

Testing: In Plain English?

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What is testing?

- It's a methodical way to gather information about a student. Results can be compared with age peers, and a plan of action formulated. Example: How can you draw on strengths to help negotiate areas of weakness?
- What are the sources of information used?
 - Parents
 - Teachers and tutors
 - Student
 - Records: previous testing, school reports, etc.
 - Research
 - Observing the student while she/he works
 - Data from standardized tests and rating scales
 - Clinical experience

What is testing - 2

- Tests are carefully constructed, given field trials, and revised periodically.
- Example: The characteristics of the US population are identified, and the test is normed on a representative sample using factors such as:
 - Race
 - Geographic location
 - Age
 - Sex
 - Public and Independent Schools
 - Level of parental education

So what?

- Careful construction allows the evaluator to compare a student's scores with those of her/his age, and sometimes age and gender peers.
- Careful construction allows the evaluator to compare a parent & teachers' scores with those of parent & teachers' of similarly aged/gender students.
- To understand the normal distribution go to YouTube, or the Wikipedia and key in that term.

So what? Example

- A percentile rank and cognitive range will be generated from the data.
- Basically: How much/less of an aptitude, skill, or behavior does the student exhibit?
- Could be a plus or liability.
- Examples:
 - Jesse's reading comprehension is at the 85th percentile (stronger than 84% of her age peers). This is a High Average score.
 - Jesse's scored at the 90th percentile on the Attention scale of the BASC, 2. This indicates more problems with attention than 89% of her peers. This is in the At Risk Category.

Why test?

- Something doesn't seem to add up! There is some unexpected glitch in:
 - Academics
 - Social learning
 - Regulating emotions
 - Regulating behavior
 - Fine/gross motor control
 - Speech and language
 - Sensory processing
 - Memory
 - Executive functioning, e.g., planning

Who tests?

- Depends on the observed difficulties, and the clinical training, and the professional limits of the professional's license or certificate to practice.
- Evaluators may be:
 - Clinical Psychologists
 - Licensed Educational Psychologists
 - Speech and Language Pathologists
 - Occupational/Physical Therapists
 - Certified Educational Therapists
 - Behavioral Pediatricians

Sometimes a Multidisciplinary Team Approach is Helpful

- Some students benefit when several professionals assess.
- This approach may be used in private practice.
- Clinic based team evaluations are conducted at:
 - Children's Health Council, Stanford
 - UCSF, HALP Clinic (Langley Porter)
 - Child Development Services (CPMC)
 - Oakland Children's Hospital
 - Unified School District

What kinds of tests are there?

- Each discipline uses tests specific to their area of interest.
- Common examples of tests include:
 - Reasoning and intellect
 - Reasoning using accommodations
 - Executive functioning
 - Memory
 - Attention
 - Visual-motor integration
 - Social and emotional functioning

More tests

- Achievement tests:
 - Reading, spelling, essay, math, following directions, etc.
 - Math:
 - Solving problems using concepts, number sense, and reasoning.
 - Solving math problems in number format
 - Fluency: How quickly does the student calculate?

More tests ...

- Reading:
 - Sight vocabulary (readily identifying common words).
 - Decoding (applying English phonics rules in order to pronounce words).
 - Comprehension (understanding reading content including predicting, perspective taking, inference).
 - Reading Fluency: How quickly does the student read, and how accurately?

Even more tests

- Executive Functioning: This basically refers to the coordination of cognitive processes which result in efficient and effective output (work). Here are some examples:
 - Planning and organization
 - Time management, and tracking work
 - Focus and attention to detail
 - Getting started on tasks, sustaining effort, and completing the task.
 - Figuring out what's important information and what's not
 - Understanding directions and consistently applying them to the task at hand

What does the professional look for?

- What was the student's behavior like during testing? Were there tasks which exhausted/frustrated the student? What excited them?
- What strategies for learning were observed? Example: The student softly repeated directions, or used a finger to track calculations.

Look for

- What abilities can be identified as strengths? How can the student use those strengths to work with limitations?
- Are there statistically significant differences between/within areas assessed? (Needed to diagnose at learning or attention disorder)

Look for

- Where did errors occur, and why?
- Is there a pattern which emerges from the data?
- How consistent are the rating scales completed by parents, teachers, and student?
- Are the scales consistent with the testing data?

Diagnosis

- Basically: Does the data support a learning or attention disorder? Criteria are drawn from the DSM-IV-TR, and scientific research.
- Example: Student has weak active working memory and difficulties with fine visual discrimination and slow processing. Findings consistent with dyslexia.

Other examples:

- Student became fatigued on tasks which did not interest her, needed to stand to work, might miss easy items and solve more difficult ones. Problems are consistent with inattention.
- Student simply described what he saw on story card, and not able to figure out what the characters were thinking/feeling. Student became silly. When perspective taking was needed, had difficulties figuring out what he needed to explain to me so I could understand what to do. Problems consistent with social learning problems.

Outcome of testing: Understanding!

- Students are generally relieved to know what's going on. There can be marked positive changes in attitude/behavior.
- Parents have a better understanding of their child's abilities. Parents are generally relieved.
- Parents can begin the process of:
 - Figuring out school placement
 - What types of specialized help the student might need
 - What they can do to support learning at home

Outcome: Understanding

- Teachers:
 - Can shift perspective about the child, her work, and her behavior in the classroom.
 - Can offer strategies to try in the classroom including accommodations.
 - Can help the child experience success.
 - Can improve communication between home and school

More Outcomes:

- Student may qualify for accommodations in the classroom, and on standardized testing.
- Student in a public school setting might qualify for services, e.g., reading specialist, daily planning/organization help.

More Outcomes

- Student may qualify for accommodations both in the classroom and on standardized testing, e.g., ERBs, SSATs, College Board tests.
- Student may qualify for accommodations in college/university.
 - Note taking support
 - Preferential enrollment
 - Digital text readings

Thoughts about standardized testing

- Parents should familiarize themselves with the specific testing requirements used by the SSAT, College Board, and Act.
- Parents should also make sure that the evaluator is familiar with those requirements, and understands how to write recommendations based on them.
- Evaluator should be aware, and inform parents, of the risks involved in asking for 'extraordinary' accommodations on standardized tests.

Further thoughts

- Parents should be aware that most colleges/universities require screening for both emotional and attentional functioning. This limits assessment to a clinical psychologist.
- Never hesitate to ask a potential evaluator about their training, experience, and be aware that non-psychologists are NOT able to assess AD/HD, and related executive functioning problems.

Re-evaluation?

Typically at the following points:

- Early elementary school
- Entry into middle school
- Entry into high school
- Application for college
- Application for graduate school