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Amy Cassaw

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ARE OUR TESTS ACCURATE?

by

Amy Cassaw

**An independent study submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of**

Master of Science in Speech and Hearing

Emphasis in Education of the Hearing Impaired

**Washington University
Department of Speech and Hearing**

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Approved by: Pam Zacher, M.S.Ed., Independent Study Advisor

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INTRODUCTION

Commercially prepared standardized tests have long been relied upon for evaluating and classifying children in the educational setting. More specifically, achievement tests have been, and still are, widely used to establish a child's level of mastery in basic academic skills and to evaluate a child's progress throughout the curriculum (Shapiro and Derr, 1987). Every child has to take an achievement test at some point in their academic career. Some children take this type of test every year. There are many different types of achievement tests available for evaluators to assess our children.

There are two classifications of achievement tests. The first are group administered tests such as state mandatory tests. The second type of achievement tests are individually administered. "Individual achievement tests are often used in school, clinic, and residential-treatment settings to make recommendations for the placement, classification, diagnosis, and treatment of children" (The Psychological Corporation, 1992). Two common individual achievements tests are the Wechsler Individual Achievement (WIAT) and the Peabody Individual Achievement Test-Revised (PIAT-R).

This study focuses on the Wechsler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT) and the Peabody Individual Achievement Test-Revised (PIAT-R). It seeks to answer the following questions: Does one test score the children higher or lower than the other? Can these tests be used interchangeably? Do the children prefer one test over another? If so, do they score better on the test they prefer? Why would they prefer one test over another?

Each child who participated in this study was administered a survey to help answer some of the aforementioned questions. The children's test scores and survey answers are included in this report.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The use of intelligence tests to explain and predict academic achievement levels is a common practice used among school psychologists. Using achievement tests developed specifically for the hearing population can present some difficulties for the hearing impaired population. The hearing impaired children are at a disadvantage when certain test items are focused on the ability to comprehend lengthy oral or written communications. This disadvantage can be managed to some degree by choosing tests that require little verbal interaction, and by assessing the child in the communication mode in which he or she is familiar. Examples of these individually administered tests used in past research are the Peabody Individual Achievement Test (PIAT), Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised (PPVT-R), Wechsler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT), Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Test Battery and the Woodcock Reading Mastery Test (Phelps and Branyan, 1990). This study focuses on the PIAT-R and the WIAT.

When one is assessing children with potential learning problems, a general test battery designed to evaluate across many academic areas is often used to depict possible strengths and weaknesses. One of the most frequently administered screening batteries is the Peabody Individual Achievement Test-Revised (PIAT-R) (Eaves, Darch and Haynes, 1989). The PIAT-R is an individually administered achievement test that provides a wide range of assessment in six content areas: General Information, Reading Recognition, Reading Comprehension, Mathematics, Spelling and Written Expression. Each of these subtests covers a wide region of achievement levels from preschool to post-high school (Markwardt, 1998). These individual subtests may be useful as a screening method for identifying a learning disability in a child (Luther, 1992). Only relevant range of questions is administered to any individual. The test utilizes two item formats- multiple

choice and free response (Markwardt, 1998).

Markwardt (1998) describes that the PIAT-R scores are helpful whenever a survey of an individual's scholastic accomplishments are needed. When more assessment of a child is required, these results will assist the investigator in selecting other diagnostic instruments appropriate to the achievement level of the subject. The PIAT-R can be useful in a variety of settings to create a larger understanding of a child's achievement (Markwardt, 1998). Costenbader and Adams (1991) report that the PIAT-R can be used in a multitude of settings for the purposes of individual evaluation, individual program planning, guidance and counseling, admissions and transfers, grouping students, follow up evaluations, personnel selection and training and research. "Teachers, counselors, and psychologists, working in schools, clinics, private practices, social service agencies, and the court system, will find it helpful" (Markwardt, 1998).

The General Information subtest of the PIAT-R consists of 100 open ended questions. These questions are read orally by the examiner and answered aloud by the examinee. These items test general encyclopedic knowledge in the content areas of fine arts, social studies, science, humanities and recreation. Names and dates of events are not stressed, but reasoning and factual knowledge are necessary to answer these items. This subtest is adaptable for use in other countries since the questions were developed to minimize knowledge of the history and culture of the United States (Markwardt, 1998).

