

Opening Remarks to the Special Issue on Validation Theory and Research for a Population-Level Measure of Children's Development, Wellbeing, and School Readiness

Martin Guhn · Bruno D. Zumbo · Magdalena Janus · Clyde Hertzman

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The articles in this special issue present an in-depth look at different theoretical, methodological, and empirical aspects of a comprehensive validation research program for a population-level measure of children's developmental status and wellbeing. The measure that is at the centre of this special issue is the *Early Development Instrument* (EDI; Janus and Offord 2007; Guhn et al. 2007). The EDI is currently being used at a population-level in numerous Canadian cities and provinces, and as a national indicator of children's wellbeing in Australia. The EDI is a measure that kindergarten teachers use to rate developmental outcomes of each child in their class on five domains: (1) physical health and wellbeing, (2) social competence, (3) emotional maturity, (4) language and cognitive development, and (5) communication skills and general knowledge. The primary purpose of the EDI is to provide communities with developmental information on all of the children in the community, at the developmentally important transition to grade school—and to thus provide communities with information they can use to discuss and inform practices, decisions, and policies that aim to foster the developmental wellbeing of children during the early years (cf. Janus and Offord 2007; Nosbush 2006; Guhn and Goelman, this issue).

The special issue will appeal to a broad audience of practitioners, researchers, and policy makers interested in (1) research on children's developmental health and wellbeing, (2) the construct of school readiness, and (3) validation of large-scale measurement initiatives. The articles address multiple cutting-edge questions and challenges pertaining to a comprehensive, rigorous program of validation research for a measure that, in a general sense, may be considered *a social indicator of children's wellbeing at school entry*. The articles may, of course, be of particular interest for those who use data from the EDI in

M. Guhn · B. D. Zumbo · C. Hertzman
University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada

M. Guhn (✉)
Human Early Learning Partnership, University of British Columbia, 4th Floor, Library Processing
Centre, 2206 East Mall, Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z3, Canada
e-mail: martin.guhn@ubc.ca

M. Janus
McMaster University, Hamilton, ON, Canada

their work—but the theoretical, methodological, and empirical ideas in this issue address questions that generally apply to large-scale measurement initiatives in the areas of community health, education, economics, and wellbeing.

In fact, one of the most fascinating and, at the same time, most perplexing characteristics of the EDI is that it represents a blend of approaches from different traditions towards conceptualizing, measuring, and disseminating information on children's developmental outcomes and wellbeing, at the aggregated level of the community. The EDI thus combines techniques from the disciplines of developmental psychology and education with concepts from sociology, and with traditions from public health and epidemiology. Such an interdisciplinary blend of conceptual approaches and methodological approaches is increasingly characteristic of newly emerging national and international organizations and initiatives dedicated to the development of indicator systems on wellbeing and sustainability, such as the Canadian Index of Wellbeing (www.ciw.ca); the International Society for Child Indicators (www.childindicators.org; see also Ben-Arieh and Fronès 2008); KidsCount (datacenter.kidscount.org); the United Nations Millennium Project (www.unmillenniumproject.org), the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development's (OECD; www.oecd.org) work on sustainable development; and the UNICEF Convention on the Rights of the Child (www.unicef.org/crc/). In addition, this phenomenon of blending disciplinary approaches for indicator research reflects a more general research trend, as an increasing number of community-oriented, applied research projects can be characterized by the commonality that they draw from a disciplinary mix of theoretical conceptualizations and methodological techniques in their approach to research questions (Porter and Rafols 2009). Such an approach has great appeal, as it draws from and bridges strengths from different disciplinary traditions. At the same time, an interdisciplinary approach presents challenges, as it requires that the compatibility of different methodological and theoretical considerations be examined.

Taken together, the articles in this special issue (1) provide a comprehensive theoretical framework for the validation of the EDI, (2) complement our proposed validation framework with a number of empirical articles that address particular aspects of the EDI validity questions and concerns, and (3) introduce novel ideas in the area of validity theory and validation practice that evolved out of the intellectual space created by the convergence of a population-level school readiness assessment project, an interdisciplinary, biological conceptualization of school readiness, and leading edge thinking in validity theory and philosophy of science. We hope that the special issue serves as a useful resource for researchers and users of the EDI and of other large-scale monitoring/assessment social indicator projects pertaining to the wellbeing of children. In particular, we hope that the ideas and findings presented in this issue spur or contribute to practices and decisions that support the primary purpose of the EDI, namely, to foster the developmental health and wellbeing of children, their families, and their communities.

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