

# **Assessment of Children Cognitive Applications**

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## 2. National Norms Are Inappropriate for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Groups

p. 661

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The argument that national norms based primarily on Euro American, middle-class, Anglo-Saxon samples are inappropriate for culturally and linguistically diverse children has led some writers (e.g., Mercer, 1976) to advocate establishing pluralistic norms. Pluralistic norms are norms derived for individual groups, such as Euro Americans, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, and Native Americans. Those who favor pluralistic norms believe that it is useful to know how a child's performance compares to that of others in his or her own ethnic group. Pluralistic norms are potentially dangerous, however, because they (a) provide a basis for invidious comparisons among different ethnic groups, (b) may lower expectations of culturally and linguistically diverse children and reduce their level of aspiration to succeed, (c) may have little relevance outside of the child's specific geographic area, and (d) furnish no information about the complex reasons why some ethnic groups tend to score lower than others on intelligence tests (DeAvila & Havassy, 1974). The renorming of tests to provide pluralistic norms is inappropriate because it does not involve test modifications, nor does it consider whether we should use the test at all with culturally and linguistically diverse children (Bernal, 1972). And the use of pluralistic norms gives rise to new questions—what norms should we use for a child who has a Mexican father and a Hungarian mother?

Some charge that norms for the major individual intelligence tests are based entirely on the performance of middle-class Euro Americans. This simply is not true. The Stanford-Binet: Fourth Edition, WISC-III, WPPSI-R, WAIS-III, and DAS, for example, have all used excellent sampling procedures

to obtain representative samples. Culturally and linguistically diverse groups are represented in each of these norm groups in proportion to their representation in the general population.

National norms reflect the performance of the population as a whole. Because they describe the typical performance of our nation's children, they are important as a frame of reference and as a guidepost for decision making. This is not to say that we should not use other norms, however. We can interpret test results from several frames of reference. But test users and consumers of test information should clearly recognize which norms were used and why they were selected.