Introduction

This book, based on some 40 years of practice in the testing field, aims to help practitioners derive maximum benefit from the assessment possibilities inherent in individual norm based tests of mental development thereby enabling practitioners to achieve accurate results and reach conclusions best suited to the particular needs of the child under assessment.

Given that all tests of mental ability provide ample information and directions to facilitate their use and ensure correct recording and scoring of results, the reader may well ask why the use of such tests, which after all are simply measuring devices, needs to be restricted, and indeed why this book is necessary at all.

The answer to such questions lies in the fact that the use or application of an individual test of mental development is a more complex process than it may at first appear. It requires much more than simply following instructions. In fact it requires three very different types of task, each of which has a complexity of its own.

First there is the task of taking measurements of the developing mental process. This demands a quantification of the observed manifestations of mental abilities; a precise operation carried out according to well-defined rules. Although the mathematics is straightforward, it takes time and practice to become proficient in the interpretation of the resultant numerical values.

The second task is that of managing an adult and a child in a situation of close interactive participation in order to gather the data. This can never be precisely controlled because there will always be many unpredictable variables such as the time of day, the inclusion of one or more siblings, the ambiance of the interview room, extraneous sounds, the mood of the child, etc.

The third task is that of the meaningful synthesis or merging of different kinds of result (scored results and individual perceptions of received information). Whatever the unpredictable variables inherent in the second task mentioned above are, it is important also to be aware of the interactive circuit set up between the observer and the observed in the assessment situation. Both the observer and the observed send and receive information they each mentally process in their own way. It is a situation fraught with potential misinterpretation, confusion and misunderstanding.

In the testing situation the process of evaluation demands the blending of skills, which assessors must constantly develop and refine.
This book is designed to help assessors understand the use of individual tests in a holistic context. In the service of that aim the text explores various avenues along which the user needs to travel prior to and during the process of testing. Some of these are strictly of a practical nature while others represent the theoretical basis needed to arrive at a reliable and valid personal evaluation of the mental process in a particular case.

Included in the chapters are reminders of those aspects of human psychology that are relevant to the appreciation of the aims of such tests and the psychometric knowledge needed to achieve meaningful, reliable and valid results. Various existing tests will be referred to in order to illustrate the most likely errors and pitfalls that may occur in the delivery of testing.

In summary this book aims to:
1) Provide a view of psychology essential to help users become more aware of the subjective elements of their perceptual mechanisms in the processing of received messages.
2) Identify where and how most common errors in the assessment process are likely to arise.
3) Look at channels of communication and warn of some pitfalls related to the user's observation skills.
4) Discuss ways to evaluate the observation of psychological functions.
5) Offer some basic information regarding the statistics required to quantify observations of performance/behaviour.
6) Describe ways to avoid common mistakes from lessons learned.