RIVIER UNIVERSITY

**DIVISION OF EDUCATION**

# **SPECIALIST IN THE ASSESSMENT OF INTELLECTUAL FUNCTIONING PROGRAM**

AND

**ASSOCIATION OF SPECIALISTS IN ASSESSMENT OF**

**INTELLECTUAL FUNCTIONING (ASAIF)**

[**http://www.asaif.net**](http://www.asaif.net)

**Comments on Reports 9/17/15 # 254**

If you are reading a bootleg version of **this newsletter** and wish to receive your own free copies newsletter, email me at johnzerowillis@yahoo.com. Back issues are archived at the ASAIF Website and at <http://www.myschoolpsychology.com/johns-blog-2/>. The ASAIF Website also includes opinion columns, such as "Have a WRAT for Lunch," and information on ASAIF workshops. The [www.myschoolpsychology](http://www.myschoolpsychology) site includes legal information from Guy McBride and assessment information from Ron Dumont as well as special education links and other information.

**CONTENT**

Texas Woman's University and Dr. Richard Woodcock announced on June 17 the formation of the new “**Woodcock Institute for Neurocognitive Research and Applied Practice**.”  The press release (with link to video of press conference) can be found here (thanks to Kevin McGrew).

<http://www.twu.edu/twunews/press_releases/15-woodcock-gift.asp>

**Minecraft.** I was asked recently if I had heard or read of any connections to children who are avid Minecraft players doing better than would otherwise be expected on the WISC-V or WAIS-IV Visual Puzzles. I would not know diddly about a computer game more advanced than solitaire.  Knowing nothing about computer games more sophisticated than solitaire, I looked at the advertising video at <https://minecraft.net/> and it seems to involve visual construction.

I have not heard anything, but it seems probable that practice with Minecraft might improve performance on Visual Puzzles and perhaps even Block Design.  There used to be a game called TRAC 4 <http://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/10198/trac-4> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OCFWoSCbZSE> that was very similar to Block Design except that the 16 blocks (otherwise identical) were about half-size and the stimulus picture was placed on a four-sided, wind-up carousel that rotated, exposing the picture briefly, in constant motion, for about one-fourth of the time.  Kids who mastered that game found the WISC-R BD pretty boring.  I never heard that TRAC 4 players improved at anything except TRAC 4 and Wechsler Block Design.  I would predict that they would also improve on DAS-II Pattern Construction, but not as much as on Block Design.  Similarly, I would predict that activities would need to be fairly similar to Minecraft for there to be much transfer of training.



Just as with the brain-development games on the market, the more the stimulus and the response of the practice resemble the target activity, the greater the transfer of training.  It is yet another normal curve -- really a three-dimensional one that you could probably build in this Minecraft thing.  The peak would be identical practice and target activity.  As the practice diverges in various aspects from the target activity, transfer of training diminishes.

Badminton, for example, is apparently not very good practice for tennis because you move your wrist in badminton, but usually not in a tennis stroke (or so I am told).  That is apparently a crucial difference that slides the practice way down from the red peak.  At that red peak, the practice and the target activity are almost identical, and transfer of training is almost complete.  As you descend down the rainbow through orange, yellow, green, blue, and indigo with increasing differences in stimulus or response characteristics, the transfer of training diminishes.  (The one exception being difficulty: practice with heavier weights, smaller stimuli, faster responses, etc., may increase transfer of training.)

Back in the 1960s, we found that many kids with SLD (then minimal brain dysfunction) flunked the Frostig Developmental Test of Visual Perception.  We then trained them on the Frostig Move, Grow, Learn program (similar to many of the activities on the Frostig test.  Sure enough, they got much better on the Frostig test.  Oddly enough, they did not improve much on the reading, writing, or math skills that had first brought the kids to our attention. I assume that commercial training programs that provide practice in working memory, sustained attention, and problem-solving strategies would generalize to some degree to other activities that require similar kinds of working memory, sustained attention, and problem-solving.

There is some generalization from any training of self-perceived competence and perhaps some generalization of the lesson that hard work yields improvement. If you make the starting lineup of the softball team after two years' practice, your English grades may also improve.

I would be interested to hear of any reports of Minecraft or Tetris generalizing to Block Design (and even more to hear of transfer to academic tasks).

