

Binet, Alfred (1857-1911) Encyclopedia Article

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Alfred Binet

Founder of experimental psychology in France and pioneer in intelligence testing.

Alfred Binet was born in Nice, France, in 1857. After studying both law and medicine in Paris, he earned a doctorate in natural science. His psychological training—mostly at Jean-Martin Charcot's neurological clinic at the Salpetriere Hospital—was in the area of abnormal psychology, particularly hysteria, and he published books on hypnotism (*Le magnetisme animal*, with C.S. Fere in 1886) and suggestibility (*La suggestibilite*, 1900). From 1895 until his death in 1911, Binet served as director of France's first psychological laboratory, at the Sorbonne. Also in 1895, he established the journal *L'Annee psychologique*. Binet had been interested in the psychology of—and individual differences in—**intelligence** since the 1880s and published articles on emotion, memory, attention, and problem solving in the journal he founded. In 1899 he set up a special laboratory where he devised a series of tests which he used to evaluate the intellectual development of his two daughters. His 1903 book, *L'Etude experimentale de l'intelligence*, was based on his studies of them.

In 1905 Binet and Theodore Simon created the first intelligence test for general use to aid the French government in establishing a program to educate mentally retarded children. In 1908 they revised the test, expanding it from a single scale of measurement to a battery of tests for children in different age groups, with the focus now shifted from identifying retardation to the general measurement of intelligence.

A further test revision in 1911 introduced the concept of mental age. In 1916 the American psychologist Lewis Terman (1877-1956) used the 1908 Binet-Simon test as the basis for the **Stanford-Binet** Intelligence Scale, the best-known and most researched intelligence test in the United States. After developing his pioneering test, Binet co-authored *Les Enfants anormaux (Abnormal Children)* (1907) with Simon and published *Les Idees modernes sur les enfants (Modern Ideas on Children)* in 1909. He died in Paris in 1911.

For Further Study

Books

Wolf, Theta Holmes. *Alfred Binet*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973.