There are two diverse types of items in the Reading Recognition subtest of the PIAT-R. The first sixteen questions assess pre-reading skills and are given in a multiple choice format. The remaining questions, 17-100, consist of a single word in which the examinee reads aloud. "The objective of this subtest is to measure the subject's skills in translating printed letters or words into speech sounds" (Markwardt, 1998).

The Reading Comprehension portion of the PIAT-R assesses the subject's ability to acquire meaning from printed words. This subtest consists of only 82 questions that

utilizes two pages of the test plate. There is a sentence on the first page that the student reads silently to themselves. There are four pictures on the following page for the individual to choose from. The individual must pick the correct picture that corresponds to the sentence previously read (Markwardt, 1998).

There is a Total Reading score that is obtained by adding the raw scores of the Reading Recognition and Reading Comprehension subtests. Hence, the Total Reading score is an overall measure of the individual's reading ability (Markwardt, 1998).

The Mathematics subtest of the PIAT-R consists of 100 multiple choice questions that covers a wide variety of mathematical skills from discriminating and matching tasks to geometry and trigonometry content. The questions are read aloud by the examiner and the response choices are displayed to the subject. The first 50 questions are not printed for the examinee to read. However, the remaining 50 questions are printed for the examinee to read silently while the question is being read aloud. Approximately 50 percent of the items relate to the practical application of mathematics. Thirty percent of the questions are included in the category of understanding of concepts. Finally, the remaining questions, about 20 percent, are in the computational skills category (Markwardt, 1998).

The first fifteen questions of the Spelling subtest of the PIAT-R are multiple choice readiness questions that encompass tasks of visual discrimination, selection of the letter that corresponds to a given sound and identification of the word that begins with a given sound. For the remaining questions, 16-100, the examiner reads the word aloud and uses it in a sentence. The examinee then selects the correct spelling of the word from four possible choices (Markwardt, 1998).

The PIAT-R also provides a Total Test score. This raw score is the total scores of General Information, Reading Recognition, Reading Comprehension, Mathematics and Spelling. This score is used to describe the individual's overall achievement level that

may be beneficial in various clinical situations (Markwardt, 1998).

Finally, the PIAT-R has a Written Expression subtest. There are two levels of this subtest. Level I measures pre-writing skills with three types of questions: one question where the subject is asked to write his or her first and last name; eight questions where the subject copies letters or words; and ten questions in which the subject writes letters, words or sentences spoken by the examiner. Level II involves two picture prompts. The individual is shown one of these pictures and is asked to write a story about it (Markwardt, 1998). All five of the participants in this study were given Level II of the Written Expression portion of the PIAT-R.

Author Markwardt (1998) reports three limitations to the PIAT-R. First, the PIAT-R is not proposed for use as a diagnostic test in any of the content areas it covers; a wide-range test cannot include a sufficient number of items to reliably measure each specific skill in a content area. Second, the PIAT-R is not structured to provide highly explicit assessment of achievement. In order to assist in wide range assessment, only a restricted number of items were incorporated into this test at any given grade level. Therefore, the test results can recognize a person's general level of achievement, but cannot make fine discriminations regarding the definite level of attainment. Finally, the items on the test were intended to represent a cross section of diverse curricula used across the United States. The items selected were not from the curriculum of any one particular individual school system. Although this test allows for worthwhile comparisons to be made between the individual's scores and the mainstream of United States education, the investigator needs to consider the "specific curricular background of any given subject when interpreting his or her results" (Markwardt, 1998).

The Wechsler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT) is a comprehensive individually administered test for evaluating the achievement of children who are in

kindergarten through twelfth grade and who are five years, 0 months to nineteen years, 11 months. The eight WIAT subtests can be used to evaluate an extensive variety of academic skills. The eight subtests are Basic Reading, Mathematics Reasoning, Spelling, Reading Comprehension, Numerical Operations, Listening Comprehension, Oral Expression and Written Expression. Each subtest featured on the WIAT contain items that comprise a wide range of curriculum objectives. The questions contained in the WIAT subtests have been structured to accommodate many of the curriculum elements found in school instructional programs. Therefore, “use of the WIAT increases the likelihood of a match between teaching and testing, an important aspect of academic assessment” (The Psychological Corporation, 1992).