**Reynolds Intellectual Assessment Scales (2nd ed.) (RIAS-2)**

<http://www4.parinc.com/Products/Product.aspx?ProductID=RIAS-2#Items> "will be released perhaps as early as August, but no later than October—should have a firm date soon.  There will be a scoring program, but it will be through PAR iConnect, so it will compatible with any computer system.  There will be an Interpretive report for just the RIAS-2 and there will also be one that uses the new PAR Academic Achievement Battery—the AAB.  Since PAR no longer publishes the WRAT series, a program linked to the WRAT products was not possible.  For RIAS-2, we have extended the floor at the lower age levels as well as the upper end just a bit at most age levels, altered the discontinue rules, and added a motor-reduced Speeded Processing Index that, like other RIAS Indexes, includes a Verbal and a Nonverbal speeded task—many users asked for these changes, so we incorporated them.  We modified a number of items, dropped a good number as well, and added quite a few new items to be more current, and of course collected all new normative data.

"PAR ([www.parinc.com](http://www.parinc.com/)) has always been the publisher for the RIAS and remains so with RIAS-2.  The PAR clinical assessment consultants in each region do negotiate quantity discounts with schools and clinics and they typically offer discounts for on-site ordering at NASP, APA, and other meetings where they exhibit, including many state meetings.  Pricing has not yet been set on the web site, but I am going to copy Julie Alexander at PAR and see if she has any additional information she can post at this point.  Appreciate the interest."

Cecil R. Reynolds, PhD, Editor-in-Chief, *Psychological Assessment;* Editor-Elect*, Archives of Scientific Psychology;* Associate Editor, *Archives of Scientific Psychology;* Emeritus Professor of Educational Psychology, Emeritus Professor of Neuroscience, Distinguished Research Scholar, Texas A&M University.

**Age and Grade Norms**

A seemingly eternal question about assessment is whether to use norms based on the child's age or the child's grade placement. This question is especially vexing during the summer when many tests shift the child from spring grade norms to fall grade norms just when the child has forgotten most of what was taught the previous spring.

The *Examiner's Manual,* *Woodcock-Johnson IV Tests of Achievement*(Nancy Mather & Barbara J. Wendling.  Rolling Meadows, IL: Riverside, 2014) states on p. 37:

The online scoring program automatically calculates the examinee's chronological age and tenth-of-school-year grade placement (based on a standard school year). If the student is enrolled in a year-round school or a school with starting or ending dates that fall more than 2 weeks before or after the default range (i.e., August 16 through June 15), use the option for entering exact starting and ending dates of the school year. Due to the wide variation in starting and ending dates for schools and districts, use this option regularly to increase the precision of the grade norms accessed by the scoring program. After entering the starting and ending dates into the scoring program, it automatically calculates the exact grade placement, in tenths of the school year.

 The month-by-month norms (for either age or grade placement) on the Woodcock-Johnson tests has long been a significant virtue of those instruments.

With achievement tests that use seasonal norms (e.g., fall and spring; fall, winter, and spring; or autumnal equinox, winter solstice, vernal equinox, and summer solstice), there can be seasonal assessment disorders when a student's score drops several points overnight.  See, for a random example with the old WIAT-II, <http://www.myschoolpsychology.com/WIATII.pdf>.  Obviously, the wider the norms band (e.g., half years vs. thirds of years), the greater the overnight changes.  (On some tests, the winter norms are simply interpolated.)  The lower the child's grade, the greater the effect.  It is also greater for some achievement domains than for others.  (Such jumps can also be also a concern for young children with tests of cognitive ability, especially if the age spans in the norms tables are broad, e.g., 12, 6, 4, 3, or 2 months.)  If a child's age or grade placement is close to the border between norm groups, I think it is always prudent to glance at the adjacent page in the norms tables to see if testing a few days earlier or later would have made a substantial change in the scores.

Tests with seasonal norms must set arbitrary dividing points in the summer.  I find it frustrating when I test a child in late summer after the official dividing point for the particular test (e.g., July 1), long after the child has forgotten many of the math skills taught in the past spring and I must use norms for fall of the next grade, which the child has not yet started.  Obviously, I must obey the rules in the particular test's manual, but I can also offer a second table of what the scores would be by other norms as long as I clearly explain in table and text that those are not official scores, but might introduce new problems if the child has repeated or skipped one or more grades. Again, one of the many virtues of the Woodcock-Johnson is that norms are based on one-month intervals, so differences in scores between grade 1.9 and 2.0 or age 7:2 and 7:3\* would be trivial.  You can check by temporarily changing the test date and rescoring.  The seasonal assessment disorder (Princess Summerfallwinterspring Effect) is not a concern with the WJ IV.

