

Keys to Understanding a Psychological/Psychoeducational Assessment

A presentation prepared for Professional Development Seminars
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What is the Purpose of an Assessment?

- Identify learning profile
- Identify strengths and weaknesses
- Determine if there is a Learning Disability
- Look for other factors (e.g., ADHD; anxiety ...)
- Determine appropriate programming

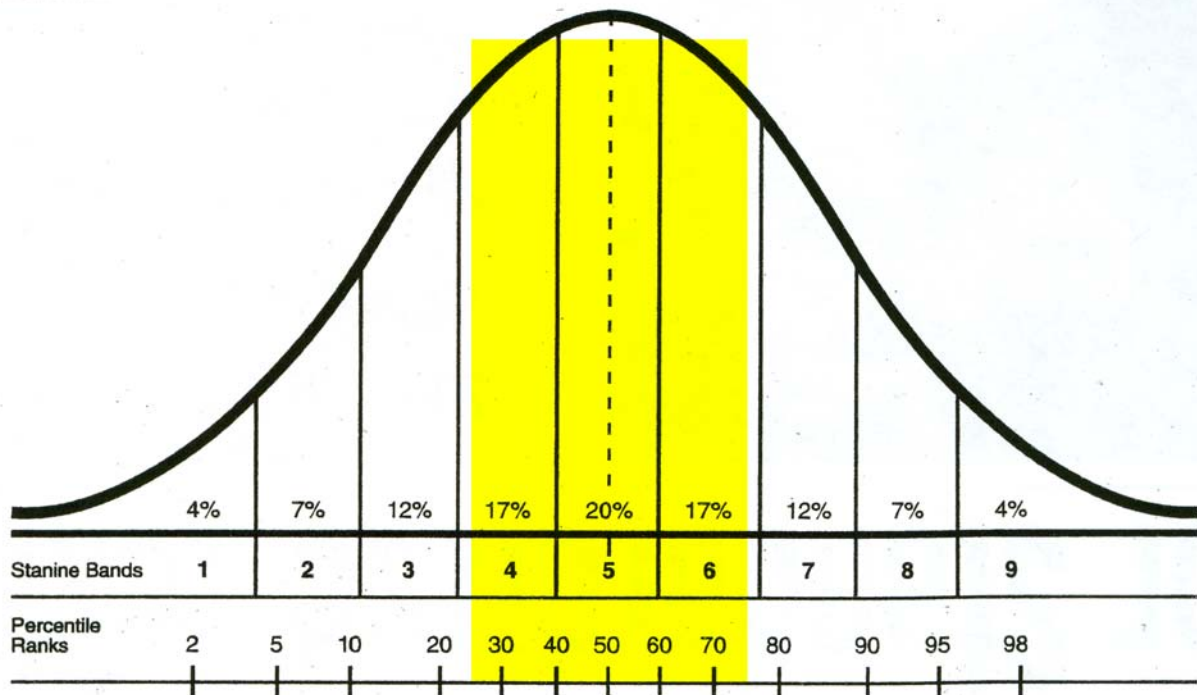
What is involved in a typical assessment?

- Informed Consent
- Gather background information, including review of academics (e.g., report cards)
- Observations & collection of data from other sources (e.g., questionnaires)
- Administer tests
- Scoring & interpreting all data
- Report writing
- Feedback
- Typical assessment takes 10 –15 hours

A Brief Review of Statistics

Normal Curve, showing Percentile Ranks and Stanines (height of the normal curve represents the number of students attaining the score at that point on the scale)

"Average" covers 50% of the national population, with the percentile ranks ranging from 25 to 74. (area under curve represents percentage of population)



Types of Tests Administered

1. Cognitive

- Provides a measure of intelligence/thinking and reasoning abilities
- Provides a rough estimate of expected school performance
- Identifies areas of strengths/weaknesses and learning profile
- Number of different measures (e.g. Leiter, WISC-IV, Woodcock-Johnson)
- WISC-IV is one of the most commonly used measures

Four Factors in the WISC-IV:

Verbal Comprehension – verbal concept formation, verbal reasoning and acquired knowledge

Perceptual Reasoning – fluid reasoning, spatial processing and visual motor integration

