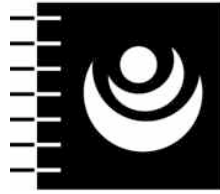


Project Summary



**Early Childhood
Measurement + Evaluation
Resource Centre**

Factors Related to the Psycho-Educational Assessment of Aboriginal Children and Youth



The Early Childhood Measurement and Evaluation Resource Centre (ECMERC) is a centre housed within the Community-University Partnership for the Study of Children, Youth, and Families.

For more information about ECMERC and CUP, please visit

www.cup.ualberta.ca

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INTRODUCTION

The Early Childhood Measurement and Evaluation Resource Centre (ECMERC) at the Community-University Partnership for the Study of Children, Youth, and Families (CUP) lead this project that was aimed at addressing the central problem of how to support the provision of culturally appropriate assessment and programming for Aboriginal children and youth. These issues have been identified as critically important in the early learning community and across school districts. Through this project we reviewed the research literature surrounding psychoeducational assessment for Aboriginal children and youth. Assessment tools that were most commonly cited in the literature were reviewed and evaluated for their appropriateness with Aboriginal children and youth. Issues related to the psycho-educational assessment of Aboriginal students and recommendations for addressing these issues are discussed below.

Testing Context

The following is a list of potential factors that could influence the outcomes of assessments.

Referral bias. Due to stereotypes, and/or a lack of understanding surrounding culturally relevant behaviours, teachers or other individuals may be more likely to refer Aboriginal students for assessment, even when behaviours are not suggestive of an emotional or cognitive concern.

Bias of examiner. Bias of the examiner towards an Aboriginal examinee may have implications for how the examiner interacts with the student or his/her parents, and the extent to which cultural factors are considered in the assessment process and in the interpretation of test results.

Parent or child attitude towards testing. Parents and/or their children may have mistrust of schools and of the testing process; parents may lack a full understanding of the assessment process and/or the potential outcomes of the assessment; and cultural attitudes about disability may impact upon how parents interact with the examiner and the way parents respond to testing information about their child.

Comfort level with examiner. Aboriginal children and their parents may approach non-Aboriginal assessors with apprehension and distrust. Until trust is established, the testing process may not yield positive outcomes. Collaboratively involving parents in the discussion of testing results and in the decision-making process can help to increase the trust between parent and examiner.

Location of the assessment and debrief. For various historical reasons, some Aboriginal parents may be uncomfortable in a schooling context. In this case, examiners should consider alternative locations for where findings of the assessment can be debriefed with parents. Inviting an Aboriginal liaison worker to the consultation with parents may help to lessen any stress.

Tests

In addition to the context in which testing is implemented, the properties and composition of the tests may lead to biases with diverse cultural groups.

Test content bias. The level of dominant culture-specific knowledge included in a test may be relevant to how an Aboriginal examinee performs on the test. Depending on the extent to which a child is acculturated into the dominant culture, certain test items may not measure what they are intended to measure. For example, a measure of self-esteem developed on the basis of a Eurocentric worldview may not be appropriate for use with a child reared within a small, rural, Aboriginal community. What is considered self-esteem in one culture may differ from that of another culture.

The focus on verbal abilities as opposed to non-verbal abilities can place some Aboriginal children at a disadvantage when taking tests, particularly when English is not the primary language spoken by the examinee.

Timed tests that require speed in processing information may also disadvantage examinees whose culture places more emphasis on a reflective style of processing information.

Test materials. Familiarity with materials used within a test has implications for how an examinee performs. For example, some cognitive tests incorporate puzzle-like materials. If an examinee is familiar with puzzles in general, he/she may be more likely to perform well on a task that involves puzzles.

Test directions. Given the standardization processes of many tests, examiners are not allowed to alter directions to ensure comprehension. If an Aboriginal examinee is unfamiliar with the specific language used to describe a test, he/she will be less likely to perform well on the test.

Scoring criteria. Specific wording is sometimes relevant to how a child scores on a task. If a child lacks knowledge of the specific language necessary to achieve a certain score, he/she is placed at a disadvantage.

Standardization sample. Although Aboriginal children are sometimes included in the standardization sample used to establish normative scores for tests, the percentage of Aboriginal participants relative to children of the dominant culture, is much smaller. As such, it is often the case that Aboriginal examinees are compared to a group comprised of primarily Caucasian children and youth.

Student-Related Factors

When generating inferences from an assessment, the following student-related factors should be taken into consideration.

Current and past living circumstances. If an Aboriginal child has been reared in a dominant-culture home, where Aboriginal cultural activities are not a focus, the influence of Aboriginal culture on test performance should be minimal, if at all present.

Child-rearing practices often differ between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families. These practices have implications for a child's fund of knowledge and for language patterns (e.g., his/her willingness to speak, response time, tendency to speak with adults) and thus for test performance. Even in urban Aboriginal homes, the rearing practices employed often differ from those in the dominant culture.

Exposure to literature and to early literacy activities can have implications for how a child performs on cognitive, language, and achievement measures. .

English language proficiency. Consideration should be given to the primary or preferred language of the examinee. If he/she is bilingual, this may have implications for his/her understanding of test items. Bilingualism may result in lower verbal scores on cognitive, achievement and language tests.

Attitude towards testing. The extent to which a child is comfortable with the examiner will likely affect how he/she responds to test items, or the likelihood that he/she will elaborate on responses when further queried by an examiner. Motivation is an important factor in how well a child performs on a test. The level of test anxiety may have negative implications for test performance.

Response style. Some ethnic minority children have a reported tendency to not attempt responses or to terminate an initial response before completion when he/she is unsure that the response is fully accurate. This response style can result in lower scores on many standardized tests.

To ensure the validity of inferences derived on the basis of test scores, it is vitally important that practitioners take into consideration the numerous factors that can influence how an Aboriginal student performs on many of our most widely used psycho-educational assessment tools.

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