasoning | 107 | 68 |
| Working Memory | 88 | 21 |
| Processing Speed | 85 | 16 |
| Full Scale IQ | 92 | 30 |

Achievement Testing

- Provides information regarding a child's levels of reading, written language, and math skills in comparison to other children.
- Age comparisons are usually used, but grade comparisons may be better if a child is much younger or older than other children in his grade.
- Grade Equivalents are not typically reported because they are misleading and are less accurate.

Reading Assessment

- Phonological and Phonemic Awareness
- Word Recognition
- Reading Comprehension
- Reading Fluency/Speed



Mathematical Skills Assessment

- Basic fact recall, or math fluency
- Calculation skills
- Problem solving



Written Expression

- Spelling
- Writing fluency/speed
- Punctuation and capitalization
- Sentence structure
- Grammar/word usage
- Organization of ideas

Achievement Testing

Woodcock-Johnson Tests of Achievement- Third Edition (WJ-III)

| Cluster/Test | Standard Score | Percentile Rank |
|----------------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Letter-Word Identification | 71 | 3 |
| Word Attack | 85 | 17 |
| Passage Comprehension | 66 | 1 |
| Story Recall | 104 | 61 |
| Spelling | 76 | 6 |
| Calculation | 87 | 19 |
| Math Fluency | 80 | 9 |
| Applied Problems | 97 | 41 |

Behavioral/Emotional Functioning

- Ability to sustain attention, resist distraction, persist on challenging tasks, and organize time, tasks and materials (i.e., executive functioning).
- Mental health issues including anxiety and mood disorders.
- Social skills and peer relationships.
- Family stressors and coping skills.

Interviews

- A comprehensive psycho-educational assessment must consist of an interview (either in person or via a developmental history form) of a child's parents/caregiver.
- An interview should provide information regarding the following:
 - Developmental history
 - Family history of learning, attention, and mental health problems
 - Birth and medical history
 - Current educational concerns
 - Educational history including number of schools attended
 - Speech and language development and intervention
 - Support services provided
 - Social skills/peer relationships
 - Emotional status
 - Sleep concerns
 - Family supports and stressors
 - Resources available within the school and community

Observation

- Test-taking behaviors
- Classroom observations
- Waiting room behaviors
- Behavioral checklists completed by parents, teachers, caregivers

Informal assessments

Criterion-referenced and ipsative

- In a criterion-referenced assessment, the score shows whether or not the test takers performed well or poorly on a given task, but not how that compares to other test takers;
- In an ipsative system, the test taker is compared to his previous performance.
- These forms of tests can lead directly to program planning and are effective for progress monitoring.
- E.g.,
 - Burns and Roe Informal Reading Inventory, Fifth Edition
 - Reading Readiness Screening Tool (RRST)

Differentiating LD from Skill Deficits or Psychological Disorders

- Lack of educational opportunity
- Mental health issues
- Drug/Alcohol Use
- ESL/ELL
- Low motivation
- Test Anxiety
- Exaggeration

Understanding LD

Having academic impairments is not synonymous with having a Learning Disability.

Having a learning disability is not synonymous with deserving support.

When is an assessment ineffective?

- When background information is not gathered from parents, teachers, cumulative files etc.
- The assessment is conducted under poor conditions, or the child is under duress.
- An incomplete battery is administered.
- Test results are not shared with parents, teachers or other involved personnel.
- No recommendations are provided.
- Results are used to label a child, not for programming.

When is an assessment ineffective?

- The report is computer generated with no personal interpretation.
- No link is made between the test results and the difficulty the child is having in the classroom or at home.
- The recommendations apply only to school-related assistance.
- The recommendations suggest the impossible.
- The recommendations focus only on what the child cannot do and do not build on strengths.
- A learning difficulty is identified with no mention of remediation or accommodation.

Characteristics of an Effective Assessment

- Assessment is not seen as a specific task
- It is not synonymous with testing, evaluation or measurement
- Information gathered depends on what one wants to know
- Multiple sources of information are utilized
- Feedback is provided to the entire support team
- Intervention strategies are provided

Questions an effective assessment should answer:

- How do these results affect the child's ability in the classroom?
- What remedial assistance does this child require?
- What type of intervention approach may be most effective?
- Who can provide this extra help?
- What accommodations are required?

Questions...

- Which behavioral or teaching strategies would be appropriate?
- What can the parents do to support this child?
- How long will this child require extra support?
- What resources are available in the school or community?

When should an assessment be recommended?

- When a child is having difficulty in school and intervention strategies are not resulting in improvement.
- When a child is exhibiting behavioral challenges that are poorly managed.
- When parents, caregivers or teachers are concerned with a child's progress and don't know how to help.

Who ya gonna call?

- Assessments can be completed by a school psychologist hired or contracted by a school division.
- Psychologists in private practice can also conduct assessments and are generally hired by concerned parents. Fees for services may be covered by extended health care plans.

Summary

- Response to intervention models are the most effective approaches to assessment.
- Information should be gathered through multiple sources of information.
- The purpose of assessment is to enhance understanding and to guide intervention.

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