

Alfred binet

War, Intelligence



Alfred Binet was one of the most influential psychologists in history. He developed the first Intelligence Quotient (IQ) test, which was to become used throughout the world. Whilst he pioneered intelligence testing, he also influenced other psychologists to explore and expand on the testing, such as Theodore Simone, Lewis Madison Terman, Henry Herbert Goddard and Jean Piaget. The I. Q. test is still used today to help maximize a persons potential to achieve. Society should be thankful to Alfred Binet for exposing the academic potential in all of us, and being able to measure such potential.

Definition of Intelligence

“ It seems to us that in intelligence there is a fundamental faculty, the alteration or the lack of which, is of the utmost importance for practical life. This faculty is judgment, otherwise called good sense, practical sense, initiative, the faculty of adapting one’s self to circumstances. A person may be a moron or an imbecile if he is lacking in judgment; but with good judgment he can never be either. Indeed the rest of the intellectual faculties seem of little importance in comparison with judgment” (Binet & Simon, 1916, 1973,: 42-43).

Background

Binet was born in 1857 in Nice, France. His father was a physician and his mother an artist. Sadly though, his parents separated whilst Binet was only a young boy, and so he moved with his mother to live in Paris, where he studied law and graduated with a degree in 1878. He had intended to follow in his fathers footsteps and attend medical school, but his interests lay elsewhere.

When Binet reached his twenties, he became infatuated with psychology, and so, engulfed himself in reading books by Charles Darwin and John Stuart Mills, and I am sure many others. He was a self taught psychologist, as he never studied the subject to obtain any formal record of achievement.

Still in Paris, he was introduced to Jean Charcot, who was the Director of the Salpetriere Hospital, he offered Binet the position of researcher in the neurological clinic; he remained in the position from 1883 - 1889.

Binet became a father in 1885 to Madeleine and in 1887 to Alice; his daughters were to become most instrumental in his study of childrens cognition.

In 1891 until his death in 1894, he worked at the Sorbonne, firstly as a researcher and then as the Director of the Laboratory of Experimental Psychology. It was whilst he was at the Sorbonne that Theodore Simon became a doctoral researcher under the supervision of Binet, and this was to become a psychological partnership which would shape the future of intelligence testing.

The Binet Test

Binet began his study into the cognitive processes after the birth of his two daughters Madeleine and Alice, whom were born two years apart. By observing his daughters, he was able to develop many ideas about their cognitive development, thus leading him to to the conclusion that children learn from their experiences and adapt them into their own lives. " The work that he did with his daughters would help to prepare him to understand the

concepts of attention span and suggestibility in cognitive development (Plucker, Ideas and Interests: 2).

In the fall of 1904, the Minister of Public Instruction of France appointed a committee to study and make recommendation regarding the education of mentally retarded children in Paris (Zusne, 1975). Both Binet and Simon were employed by the committee to devise a method of assessment for the appropriate placing in the education system for these children.

The main concern for the Minister of Public Instruction was that children whom simply had problems with behaviour were being placed in special classrooms because their teachers did not want them in theirs. Binet and Theodore Simon wanted to identify those children who would not benefit from being in the normal classroom situation (e. g. special needs children). They wanted to devise a test to measure a variety of psychological abilities, which included imagery, attention, comprehension, imagination, judgments of visual space, and memory for various stimuli.

Binet did not believe that simple sensory testing was a true and accurate way to determine a person's intelligence. Binet never intended for his test to measure ones intelligence but to measure ones intelligence in regards to their behaviors. Binet and Simon compiled a collection of tests which incorporated various tasks which they deemed would highlight children's abilities at various ages. They based the tasks on their many years of observing children, imparticularly the observations Binet had made in regard to his own two daughters.

In 1905 Binet and Simon tested their measurements on another fifty children whom their school teachers considered to be of average intelligence for their ages. This test was to enable Binet to examine the levels of intelligent behaviors between children of the same age. Some of the tests on Binet's scale were very simple, including asking a child to follow the direction of movement of a lighted match, and then maybe slightly harder was to repeat back a three digit sequence of numbers or sentences. There were a few harder tests involved which would require a child to make a sentence out of maybe three or four words, or to reproduce a drawing from memory.

Thus we arrived at the Binet-Simon scale; this would attain a child's mental age as opposed to their chronological age. For example if a child aged 8 years passed all the test requirements set out for a child of that age, then he/she would have a mental age with an exact match to their chronological age, which in this case would be 8.0, or if a child aged 8 scored as well as an average child aged 10, then their mental age would be 10 years.

However, Binet was quite adamant that the test results would be due to variables such as backgrounds, the conditions under which the testing is executed, and he maintained that a child's cognitive abilities were not totally impacted upon by the genetics, but that intelligence could be learnt.