

Edith Kaplan (1924–2009)



Edith Kaplan, widely regarded as the mother of clinical neuropsychology, passed away on September 3, 2009, at the age of 85. She is survived by her son Michael Kaplan, her granddaughter Rachel Kaplan, and hundreds of colleagues, former students, and friends whom she embraced with love, devotion, and wisdom.

Edith was born in New York City on February 16, 1924, and raised in Brooklyn, the only child of immigrant parents. She completed her doctoral work in developmental psychology at Clark University in 1956 under the mentorship of the renowned developmental psychologist Heinz Werner. Her master's thesis on the development and communication of symbolic meaning in children became an important theme in a famous 1963 textbook, *Symbolic Formation*, authored by Werner and Edith's husband, the late Bernard Kaplan, who was a fellow graduate student at Clark University.

After completing her graduate studies, Edith had difficulty finding a position in the Boston area in her field of study—the development of language in children. She accepted a position with Harold Goodglass at the Boston Veterans Administration (VA) Hospital, studying the breakdown of language in adults who suffered from brain damage. The budding field of neuropsychology was changed forever with this fortuitous and now legendary collaboration between Goodglass and Kaplan. Together, they authored the Boston Diagnostic Aphasia Examination (1972) and the Boston Naming Test (1983), which after several decades continue to be among the most widely used assessment instruments of lan-

guage disorders in two separate fields of clinical practice: speech pathology and neuropsychology.

Many scholars view the time that Edith worked at the Boston VA, from 1956 to 1985, as the golden years of neuropsychology. There was an uncanny coming together of brilliant minds from the fields of neuropsychology, behavioral neurology, cognitive science, and speech pathology, all working together on “7D,” the famous neurology ward on the 7th floor of the Boston VA. In addition to Kaplan and Goodglass, the multidisciplinary team included Norman Geschwind, Frank Benson, Nelson Butters, Laird Cermak, Howard Gardner, Kenneth Heilman, Michael Alexander, Nancy Helm-Estabrooks, Margaret Naeser, Marlene Oscar-Berman, Donald Stuss, and Edgar Zurif. The convergence of these brilliant clinician–scientists, integrating their unique contributions in the service of a common goal, led to some of the most important early discoveries in the study of mind–brain relationships.

An example of the exciting breakthroughs that were occurring on 7D at that time is illustrated by what happened after Edith, with her legendary clinical acumen, first discovered the patient who could perform practice (symbolic) movements (e.g., pretend to flip a coin, write meaningful words, type meaningful words) with his right hand but not with his left hand, all the while showing normal motor skills in his left hand. Following several months of intense scrutiny, testing, and retesting by Edith, this case continued to baffle the entire neurology and neuropsychology staff at the Boston VA until one day the chairman of the department stood up at neurobehavioral rounds and, in frustration, announced, “It’s like his left hand doesn’t know what his right hand is doing!” It was shortly after this point that Geschwind solved the riddle of this case, proposing that the patient was displaying what has come to be known as a classic disconnection syndrome, the first ever documented in humans, even before the famous split-brain surgery patients that were soon to follow. Geschwind and Edith published this case in the journal *Neurology* in 1962; in 1998, their article was republished by the American Academy of Neurology as one of the landmark papers of the 20th century.

As young predoctoral and postdoctoral interns training at the Boston VA in the 1970s, my peers and I always felt a little nervous presenting cases in neurobehavioral rounds when Geschwind was the attending neurologist because of his distinguished aura and his somewhat blunt, East-coast style of teaching. However, his face would always glow with the deepest admiration and respect whenever he interacted with Edith. It was clear that Geschwind, like so many of the neurologists and neuropsychologists working with her at that time, was deeply grateful to Edith for playing such a significant role in advancing his career.

In the mid-1970s, Edith branched off from the study of the language areas of the left hemisphere and began to tackle the whole brain. She made modifications to the original Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS) and Wechsler Memory Scale

(WMS) in order to enhance the suitability of these instruments for assessing component processes of visual-spatial, executive-function, and verbal and nonverbal memory skills in brain-damaged patients. This work led to the development of a new school of clinical neuropsychology known as “the process approach,” of which Edith is unequivocally regarded as the pioneer and chief architect. It was also at this time that she formally established her world-renowned predoctoral internship and postdoctoral fellowship programs in clinical neuropsychology, which, over the ensuing years, resulted in the training of several hundred graduate students, many of whom have gone on to become leaders in the field. During these years, a common sight on the 7th floor of the Boston VA was Edith rushing down the hall as she arrived at work (usually late from staying up until midnight the night before supervising students in her office), carrying several grocery bags overflowing with textbooks, research manuscripts, dissertation proposals, and of course her latest knitting project and trailed by a throng of students from all levels of training scurrying after her like ducklings trying to keep up with a mother duck.