The Basic Reading portion of the WIAT contains 55 questions. The first seven questions of this subtest assess the examinee’s ability to decode letters and words. The child is to pick the correct picture that describes the written word. The remainder of the questions require the child to read aloud the printed words (The Psychological Corporation, 1992).

The Mathematics Reasoning portion contains 50 questions that were structured to evaluate the individual’s ability to reason mathematically. Many of these questions include visual stimuli such as pictures of objects. The text for each question is read aloud by the examiner and is also printed on the child’s page of the stimulus booklet. This enables the child to follow along while the question is read aloud. For most of the questions, the child responds orally. However, a few items require the examinee to point to a response. A few items also require the examinee to write a response on a sheet of paper (The Psychological Corporation, 1992).

The Spelling subtest of the WIAT is used to assess the child’s ability to write dictated words. Questions 1-6 are structured to assess the child’s ability to write letters of the alphabet and the ability to encode dictated sounds. The following questions assess

the child's ability to spell spoken words. The examiner reads aloud a word and uses it in a sentence. The individual writes his or her response in the Spelling Response page of the Record Form (The Psychological Corporation, 1992).

In the Reading Comprehension subtest, each question is used for evaluating the child's reading comprehension. Each question is comprised of a printed passage and an orally presented question. Each of the first eight questions contain a one-sentence passage along with a picture. The following questions contain more difficult, longer passages that do not contain pictures. The child reads each passage and the examiner asks a question that pertains to the passage. The child responds orally to each question and the examiner records each response (The Psychological Corporation, 1992).

The Numerical Operations subtest consists of 10 four-item sets. The initial set is intended for assessing the ability to write dictated numbers. The proceeding sets concentrate on the ability to solve computation problems that involve a multitude of operations and the ability to solve simple algebraic equations. The individual writes his or her responses in the Response Booklet (The Psychological Corporation, 1992).

The first nine items of Listening Comprehension analyzes the child's comprehension of orally presented words. Each of these questions contain a page with four pictures. The word is orally presented to the child; the child is expected to choose the correct picture that corresponds to the word. The following questions concentrate on the comprehension of orally presented passages. The investigator presents a related picture of each passage, reads the passage orally and asks a question related to the passage. The child responds orally to the question (The Psychological Corporation, 1992).

The Oral Expression subtests contains 16 questions; the first ten are structured for assessing the capacity to orally express a target word. The examiner presents a picture

illustrating a word, then orally defines the word. The child is to orally respond appropriately to the word using the picture and definition. The final six questions focus on the ability to orally describe a scene, give directions and explain steps in a procedure. In two of these questions, the examiner provides a picture scene to the child and the child orally provides details about the scene. In two other questions, the child is faced with a map. The child orally provides directions on how to get from one place to the next. In the final two questions, the children are presented with a picture that shows steps in a process. The children orally explain the correct steps in the provided process (The Psychological Corporation, 1992).

Finally, in the Written Expression portion of the WIAT, the child is asked to write about their ideal home. They are asked to write a letter that describes what they think their ideal home is. This prompt is presented orally as well as in print. The child is allowed to view the prompt throughout this subtest. The child writes his or her response in the Response Booklet (The Psychological Corporation, 1992). Compared to the PIAT-R, the WIAT written expression scoring system appears to have good items for measuring the construct of written expression as proven by adequate item reliability and validity (Muenz, Ouchi and Cole, 1999).

Reading is an essential part to a child's education. Most information during a school day is acquired through reading. Researchers Weinberg, McLean and Brumback (1988) report that the Peabody Individual Achievement Test-Revised (PIAT-R) is an admirable tool to assess reading comprehension of poor readers because it does not require nominal recall or specific word recall. They argued that listening comprehension during a reading task is "intact for poor readers and is like that of good readers." These researchers also argued that the performance of the poor readers can be drastically increased to the level of good readers by the simple action of allowing the child to listen to the sentence while reading it silently to themselves (Weinberg, McLean and

Brumback, 1988). This study should be a source to others when administering an achievement test and when developing an achievement test. There is so much importance placed on the child's score and outcome that every step possible should be taken to ensure the success of that child.

