

Assessment of children: Fundamental methods and practices

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This text adds to the literature on assessment of "at risk" children who require either individualised educational programmes or re-evaluation of their progress within such programmes. The value of this book lies in the way it links assessment and intervention and research and practice. I would recommend this book, as suggested in its foreword, for those entering special education and, in this era of inclusion, more generally for all undergraduate education students. Until we have an Australianised edition, however, it needs to be supplemented extensively with Australasian readings.

An unusual feature of this book is its dual table of contents. A brief table of contents gives a birds-eye view of the 4-part structure of the book with titles of the 18 chapters. A second detailed list of contents then gives information on the main chapter sections.

The chapter structure is unequal. Three "foundations" chapters address assessment as an integral aspect of problem-solving, the various models, assumptions, and approaches, and U.S. legal considerations, culminating in 1990 with P.L. 101-476, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Technical aspects of assessment in chapters 4 and 5 are de-emphasised in comparison with rival texts. There is one chapter on basic concepts (types of measurement scales, measures of central tendency, range, standard deviation, standard scores, percentiles and

correlation) and one chapter on essential test characteristics (reliability, validity, and norms).

The practice of school-based assessment, the heart of the book, takes nine chapters. Three general chapters on cognitive abilities, academic achievement, and screening and identification in the vital early childhood years are followed by three more specific chapters on the key curriculum areas of reading, maths, and language respectively. The next three chapters branch out more widely into the more contentious areas of perceptual motor skills and abilities, behaviour rating scales and inventories, and the assessment of adaptive behaviour.

Alternative approaches to assessment are covered in the final four chapters. An excellent chapter on observational techniques goes well beyond the subjective anecdotal process typically practised in Australian classrooms. There are chapters on specialised approaches for low incidence disabilities, curriculum-based assessment and computer-based assessment and test interpretation, respectively.

The sections focussed on practice and research throughout the book are one of its real strengths, as they encourage the reader to engage actively with assessment issues. Examples from these sections demonstrate the opportunities for lively discussion in tutorial rooms and staffrooms: "At best, the word 'dyslexia' means a possible reading problem!" (p. 244); "Use of a simple model of behavior, such as the ABC model, can help unravel many problems" (p. 9); and

“Teachers...tend to overestimate the severity of behavior problems” (p. 413).

Accessibility to the reader is another strength. The prose style is lucid and straightforward. Generous instructional provisions include a detailed instructor’s manual and software containing Buros Mental Measurements Yearbook evaluations of common tests used in the USA. They offset the lack of questions for further study or reflection usually included at the end of chapters.

Cultural appropriateness is the main limitation of this text for Australasian readers. We need books of this calibre that include assessment measures developed in our own countries, from major test developers such as ACER and NZCER (e.g., *Progressive Achievement Tests in Reading*), from state or national departments of education or health (e.g., the Literacy and

Numeracy Diagnostic Assessment Project, *LANDA*, from Queensland, and the *Irrabeena Developmental Checklist* from Western Australia), and from individual researchers such as Marie Clay and Marie Neale. We need to know about curriculum-based assessment measures like Schleiger’s *Diagnostic Mathematical Tasks and Checkpoints*, developed by the English Club in Victoria. We need to be aware of early childhood measures, such as those developed by Moira Pieterse and her colleagues at the Macquarie University Special Education Centre. That caveat apart, this book is a worthwhile addition to your bookshelf.

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