

# Psychological Evaluations: When and Why

*Ketty Patiño González, Ph.D.  
Licensed Psychologist,  
Private Practice  
May 2008*

# Signs: Toddlers/Preschoolers

- Delay in language (i.e., not talking in short sentences by two, not saying words by 15 months)
- Does not respond to his name when you call him, more times than most
- Lack of pointing to share things
- Prefers to interact with things, not you
- Extremes of behavior

# Purposes of Preschool Assessment

(Nagle, 2000; Appl, 2000)

- Screening
- Diagnosis
- Individual program planning and monitoring

# Signs: Toddlers/Preschoolers

- Motor delays
- Difficulty pronouncing words by age 5
- Difficulty learning letter-sound connections (by age 5)
- Difficulty learning to count to ten (by age 4)
- Repetitive behaviors or intense, unusual special interests

# Signs:

## Toddlers/Preschoolers

- At school is not interested in other kids
- Will hide under table/not sit down during Circle Time
- Has tried to run away from the classroom
- Behavior at school is much worse than at home

# Importance of Preschool Assessment

- Early detection=better outcomes (Feil & Severson, 1995)
- The goal is for the child to start formal schooling ready to learn (USD OE, 1992)
- Listen to your inner voice, you know your child better than anyone else.

# Preschoolers are a Unique Population (Nagle, 2000)

- Rapid developmental change
- Behavior during testing may affect accuracy of test results
- Approach testing situation differently than older students
- Ease with strangers greatly varies
- View scores as current level of development which is constantly changing (i.e., establish a baseline)
- Lack of prior school experience

# Issues to Consider

(Bracken, 2000)

- Child's temperament
- Examiner approachability, affect, and physical presence
- Behavior management
- Environment
  - Furniture, decorations, distractions, climate, seating arrangement
- Test floors and ceilings

# Traditional Methods of Assessment

(Nagle, 2000)

- Traditional: standardized, norm-referenced
  - Battelle Developmental Inventory
  - Stanford-Binet, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition
  - Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children -II
  - Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (WPPSI-III)
  - Bracken Basic Concept Scale, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition
  - Differential Ability Scales (DAS-2)
  - Bayley Scales of Infant and Toddler Development, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition
  - Preschool Language Scale, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition

# Other Methods of Assessment

- Play-based assessment (Ross, 2000 [Best Practices])
- Direct observation (e.g., school visit)
- Mix of the two (i.e., Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule)
- Parent interviews (e.g., Autism Diagnostic Interview)
- Parent-child interactions
  
- A COMBINATION OF TRADITIONAL AND OTHER METHODS IS BEST FOR A YOUNG CHILD

# Assessment of Behavior

- Functional Behavior Assessment (FAB)
- Parental and teacher input are crucial
  - Rating scales
  - Developmental history
- Observations
- Parental point of reference
  - First child; different children's development (e.g., compared to your first child...?)

# Best Practices in Early Intervention

(Barnett, 2000)

- Interventions for Language and Literacy
  - Milieu Language Interventions
  - Early Literacy
- Interventions for Challenging Behaviors
  - High probability sequences
  - Alternative responses and functional communication training
  - Choices
  - Timed positives, fixed-time, or noncontingent reinforcement
  - Correspondence training

# School Readiness

- Cognitive development
- Social-emotional development
- Communication and language development
- Sensorimotor development

# Home Activities to Promote School Readiness

- Healthy pregnancy and mother's nutrition
- Regular health care after birth
- Verbal communication with child
- Reading to the child
- Opportunities to write, draw, sing, dance, and tell stories
- Talk about the value of education and learning
- Visits to libraries, museums, and cultural activities
- Asking children open-ended questions
- Opportunities to play and explore
- Social interaction with other children
- Promote independence at the child's level

# School-Age: Signs

- Slow reader
- Is achieving in school below potential
- Teachers complain she has a hard time finishing work on time
- Hates math (social studies, language arts, fill in the blank)
- Complains about other kids

# School Age: Signs

- Handwriting is BAD
- Obvious social problems
- He is “lazy” or unmotivated
- Has word finding difficulties
- Moods are extreme
- Motor mouth/excessively active
- Still has a difficult time expressing herself

# Psychoeducational Evaluations: Basics

- Research shows that children need to have many different abilities in place in order to learn
- Different deficits affect different areas of learning
- Deficits affect different subjects (i.e., reading, writing, etc.) in diverse ways, depending on the age of the child

# Psychoeducational Evaluations: Basics

- If more than one substrate is affected, different areas may be affected
- Measuring deficits involves error
- In addition, the interpretation of learning profiles is very complex, as they have to be viewed in the greater context of one individual

# Psychoeducational Evaluations: Basics

- Most psychoeducational evaluations need to look at least eight different areas of processing
- Problems:
  - Many evaluators do not do this
  - There are many different achievement measures that measure different aspects of the same area
  - Although most evaluators use the WISC, they do not supplement it, as they need to do

# BASICS: cont.

- Each of the eight substrates needs to be examined through a minimum of two different subtests
- If these subtests diverge widely then they need to be supplemented for clarification
- Reports should not just comment on the quantitative data, they should also comment on HOW the data got there

# Qualitative vs. Quantitative

1. Wrong
  2. Right
  3. Wrong
  4. Right
  5. Wrong
  6. Right
  7. Right
  8. Wrong
- Total = 4

1. Right
  2. Right
  3. Right
  4. Right
  5. Wrong
  6. Wrong
  7. Wrong
  8. Wrong
- Total = 4

# Comment

- “Interpretation and communication of test results, in the context of the individual’s particular background, referral referral behaviors, and approach to performance on diverse tasks, constitute the **crux** of competent evaluation” (Reynolds & Kaufman, 1990).

# Summary

- To understand a child's learning profile we need to understand:
  - The abilities that lie behind the ability to learn
  - How to measure those abilities
  - How to interpret the results
  - How they can be remedied and, if they cannot be, how they can be compensated for or the demands modified.

# Looking for Zebras

- **IMPORTANT POINT:** Many evaluators will not look for zebras when they hear the clapping of hooves. However, when we don't know a child's genetic background we need to be specially aware of the possibility that the clapping may be indeed coming from zebras

# Psychoeducational Evaluations

- 1. Should provide strong explanations of a child's cognitive profile, **broken down by area**. These explanations should contain qualitative comments, not just numbers. In essence, you need to be able to tell **HOW** the child obtained those numbers, not simply what the numbers are.

# Psychoeducational Evaluations

- 2. Explanation of the different achievement areas, broken down by subarea. For example, word decoding is not the same as reading comprehension.
- The evaluator needs to understand that what one test calls reading comprehension may be very different from what another test calls reading comprehension and should address and acknowledge the deficits of the measure she selected.

# Psychoeducational Evaluations

- 3. If there are discrepancies found between the different areas of the child's child's cognitive profile, then these should should relate **in ways supported by theory and research**, to:
  - A. The child's areas of academic weaknesses weaknesses AND strengths found in the evaluation

# Psychoeducational Evaluations

- B. The child's background, as provided by the parents and teachers
- C. Specific difficulties in different areas of achievement found in the evaluation

# Psychoeducational Evaluations

- 4. Recommendations should follow from the report findings and be both global and and specific. **They should also address the psychological findings of the evaluation.**
- 5. Recommendations should be backed by by research

# References

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# KETTY'S WEBPAGE

- [www.kettygonzalez.com](http://www.kettygonzalez.com) discusses how her psychoeducational evaluations are organized and the theory behind them. It also provides a guide for understanding psychoeducational evaluations