METHOD

Participants

The five participants included in this study were recruited from the Middle School department of Central Institute for the Deaf. Three are female and two are male. A formal letter and a permission slip were sent home with ten of the students. The parents signed the permission slip and selected the dates for their children to participate in the study. The author received eight permission slips back from the parents; three did not want their children to participate in the study for various reasons and five granted permission for their children to be included in the study. Two of the parents did not respond.

Materials

The author chose to use the Peabody Individual Achievement Test-Revised (PIAT-R) and the Wechsler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT) for the study. The PIAT-R evaluates students in the following areas: General Information, Reading Recognition, Reading Comprehension, Mathematics, Spelling and Written Expression. The WIAT evaluates students in the areas of Basic Reading, Mathematics Reasoning, Spelling, Reading Comprehension, Numerical Operations, Listening Comprehension, Oral Expression and Written Expression. A survey was also given to the children after they took the second test. The intent of the survey was to find out which test the children preferred and their feelings toward both tests.

Procedures

A letter explaining the purpose of this study and a permission slip were sent to the parents of ten Middle School students. The children were given each test, one week apart. Each child was given the Peabody Individual Achievement Test-Revised (PIAT-R) first. The Wechsler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT) was administered a week later. A comparison of test scores across comparable areas were analyzed.

A survey was given to each child after taking the WIAT. The author read the questions from the survey to the children. The children answered the questions orally and the author recorded each answer appropriately.

See Appendix A for the letter and permission slip and Appendix B for the survey.

RESULTS

Test scores for 5 hearing impaired children and their responses to the survey are included in this study. Test scores are reported in grade equivalency for each child; the first number is equivalent to the grade year and the second is in months.

The author chose to compare Total Reading, Total Math, Spelling and the Total Test scores from each test. The Total Reading score on the PIAT-R is a combination of the Reading Comprehension and the Reading Recognition portion of the test. On the WIAT, the Total Reading score is composed of Basic Reading and Reading Comprehension. The Math score on the PIAT-R is a single subtest score within the test. On the WIAT, the Total Math score consists of Mathematics Reasoning and Numerical Operations. The Spelling score is a single subtest within each test.

Subject A

Grade Level, 8

	<u>PIAT-R</u>	<u>WIAT</u>	<u>DIFFERENCE</u>
TOTAL READING	3rd grade; 9 months	3rd grade; 4 months	5 months
TOTAL MATH	4th grade; 7 months	4th grade; 1 month	6 months
SPELLING	3rd grade; 9 months	3rd grade; 6 months	3 months
TOTAL TEST	4th grade; 7 months	3rd grade; 9 months	10 months

Subject B

Grade Level, 7

	<u>PIAT-R</u>	<u>WIAT</u>	<u>DIFFERENCE</u>
TOTAL READING	3rd grade; 5 months	3rd grade; 7 months	2 months
TOTAL MATH	4th grade; 1 month	3rd grade; 8 months	5 months
SPELLING	5th grade; 1 month	3rd grade; 9 months	1 year; 4 months
TOTAL TEST	3rd grade; 5 months	3rd grade; 3 months	2 months

Subject C

Grade Level, 4

	<u>PIAT-R</u>	<u>WIAT</u>	<u>DIFFERENCE</u>
TOTAL READING	3rd grade; 0 months	2nd grade; 5 months	7 months
TOTAL MATH	3rd grade; 9 months	2nd grade; 9 months	1 year
SPELLING	4th grade; 1 month	2nd grade; 9 months	1 year; 4 months
TOTAL TEST	3rd grade; 0 months	2nd grade; 3 months	9 months

Subject D

Grade Level, 6

	<u>PIAT-R</u>	<u>WIAT</u>	<u>DIFFERENCE</u>
TOTAL READING	4th grade; 5 months	5th grade; 3 months	10 months
TOTAL MATH	4th grade; 7 months	4th grade; 8 months	1 month
SPELLING	4th grade; 7 months	5th grade; 7 months	1 year
TOTAL TEST	4th grade; 9 months	4th grade; 4 months	5 months

