

This Week's Citation Classic

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Kirk S A, McCarthy J & Kirk W D. *The Illinois test of psycholinguistic abilities*.
Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1967. 136 p.

The ITPA is a diagnostic test of 12 linguistic, perceptual, and memory abilities which serve as a measure of intraindividual difference in an individual child. This approach can lead to a program of remediation for children with learning disabilities. [The 'Social Sciences Citation Index' (SSCITM) indicates that this paper has been cited over 205 times since 1968.]

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"In 1949 I was conducting an experiment on the effect of preschool experience on the mental and social development of young mentally retarded children. For this experiment I had selected three-, four-, and five-year-old children described by psychologists and pediatricians as mentally retarded. The children ranged in IQ from 37 to 80 on standardized intelligence tests.

"When we started working with these children we found that they differed so widely that the term mental retardation was not descriptive of their abilities or disabilities. One little girl with a recorded IQ of about 50 was legally blind but had good language and verbal communication. Another girl of about the same age and mental ability was unable to talk or understand language

"Working from a psychological model of the communication process, my colleagues and I generated tests to measure responses which indicated the functioning of certain cognitive abilities. This work eventually turned out to be the Illinois Test of Psycho-linguistic Abilities (ITPA)

"The abilities we wanted to isolate were both verbal and nonverbal. But we were also

concerned with dimensions such as the processes of reception, expression, and an intermediate process of organizing symbols and concepts as well as levels of organization, i.e., the degree to which responses are automatic or require the rational translation of symbols into meaning and response.

"We had many false starts but by 1961, after ten years of research, we thought that we just might have something teachers, psychologists, and researchers could use. We wanted to turn it loose so that other people could do research on it, so we constructed 250 homemade kits and distributed them to those who would experiment with it. I do not know whether we were more surprised or pleased that the demand for this tool was so great. Workers in child development, education, and mental retardation were hungry for something that would diagnose children in such a way that would lead to remedial programs that would help teach children with intraindividual discrepancies. Thousands more kits had to be made, and although it was an experimental edition it was widely used for both clinical and research purposes. After considerable research by us and others we revised the test in 1968.

"The popularity and wide use of the test by teachers, speech pathologists, psychologists and others is both a boon and a danger. The ITPA was designed primarily for preschool and primary grade children, but it has been used inappropriately in research with fourth graders, high school students, and even prison inmates.

"In our article 'Uses and abuses of the ITPA,'¹ we have tried to note some of the misuses and misinterpretations that have occurred. It has been impossible to control the appropriate use of the ITPA as an instrument to aid clinicians, not replace clinicians, in assessing linguistic, perceptual, and memory behavior of young children.

"The ITPA measures and compares 12 abilities within a child (intraindividual differences) as opposed to classification tests comparing one child with another (interindividual differences).² This approach has educational relevance."

1. Kirk S A & Kirk W D. Uses and abuses of the ITPA. *J. Speech Hear. Disord* 43:58-75, 1978.
2. *Psycholinguistic learning disabilities*.
Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1971. 198 p.