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School-Based Assessment Research in Five Nations

This special issue of the *McGill Journal of Education* is devoted to school-based assessment research in Canada, People's Republic of China, Israel, Lebanon, and the United States. The focus of each paper is primarily on psychoeducational assessment issues that involve standardized intelligence, achievement, and personality/temperament tests used to evaluate children having difficulties in school. The nations surveyed are located in North America, the Middle East, and China. Readers, therefore, will be able to gain some understanding of current trends in psychoeducational assessment research in diverse regions of the world.

School-based assessment practices have been shaped by the efforts of investigators from such countries as Great Britain (e.g., Sir Francis Galton, Karl Pearson, Charles Spearman, and Sir Cyril Burt), France (e.g., Alfred Binet, Victor Henry, Edward Seguin, and Theodore Simon), Germany (e.g., Emil Kraepelin, Herman Ebbinghaus, and William Stern), and the United States (e.g., James Cattell, Henry Goddard, Louis Terman, Edward Thorndike, Leon Thurstone, David Wechsler, and Robert Thorndike). Although in recent years the United States has been at the forefront of psychoeducational research, other countries continue to contribute to the development of psychoeducational and clinical assessment procedures.

There are notable variations in the scope and quality of school-based assessment research in the five nations surveyed. The countries considered herein vary with respect to legislation involving mandatory education, assessment of students with special needs, and accountability for student achievement. Moreover, considerable variation exists with respect to the availability of measurement personnel, financial incentives, university systems that reinforce research productivity, national security, and public attitudes toward testing.

Despite these variations, the influence of tests developed in the United States is quite apparent in Canada, China, Israel, and Lebanon. But these four nations also are striving to develop their own indigenous products and have been successful in some areas. Simple translations of English-language tests, standardized in the United States or Canada or England, for example, may not be appropriate in other countries without significant modifications. Test translations are hazardous without careful research into the meaning of the translated items. Psychometric issues – such as item difficulty levels, reliability, and validity – must also be considered. Still, tests developed in the United States are used for psychoeducational assessment purposes in translated form in many countries throughout the world.

It is of interest to observe that Chinese and Israeli investigators have been able to cross-validate a number of individually administered intelligence tests that were developed in the United States. Canada, Lebanon, and Israel also have developed their own group intelligence tests, such as the *Canadian Cognitive Ability Test*, *Lebanese General Ability Scale*, and *Milita Group IQ Test*, respectively. Countries need to be encouraged to continue to develop their own tests in order to serve their own specific purposes. Given that group tests are generally easier to construct, administer, and validate than individually administered tests, investigators in other countries may wish to concentrate their resources on developing group measures and on cross-validating group ability tests developed in the United States. However, for psychoeducational (and clinical) activities, individually administered tests are especially useful.

The issue of test bias is an important concern, not only in Canada and the United States, but in the other nations surveyed in this issue and likely in other nations as well. Test bias is of special importance in nations that have a multiethnic and multilingual society. How to deal with potential test bias, as we know from years of litigation and research in the United States, is by no means easy. Voices in Israel, as Moshe Zeidner points out, are as vociferous and demanding as voices in the United States. These voices are saying that all tests must be abolished because they are culturally unfair to segments of the population. Yet, as D.H. Saklofske and H.L. Janzen seem to be saying, Canada has more moderate voices. Psychologists and educators in Canada recognize that there are difficulties in using tests with diverse ethnic groups, but if used wisely, tests do contribute to the assessment process.

Who should assume the primary responsibility for carrying out the assessment of special children? This issue is by no means resolved in the five nations surveyed. Psychologists as well as teachers are responsible for carry-

ing out psychoeducational assessments in the United States, Canada, and Israel; in Lebanon and China teachers appear to assume more of this responsibility because there are few specially trained personnel to perform the psychoeducational assessment. Will these trends continue in the future?

J. LaVoie's review of school-based assessment research in the People's Republic of China brings out clearly the issue of values and goals associated with assessment activities. In the People's Republic of China the focus is on placement, with teachers trying to help special children work up to the level of their classmates. How often do the teachers reach their goals? Do children who are not performing adequately in classrooms in the People's Republic of China improve their performance after they have been given special attention by their teachers? How do the success rates of the People's Republic of China compare with those in other nations where the focus is on understanding the individual child? This is an important issue for future cross-cultural research.

In a nation like Lebanon, war-ravaged and on the brink of destruction, it is a wonder that any research could have occurred. Children and their families in such circumstances need to place all their energies on survival. It is a testimony to the human spirit that education, research, and scholarship continue under such horrible and inhumane conditions. Given the current situation, it is understandable that research productivity is at a standstill. Although it is difficult to make predictions about the Middle East, it is thought that P.A. Saigh's more favourable prospectus would lead to a rekindling of scientific inquiry.

J.A. Cummings and M.C. Laquerre note that in the United States research in the area of psychoeducational assessment is progressing on many fronts, including intellectual functioning, academic functioning, adaptive behaviour, and social-emotional functioning. The very need for special education is being questioned, but what are the alternatives? Cummings and Laquerre wisely point out the need for researchers not associated with test publishers to independently study the psychometric properties of newly developed assessment instruments.

These five surveys point out that different nations recognize that children who are performing poorly in school need to be identified, evaluated, and given special help. The procedures used in each nation differ depending upon the political, social, and philosophical views of its people and governing bodies. But in spite of the differences among nations, there are similarities as well. Psychologists and educators recognize the continuing need to develop reliable and valid assessment procedures that take into account the language,

thought processes, and culture of children in need of help. This survey attests to the vitality of research on how special children are assessed and identified in different countries around the world.

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