Subject E

Grade Level, 5

	<u>PIAT-R</u>	<u>WIAT</u>	<u>DIFFERENCE</u>
TOTAL READING	2nd grade; 0 months	2nd grade; 5 months	5 months
TOTAL MATH	3rd grade; 0 months	3rd grade; 2 months	2 months
SPELLING	2nd grade; 8 months	2nd grade 5 months	3 months
TOTAL TEST	2nd grade; 1 month	2nd grade; 2 months	1 month

The following table shows which subtest and total test the subject scored higher on.

	<u>Test 1 (PIAT-R)</u>	<u>Test 2 (WIAT)</u>
Spelling	A, B, C, E	D
Math	A, B, C	D, E
Reading	A, C	B, D, E
Total Test	A, B, C, D	E

The following page shows the participants responses to each question on the survey.

Each subject is listed, followed by their response.

Survey

1. *Did you like Test 1 (PIAT-R) or Test 2 (WIAT) better?*

Subject A: Test 2 (WIAT)

Subject B: Test 2 (WIAT)

Subject C: Test 2 (WIAT)

Subject D: Test 1 (PIAT-R)

Subject E: Test 2 (WIAT)

2. *What did you like about this test?*

Subject A: The questions were easier.

Subject B: I liked the pictures. They were clear.

Subject C: I liked Math and Spelling and the pictures.

Subject D: It looks more interesting than the other test.

Subject E: Writing down the Math.

3. *What did you not like about this test?*

Subject A: I don't like the pictures. They don't give very good detail.

Subject B: The Spelling Test was too hard.

Subject C: I did not like the Oral Expression. The directions too hard.

Subject D: Nothing.

Subject E: Some questions were hard.

4. *Why didn't you like the other test?*

Subject A: It was too hard. The questions were hard to understand.

Subject B: It was not fun.

Subject C: It was too hard.

Subject D: It was too hard.

Subject E: It is boring.

5. *Was there anything good about the other test?*

Subject A: I don't remember.

Subject B: No.

Subject C: Nope. Everything is bad and awful.

Subject D: Math was good.

Subject E: No.

<u>Subtests</u>	<u>Test 1 (PIAT-R)</u>	<u>Test 2 (WIAT)</u>
Spelling	D	A, B, C, E
Math		A, B, C, D, E
Reading	A, B, D,	C, E

Subject D was the only child that preferred the PIAT-R over the WIAT. The other children reported they liked the WIAT better.

DISCUSSION

Each child was asked which test they preferred and why after completing the second test. They were also asked which subtests they preferred and why. The author compared the Reading, Math and Spelling subtests, as well as the Total Test scores of each test.

Subject A scored better in all four areas on the PIAT-R. However, she reported that she preferred the WIAT over the PIAT-R. Subject B scored two months higher on the WIAT in Reading, but scored higher on the PIAT-R in the remaining three categories. She also preferred the WIAT over the PIAT-R. As with Subject A, Subject C scored higher in all four categories on the PIAT-R and also preferred the WIAT. Subject D scored higher in Math, Spelling and Reading on the WIAT; but his Total Test score was higher by 5 months on the PIAT-R. This subject reported that he liked the PIAT-R better than the WIAT. Finally, Subject E's scores were better on the WIAT in Reading, Math and Total Test; he produced a higher score by 3 months on the PIAT-R in Spelling. He also preferred the WIAT over the PIAT-R. The highest difference among any two scores was by 1 year and 4 months; the lowest was 1 month. The mean difference among the

scores was 6.6 months. These results reveal that the subject's preference for either test had no bearing on their final score.