Some teachers, administrators, and teams prefer grade-based norms  There is a problem, though, when a child has been red-shirted (such as a "Readiness" or "Transition" year crammed in between kindergarten and first grade, or a repetition of one or more grades in the belief that repeating the same action will yield a different outcome).  It is unreasonable to expect a second grader to do fourth grade math no matter how old or tall the child may be (so grade-based norms might be more appropriate).  However, it is not defensible to make a child repeat several grades because of reading deficiencies and then triumphantly announce that the child is at long last reading almost at grade level (and passed his driver's license test with oral administration).

In some cases, when there is a noteworthy difference between scores based on age norms and scores based on grade norms, it may be best to report both sets of scores.  The whole truth does not reside in either set of scores alone.

Similarly, if the test manual says to use norms for grade 1.9, but the parent wants scores by norms for grade 2.0 (or any other comparison, for that matter), I would score the test twice and report both sets of scores (carefully and clearly identifying in both table headings and text which set is based on the test manual requirements and which set is not).  I'd rather switch than fight.

 Another issue is comparisons of "ability" and "achievement" scores (or, much better "predicted achievement" and "achievement" scores), assuming that is the sort of thing one wants to do for some reason.  It is simply nuts to compare achievement by one set of norms and ability or predicted achievement by another set of norms.  Consider Johnny, whose IQ standard score was 100, who is of average height and weight for his age, and who has been retained twice in grade.

**Percentile Rank Percentile Rank**

**by norms for by norms for**

**Age     Grade Age     Grade**

**Intelligence**50          90 **Intelligence**50

**Reading**1          50 **Reading** 50

**Height**50          90 **Height**50

**Weight**50          90 **Weight** 90

Conclusions: Johnny is reading just fine and he is obese.

Off-hand, I cannot think of an individually-administered cognitive ability test other than the Woodcock-Johnson that offers grade-based norms, so if, for some odd reason, I felt compelled to compare a child's "ability" scores with the child's "achievement" scores and I wanted to use grade-based norms, I would have to use the Woodcock-Johnson COG.  If I also use the WJ IV ACH and OL, I have the advantage of scores all based on the same national sample of unsuspecting victims.  I would also have the options of comparing very similar tests of listening comprehension and reading comprehension and of using the General Intellectual Ability, the *Gf-Gc* Composite, and/or the various specific Scholastic Aptitude Clusters.

However, if the child is also undergoing language testing, neuropsychological testing, or other testing scored with age-based norms, I need to provide achievement-test scores also based on age norms.  Some achievement tests offer only age-based or only grade-based norms.  (Again, I often elect to report achievement-test scores by both age norms and grade norms.)

Please note that this discussion addresses norms based on the child's age and norms based on the child's grade placement (or norms based on some other grade placement that you wish to consider). It does not refer to age-equivalent and grade-equivalent scores! Please see <http://www.myschoolpsychology.com/testing-information/misuse-of-grade-equivalents/> .

You can find very useful tables of average ages for grade placements and average grade placements for ages (and tons of other wicked cool information) in

Mather, N., & Jaffe, L. E. (2004). *Woodcock-Johnson III: Reports, recommendations, and strategies* (with CD)*.*Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

and

Mather, N., & Jaffe, L. (in press). *Woodcock-Johnson IV: Reports, recommendations, and strategies*(with CD)*.* Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

<http://www.amazon.com/Woodcock-Johnson-IV-Reports-Recommendations-Strategies/dp/1118860748>

**Basic Processes in Specific Learning Disabilities?** Ron Benner, School Psychologist in Connecticut, and webmaster of the School Psychology Listserv (Subscribe: Send blank email to School-Psychology-Listserv-subscribe@yahoogroups.com) kindly posted this article:

<http://www.ocregister.com/articles/reading-671703-brain-children.html>. The original study can be found at <http://journals.plos.org/plosbiology/article?id=10.1371/journal.pbio.1002196>. We all know that the 2006 IDEA Regulations and most state regulations consider specific learning disabilities to be simply low achievement not obviously caused by inadequate instruction; limited English proficiency; vision, hearing, or motor disabilities; intellectual disability; emotional disturbance; or environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage. Assessment of basic psychological processes is not required by the IDEA Regulations nor by most states. Nonetheless, I persist in believing that specific learning disabilities are more than unexplained low achievement, that they do have a biological basis, and that – if Response to Intervention and ruling out of excluded causes fail to yield effective interventions for a particular child – then it can be useful to explore basic psychological processes for that particular child in order to develop more effective interventions. But that is just me.

**STYLE**

Don’t write merely to be understood. Write so that you cannot possibly be misunderstood.

 – Robert Louis Stevenson

I abhor averages.  I like the individual case.  A man may have six meals one day and none the next, making an average of three meals per day, but that is not a good way to live.

