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Book Review

Assessment of Children: Cognitive Foundations and Applications

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Disclosure: Stefan C. Dombrowski is the author of a text on psychoeducational assessment and report writing.

Book Review

Assessment of Children: Cognitive Foundations and Applications

Introduction

It is difficult for a seminal reference, with a long publication history, to evolve and keep current with contemporary science and practice when there have been substantive changes in the discipline during that time span. In its sixth edition, Sattler's *Assessment of Children: Cognitive Foundations and Applications* (Cost: \$140) has largely accomplished this feat and continues to be as relevant today as it was when it was first published. The text remains at the vanguard of contemporary assessment practices and is well-deserving of the accolades it has received over the past five decades. The author (and contributors) are to be commended on incorporating new research evidence as it has accumulated in clinical, school, and assessment psychology—the present reviewers find the text to be empirically guided and representative of a state-of-the-art contribution not only to praxis but also to the professional literature on evidence-based assessment.

General Description

Like previous editions, the present edition contains five major sections: (1) Foundations; (2) Theories and Issues in Intelligence; (3) The Wechsler Scales; (4) Other Intelligence Tests; and (5) Report Writing. The initial section on foundations discusses important topics in assessment including an overview of the assessment process; important legal and ethical issues related to assessment; an overview of National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), American Psychological Association (APA) and Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) ethical codes; and a presentation of topics concerning culturally and linguistically diverse assessment. With regard to relevant ethical codes and standards, we are particularly pleased to

see several references to the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* (American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, & National Council on Measurement in Education, 2014). This section also offers a primer on psychometrics and on the role of the evaluator in the assessment process. Each of these sections is sufficiently detailed yet concisely summarized to offer a comprehensive overview of important topics without overwhelming novice readers.

The next section, theories and issues in intelligence, discusses the history of intelligence and the various theories of intelligence (IQ) including the relationship of IQ to a variety of outcomes including achievement, vocation, and gender. The theoretical section traces the history of IQ assessment from the dawn of recorded history to the present time. The inside cover of the book offers a chronological listing of important events within IQ testing. The third section, entitled the Wechsler scales, provides a comprehensive description of the theoretical and practical application of the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Fifth Edition (WISC-V) and Wechsler Preschool and Primary School Intelligence Scale-Fourth Edition (WPPSI-IV) including in-depth description of subtests and index scores as well as how to administer, score, and interpret the instruments. This section is intensely detailed offering very specific guidance on how to interpret scores at each level of the scales. It also includes a discussion of the extant, independent factor analysis of the WISC-V and WPPSI-IV.

The next section entitled, Other Measures of Intelligence, follows the same organizing framework as the section on the Wechsler Scales, and discusses the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scales-Fifth Edition (SB5), Differential Ability Scales-Second Edition (DAS-II), Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children-Second Edition (KABC-2), and Woodcock-Johnson IV Tests of Cognitive Abilities (WJ IV Cognitive) in sufficient detail not only to understand the plethora of

information offered in the respective technical manuals, but also the extant factor analytic and other research on the instruments. The final section on report writing contains a description of how to write a psychological report including the various report components, and best practices and pitfalls of report writing. A supplemental resource guide is also provided with the purchase of the text that includes chapters containing additional reference tables for the major instruments reviewed, brief descriptions of alternative measures of cognitive abilities, recommendations for serving as an expert witness in legal proceedings, and the assessment of academic achievement and oral language abilities.

Commentary

Sattler's text remains nonpareil: relevant, comprehensive, and generally scientifically sound. From its origins, it has been at the forefront of clinical assessment and stands as the leader among a panoply of rival texts. Although the level of detail may at first appear overwhelming, the text remains, for the most part, accessible to students enrolled in introductory and advanced assessment courses. Future practitioners will likely welcome the level of detail offered in the text as they gain more insight and experience into the process and mechanics of clinical assessment. Whereas other assessment texts suffer from built in obsolescence and are purposely designed to be updated every few years, *Assessment of Children: Cognitive Foundations and Applications* is built to serve as a reference resource that practitioners can return to throughout the course of their career.

One of the more laudable aspects of the text is its up-to-date summary of the universe of literature surrounding IQ testing and the correlates of IQ. For instance, Sattler discusses the current relationship among various environmental and genetic factors in relation to IQ. Also compelling is the impartial coverage of the extant, independent factor analytic research for

various instruments. Coverage of this topic is vital as structural validity serves as the foundational validity evidence necessary for understanding and interpreting the scores that are provided to the test user. Sattler's text is refreshingly scientific in this regard. Unlike many available interpretive handbooks, books, and chapters for specific instruments, Sattler's text offers a presentation of both independent research perspectives and those furnished by the publisher in test technical manuals. More importantly, when discrepancies are observed between these results, they are highlighted for the reader. For example, in the chapter on the WJ IV Cognitive, Sattler and colleagues make research guided recommendations regarding how to understand and interpret that instrument featuring studies that support an alternative structure for the instrument. Sattler essentially took this same approach when discussing the KABC-2 and DAS-II. Additionally, we find the overview chapter on statistics and psychometrics to be among the best surveys of this topic that we have seen in the field and is particularly welcome at a time when related treatments of psychometric and measurement theory has been culled from many masters and specialist-level training programs. The author clearly has a keen capacity to summarize broad topics and distill highly technical language in a way that makes it accessible to all and the summaries provided at the end of each chapter further crystallize salient "take home" messages.

There is one topic that is covered in Sattler's text which deserves further explication. His text continues to promote an approach to interpretation of the Wechsler Scales that deviates from the preponderance of the scientific evidence and is a vestige of what we consider an anachronistic practice. For decades, in a section called "A Successive-Level Approach to Test Interpretation," (pp. 431-433) Sattler's text has promoted the practice of subtest analysis and interpretation (albeit constrained) within the Wechsler Scales despite numerous research calls to

“just say no” to subtest analysis (McDermott, Fantuzzo & Glutting, 1999; McGill, Dombrowski & Canivez, 2018; Watkins, Glutting & Youngstrom, 2005).

In this section Sattler discusses six levels of IQ test interpretation starting with level I (interpretation at the level of the full scale IQ), then to levels II through V (subtest level analysis) and on to level VI (qualitative analysis). We contend that engaging in levels III through VI, though intuitively appealing and steeped perhaps in the psychodiagnostic tradition to conceptualize and ponder a clinical situation, has a questionable scientific foundation. As a further example, Sattler includes a table listing specific subtests with associated attributes (pp. 421-422) and recommends the use of clinical acumen to link subtest results to particular cognitive processes thought to be associated with each subtest. Even though these procedures may be intuitively appealing, likely due to retrospective association (see Watkins et. al, 2005), practitioners and trainers alike are cautioned that this practice has been the subject of criticism in the research literature for well over three decades.

Nevertheless, Sattler and colleagues have updated their interpretive recommendations in important ways. For example, the longstanding practice of invalidating composite scores due to significant scatter is questioned for specific instruments and several studies reporting negative research results associated with this practice are cited. Although we endorse Sattler’s text in general, we do not presently endorse the practice of subtest-level and item-level analyses in particular. This aspect may well be the singular major criticism of what we consider a masterwork on par with other reference classics in psychology and other disciplines.

Conclusion

Put simply, Sattler’s text is a *tour de force* in the field of assessment psychology. It remains as relevant today as it was over 45 years ago when the first edition was published. As

such, *Assessment of Children: Cognitive Foundations and Applications* should be considered by any practitioner or trainer who is interested in the clinical assessment of children's cognitive ability in professional psychology and education.

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