Working Memory – ability to perform verbal tasks while holding information in short term memory

Processing Speed – ability to quickly & accurately visually scan, discriminate and/or copy visual information

- Interpretation of cognitive profile: (cannot just look at a single score)
- Consider discrepancies between factors and within factors
- Determine normative and individual strengths and weaknesses
- Qualitative observations

2. Psychological Processing Measures

- Phonological Processing (phonological awareness; Phonological Memory; Rapid Naming)
- Memory (Short-term memory; Working memory; Long-term memory; Consolidation/retrieval)
- Language Processing (receptive and expressive language)
- Other (Visual-spatial processing; Visual-motor integration; Processing Speed)
- Executive Function (Initiating behaviour; Inhibiting competing actions; Selecting relevant task goals; Planning & organizing; Shifting problem solving strategies; Self -Monitoring & evaluating; Working memory; Emotional/behavioural self regulation)

3. Academic

- Designed to measure what a student has learned, including their skills in the areas of reading, writing, and mathematical skills
- Compared to performance on the ability test
- Not directly related to curriculum

4. Adaptive

- Usually used with students who exhibit weaknesses in cognitive functioning
- Activities of Daily living (Self care; Home care; Community awareness)
- Socialization
- Communication

5. Social Emotional

- Concerns about social-emotional factors and/or behaviour impacting learning ability
- Questionnaires and Projective measures

Possible Profiles from an Assessment

- Learning Disabled (LD)
- Mild Intellectual Disability
- Developmental Disability
- Gifted
- Gifted/LD
- Working to potential
- Slow Learner

What to Look for in the Beginning of a Report

- Identifying information (name, grade...)
- Date Assessment Completed
- Age of Child when Completed

- Reason for Referral
- Background information
 - Diagnosis
 - Medical History
 - Academic History & Support (IEP, Resource...)
 - Family Medical/Mental Health History

What to Look for in the Assessment Observations

- This is a 1:1 environment – expect best performance
 - Willingness
 - Signs of Inattention, Focus, Distractibility
 - Worry or Concern
 - Talkative – on topic?
 - Separation from caregiver
 - Comment on validity of results

How to Read Cognitive Test Results

- Look for percentiles for the cognitive measure (can chart them on given form)
- See if discuss whether Indices were valid/unitary
- Any significant discrepancies between Indices (relative strengths/weaknesses)
- What is the best estimate of cognitive functioning
- Qualitative observations provide a lot of information (can't just rely on the numbers)

Interpretation of Processing Measures

- For an LD, need weak processing in an area that makes logical sense
- The processing measures can highlight other expected difficulties in the class
- Not all measures will be utilized in all assessments

How to read Academic Results

- Look at percentiles/grade equivalents
- Look for significant discrepancies between ability (WISC-IV best estimate) and academics
- Are all three areas equally developed?
- Qualitative observations

What to look for in Behaviour/Social/Emotional

- Questionnaires and/or projective measures and/or adaptive functioning
- Do parents/school/student agree on concerns
- Do the results match what you see at school?

What to Look for in the Formulation/Summary

- Summary of results
- Ties all results together
- Outlines strengths/weaknesses
- Diagnosis?

Other Valuable Information from Reports

- Referral/suggestion to investigate concerns with paediatrician (e.g., ADHD)
- Social-emotional difficulties impacting academics (may benefit from therapy)
- Was the student identified in public school

Important Information

- Only a few profiles have been outlined
- Regardless of your experience, it is often difficult to determine if a child has a LD without psychoeducational testing
- There are some differences between LD and learning difficulties
- Slow learners are a common profile

Other Considerations

- Important to have successful strategies for LD; ADHD; Anxiety; Behaviour; Nonverbal LD; Autism/Developmental Delay; Parents (supportive versus demanding); Self-advocacy; Executive Functioning

Other Information a Psychologist Can Provide

- ADHD investigation or diagnosis
- Anxiety/Stress investigation or diagnosis and therapy
- Class Profiles (educational assessments versus psycho-education assessment)
- Brief Screening Measures
- Autism
- Help with translating report into programming
- Therapy
- Dealing with parents
- Plus a lot more...

**To Contact Dr. Pam Struikma for any of the above support:
Please contact Professional Development Seminars
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