In the 1980s, Edith and I started a nonprofit agency called the Boston Neuropsychological Foundation to promote continuing education in neuropsychology. We gave workshops around the country on the process approach to neuropsychological assessment, and the proceeds were used to fund postdoctoral fellows to work with her. At one such workshop in Chicago, several project scientists and senior executives from The Psychological Corporation attended. Edith was worried that they might be upset at the modifications that she was making to the standardized administration procedures of the WAIS and the WMS in order to better assess cognitive deficits in brain-damaged patients. After the workshop, we invited them to have dinner with us. As was usually the case, Edith soon had them roaring with laughter as she told her infamous stories about her unconventional life, particularly her numerous, near-fatal car accidents.

One of the young project scientists at that meeting, Aurelio Prifitera, fell under the charm and wisdom of Edith and, after returning from the workshop, pushed hard for The Psychological Corporation to formally incorporate the changes to the WAIS and the WMS that Edith was advocating. Since then, no one has had a more significant impact on the revisions that have been formally made to the family of Wechsler intelligence and memory subtests than Edith. For example, the cognitive task that she originally developed as a student of Heinz Werner has been included as one of the subtests in the recently published Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC)—IV (Word Reasoning). Aurelio Prifitera, who is now President and CEO of Clinical Assessment at the Pearson Publishing Corporation, always held a special place in Edith’s heart for his active role in embracing and championing her approach to assessment.

Outside of work, Edith’s pride and joy was her granddaughter Rachel Kaplan, for whom she was the primary mother figure after Rachel’s mother tragically passed away from leukemia in 1998. Although Edith always had a busy teaching and travel schedule, giving lectures and workshops around the Boston area and the country, Rachel and her father Michael were often by Edith’s side, driving her to the lecture sites or the airport

and helping to carry her luggage and bags of disorganized slides and transparencies. In recent years, when Edith was having health problems, Rachel made it possible for her to attend professional meetings and conferences by serving as her personal travel companion, attendant, and best friend, an act of love and devotion for which Edith was always deeply grateful.

Edith’s research productivity never waned, even when she was in her 80s. She is best known for her work in test development, and she is the lead or senior author on numerous assessment instruments designed for both children and adults that are used nationally and internationally, including the Boston Diagnostic Aphasia Examination (Lea & Febiger, 1972); the Boston Naming Test (Lea & Febiger, 1983); the California Verbal Learning Test—Adult Version (The Psychological Corporation, 1987); the California Verbal Learning Test—Children’s Version (The Psychological Corporation, 1994); Microcog: A Computerized Assessment of Cognitive Status (The Psychological Corporation, 1993); the WAIS—Revised as a Neuropsychological Instrument (The Psychological Corporation, 1991); the WISC—III as a Process Instrument (The Psychological Corporation, 1999); the WISC—IV Integrated (The Psychological Corporation, 2004); the Kaplan—Baycrest Neurocognitive Assessment (The Psychological Corporation, 2000); the California Verbal Learning Test—II (The Psychological Corporation, 2000); and the Delis—Kaplan Executive Function System (The Psychological Corporation, 2001).

As a pioneer in neuropsychology, Edith also helped shape the professional organizations of this burgeoning field. She served as one of the first presidents of the International Neuropsychological Society (1979) and of Division 40 (Clinical Neuropsychology) of the American Psychological Association (APA; 1986). She was one of the founders of the American Board of Clinical Neuropsychology, which later merged with the American Board of Professional Psychology to provide board certification in clinical neuropsychology. She was the recipient of numerous awards, including the Ezra Saul Psychological Service Award from the Massachusetts Psychological Association (1984); the Distinguished Clinical Neuropsychologist Award from the National Academy of Neuropsychology (1993); the Distinguished Contributions Award from the New England Psychological Association (1996); the Career Contribution Award from the Massachusetts Neuropsychological Society (1997); the Arthur Benton Award from APA Division 40 (2004); the Lifetime Distinguished Career Award from the International Neuropsychological Society (2008); and the Distinguished Service and Contributions to the Profession of Psychology Award from the American Board of Professional Psychology (awarded posthumously in 2010).

At the time of her death, Edith continued to work as a professor of psychology at Suffolk University, an adjunct professor of neurology and psychiatry at Boston University School of Medicine, and an affiliate professor of psychology at Clark University. And, of great importance to the field, she continued to be vigorously involved in her most beloved activity of all, teaching students about neuropsychology.

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