– Louis D. Brandeis

**Did** seems like a harmless little word. However, it can introduce an argumentative or grudging tone into an otherwise placidly neutral sentence. Compare these sentences, for example:

 *Ecomodine had difficulty reading words of more than one syllable.*

 *Ecomodine did have difficulty reading words of more than one syllable.*

The first sentence is clearly a simple statement of an unfortunate fact. The second one suggests that the difficulty with polysyllables was unexpected, a contradiction to other test findings, or an exception to an otherwise consistent rule. If we would not be tempted to begin the sentence with "However," we probably should not cram a "did" into it. Habitual insertion of "did" for no real purpose (a tendency I have noted in many evaluation reports) may require a twelve-step program.

**Math facts.** I have mentioned before that people who have not had the rewarding opportunity to work as elementary school teachers may think that "math facts" include information such as "eight is greater than three" or "addition is commutative" of "Pi Day this year was celebrated on 3/14/15 at 9:26:53." Those unfortunate persons may not realize the examiner meant "memorized sums, differences, products, and quotients." Also, for some reason, many evaluators describe results of math tests with such language as "solved multiplication facts." How do you solve a fact?

**RECOMMENDED NEW BOOKS**

(Please consider patronizing your friendly, local, independent bookstore.)

Davis, L. J. (2015). *Enabling acts: The hidden story of how the Americans with Disabilities Act gave the largest US minority its rights.* Boston, MA: Beacon Press. ISBN: 978-0-8070-7156-4. Enthralling for people who do want to know more about how sausages and laws are made. This year is, as you know, the 25th anniversary of the ADA. (I will throw in here a shameless plug for ch. 7 of *Essentials of IDEA for Assessment Professionals* by McBride, Dumont, and Willis [Wiley, 2011] and for <http://www.myschoolpsychology.com/guys-log/>.)

Flanagan, D. P., & Alfonso, V. C. (Eds.) (in press). *WJ IV clinical use and interpretation.* Burlington, MA: Academic Press (Elsevier). <http://store.elsevier.com> \*

Flanagan, D. P. & Alfonso, V. C. (in preparation).  *Essentials of WISC-V Assessment*.  Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Flanagan, D. P., Ortiz, S. O., & Alfonso, V. C. (2015). *Cross-Battery Assessment Software System (X-BASS) access card*. ISBN: 978-1-119-05639-3. <http://www.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-111905639X.html>

See also <http://www.crossbattery.com/>. New and improved version of Flanagan, Ortiz, & Alfonso's Cross-Battery Assessment software. One-time download.

Kaufman, A. S., Raiford, S. E., & Coalson, D. (in press). *Intelligent testing with the WISC-V.* Hoboken, NJ: Wiley. ISBN: 978-1-118-58923-6. <http://www.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-1118589238.html> \*

Mather, N., & Jaffe, L. (in press). *Woodcock-Johnson IV: Recommendations, reports, and strategies.* Hoboken, NJ: Wiley. ISBN: 978-1-118-86074-8. <http://www.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-1118860748.html> <http://www.amazon.com/Woodcock-Johnson-IV-Reports-Recommendations-Strategies/dp/1118860748>. Like its WJ III predecessor, this book comes with an incredibly useful CD and is an excellent textbook and resource for assessment in general, not just for the WJ IV.

Mather, N., & Wendling, B. J. (2015). *Essentials of WJ IV tests of achievement.* Hoboken, NJ: Wiley. ISBN: 978-1-118-79915-4. <http://www.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-1118799151.html> \*

Schrank, F. A., Decker, S., & Garruto, J. (in preparation). *Essentials of WJ IV cognitive abilities assessment.* Hoboken, NJ: Wiley. \*

Weiss, L. G., Saklofske, D. H., Holdnack, J. A., Prifitera, A. (2015). *WISC-V Assessment and Interpretation: Scientist-Practitioner Perspectives.* Burlington, MA: Academic Press (Elsevier). ISBN : 9780124046979 <http://store.elsevier.com>.

\* Disclosure: I am co-author of a chapter in this book, but will receive no royalties.

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This newsletter goes out intermittently to about 400 people on eleven separate lists (because some mailboxes won't accept mailings to more than 49 recipients). If you wish to contact the entire list, not just your 1/11 of it, please send the message to me, and I will add it (subject to Comstock, Hays, Children's Internet Protection Act, HIPAA, FERPA, copyright, and Homeland Security considerations) to the next mailing. If you wish to be protected from receiving future copies, just email me at johnzerowillis@yahoo.com.