The author also looked at preferences for the different subtests; Spelling Math and Reading. In regards to Spelling, Subjects A, B, C and E preferred the WIAT over the PIAT-R. However, they all produced higher scores on the PIAT-R. Subject D was the only who preferred the PIAT-R; he did better on the WIAT. All five subjects chose the WIAT when asked with Math subtest they preferred better. Three of the subjects, A, B and C, did better on the PIAT-R. Subject D's score was better on the WIAT by one month and Subject E by 2 months. Finally, in Reading, Subjects A, B, and D chose the PIAT-R. Subject A did better on the PIAT-R, while the other two subjects did better on the WIAT. Subjects C and E preferred the WIAT. Subject E actually had a better score on the WIAT by five months, but Subject C's higher score was on the PIAT-R.

CONCLUSIONS

The aforementioned results proved the opposite of what the study originally was intended for. Subjects A, B, and C produced higher results on the PIAT-R, but chose the WIAT as their preferred test. Subject D preferred the PIAT-R and produced a higher score on the PIAT-R and Subject E preferred the WIAT and scored higher on that test. Out of the twenty comparable subtests, thirteen were scored higher by the PIAT-R. However, the author feels that these two tests can be used interchangeably. The scores were far too close to make the distinction of one test over the other.

Limitations of this study were present. First and foremost, the sample used in this study was smaller than previously anticipated. Subjects available to this study were limited to students in the Middle School Department at Central Institute for the Deaf. There are only thirteen students in this department. Participants were limited even further

by parent involvement. The author sought out to have at least ten subjects for this study; however, five parents either did not respond or did not wish for their child to participate in this study.

The author feels that this study is a worthwhile beginning for future studies involving achievement testing. However, more subjects are needed to generalize these results. Given more time and more participants, this study could be an important resource for an educator who has to choose between administering the Peabody Individual Achievement Test Revised (PIAT-R) and the Wechsler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my deepest gratitude and appreciation to Pam Zacher for all of her help with my independent study. She was always there for me offering encouragement and support. She also was willing to make time for me during her busy schedule. She is and always will be a great mentor.

I would also like to thank the parents for allowing their children to participate in my study. They also sacrificed time out of their busy schedule to pick their children up late from school to accommodate my testing schedule.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the children in my study, without whom this project would not have been possible. They were eager and enthusiastic about spending an extra hour or two after school to participate in my study. I give them my sincerest thanks and best wishes for a bright and successful future.

APPENDIX A

January 30, 2002

Dear Parents,

I am a graduate student at Central Institute for the Deaf. I am currently working on my Independent Study for my Masters Degree. For my study, I am investigating two achievement tests; the Wechsler Individual Achievement Test and the Peabody Individual Achievement Test-Revised. I need 10 participants for my study and I am recruiting from the Middle School department. I am asking your permission for your child to participate in my study. I will need to test your child on two separate occasions, one week apart. All test scores and participant names will be kept confidential. The tests should last from 45 minutes to 1 hour and 15 minutes. I will be able to start the tests after school at 3:15. Your child will be ready to be picked up from school between 4:00 and 4:30. I am able to start testing at any day that is convenient for you. Please sign the attached consent form and return it as soon as possible with your child to school. Thank you for your time. Please call me at home with any questions or concerns you may have: 636-441-5608.

Sincerely,

Amy Anne Cassaw

January 30, 2002

I give permission for my son/daughter to participate in Amy Cassaw's Independent Study.

Name

Date

Please circle the dates that are convenient for your son/daughter to be tested.

Monday Feb 4 Tuesday Feb 5 Wednesday Feb 6 Thursday Feb 7

Monday Feb 11 Tuesday Feb 12 Wednesday Feb 13 Thursday Feb 14

Monday Feb 18 Tuesday Feb 19 Wednesday Feb 20 Thursday Feb 21 Friday Feb 22

Monday Feb 25 Tuesday Feb 26 Wednesday Feb 27 Thursday Feb 28 Friday Mar 1

Monday Mar 11 Tuesday Mar 12 Wednesday Mar 13 Thursday Mar 14 Friday Mar 15

APPENDIX B

Survey

1. Did you like Test 1 (PIAT-R) or Test 2 (WIAT) better?

2. What did you like about this test?

3. What did you not like about this test?

4. Why didn't you like the other test?

5. Was there anything good about the other test?

Subtests

Test 1 (PIAT-R)

Test 2 (WIAT)

Spelling

Math

Reading

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