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Rater Agreement on IQ and Achievement Tests Effect on Evaluations of Learning Disabilities

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Protocols from 110 evaluations utilizing the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Third Edition (WISC-III) and the Woodcock/Johnson Tests of Achievement-Revised (W/J-R) were scored by two different raters to determine (a) whether subtests with more difficult levels of scoring yield lower interrater correlation coefficients, (b) whether scoring errors on subtests affect broad score estimates, (c) the effect of expertise of rater on scoring errors, and (d) whether scoring errors affect a learning disability determination based on IQ/achievement discrepancy. Scoring errors were found on almost 25% of Comprehension and Vocabulary subtests; however, the effect of these scoring errors was minimal. About 42% of Writing Samples subtests had scoring errors, resulting in a mean change of 1.75 points on the Broad Written Language Cluster subtest. On the WISC-III, but not the W/J-R, there were significantly more errors made by inexperienced testers. Scoring errors resulted in two cases in which learning disability determination would be changed. Overall, the study corroborates previous findings of strong interrater reliability on most subtests of common IQ and achievement tests and indicates that novice scorers are not likely to make scoring mistakes that will significantly impact an IQ/achievement discrepancy-based documentation of learning disability. © 2002 Society for the Study of School Psychology. Published by Elsevier Science Ltd

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Public Law 94-142 (Education of all Handicapped Children Act, 1975), Public Law 101-476 (Individuals with Disabilities Act, 1990), the IDEA 97 revisions (Individuals with Disability Education Act Amendments, 1997), and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 mandate that students meeting established criteria for specific learning disorders receive reasonable accommodations in order to ensure the provision of appropriate public education curricula. More than one-half of all children receiving special education/ESE services

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nationwide are diagnosed with a learning disorder (Shinn, Good, & Parker, 1999). Specific guidelines for the identification of learning disabled students vary from state to state; however, most criteria are consistent with the broad guidelines established by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition-Text Revision (DSM-IV-TR, American Psychiatric Association, 2000). The DSM-IV-TR (2000) provides criteria for Specific Learning Disorders in the following three areas: reading, mathematics, and written expression. In addition to an evaluation of academic achievement and sensory deficits, the DSM states that learning disorders are diagnosed when the individual's "achievement on individually administered, standardized tests in reading, mathematics, or written expression is substantially below that expected for age, schooling, and level of intelligence . . . Substantially below is usually defined as a discrepancy of more than 2 standard deviations between achievement and IQ" (p. 49).

The IDEA revision of 1997 states that "the team finds that a child has a severe discrepancy between achievement and intellectual ability . . ." (300.541). Using a discrepancy criteria has been widely debated, with difficulties noted based on regression to the mean (making it easier to achieve a discrepancy if you have a higher IQ score), lack of interchangeability of tests, and questionable use of full scale IQ scores (Dumont, Willis, & McBride, 2001). However, because many states utilize an IQ/achievement discrepancy criterion as part of the overall decision making, scoring accuracy is crucial to LD determination.

INTERRATER RELIABILITY

The issue of interrater reliability, the need for multiple examiners to score the same quantitative test items in a consistent manner, represents a fundamental concern to test reliability and validity. High interrater agreement is essential to control for error in test administration.

The Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Third Edition (WISC-III; Wechsler, 1991) and the Woodcock/Johnson Tests of Achievement-Revised (W/J-R; Woodcock & Johnson, 1989) represent two of the instruments most frequently used by school psychologists to determine the presence of a learning disability (Stinnett, Havey, & Oehler-Stinnett, 1994). Because scoring of achievement and intelligence tests can be quite laborious and subject to examiner error, the present investigation deals with interrater reliability, the effect of scoring errors on broad score estimates, the relationship between scorer expertise and scoring errors, and the effect of scoring errors on the determination of specific learning disabilities.

Studies of the interrater reliability of the WISC-III have found lower interrater reliability coefficients for specific subtests, most notably Similarities, Vocabulary, and Comprehension (Cuenot & Darbes, 1982; Shrout & Fleiss, 1979). While interrater discrepancy is contingent to

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