Woodcock Johnson IV ECAD®

WJ Perspectives

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The Arrival of the *WJ* IV *Tests of Early Cognitive and Academic Development*

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The authors of the ***Woodcock-Johnson*® IV** (***WJ* IV™**; Schrank, McGrew, and Mather, 2014) are proud to announce the publication of a dedicated battery of early development tests that measure the emergence of cognitive abilities and academic skills at the preschool level as well as the presence and severity of any cognitive developmental delay in children from ages three –nine.

A new battery of tests has been added to the ***Woodcock-Johnson* IV** family of assessment instruments. The ***Woodcock- Johnson* IV *Tests of Early Cognitive and Academic Development*** (***WJ* IV *ECAD*®**) (Schrank, McGrew, & Mather, 2015) is a special-purpose battery of tests, contained within a single test easel, designed primarily for use with children of ages 2:6 through 7:11. The ***ECAD*** is also useful for children up to age 9:11 when cognitive delay or intellectual disability is present.

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The ***WJ* IV *ECAD*** was developed in response to a need expressed by many school psychologists for a dedicated ***WJ* IV** battery of tests measuring both the emergence and development of different broad CHC abilities at the early childhood level. Many school psychologists who use the ***WJ* IV** have suggested that CHC theory can be especially helpful for determining if cognitive abilities are developing as expected. The ***WJ* IV *ECAD*** is a battery of ten tests designed to measure emerging cognitive abilities and academic skills in a format that is interesting and attractive to preschool children. Some of the tests are unique to the ***ECAD***, while others are adapted and alternate forms of tests included in other parts of the ***WJ* IV** that school psychologists have found especially useful for preschool assessments. Unique ***ECAD*** tests include Memory for Names, Verbal Analogies, Visual Closure, and Number Sense.

Memory for Names is a test of learning ability that has been used and loved by school psychologists who conduct preschool evaluations since 1989. With the publication of the ***ECAD***, new and colorful art enhances the attractiveness of this learning task to young children.

Young children learn to reason by analogy, making the **Verbal Analogies** test a perfect choice for assessing the development of fluid reasoning ability. At the preschool age the task taps the emergence of reasoning ability as the child applies his or her knowledge of the relationship between the words in the first part of each item to induce and say a fourth word that completes the analogy.

Visual Closure is a test of visual processing, specifically the ability to identify the name of object when provided only with a limited portion of a pen and ink drawing of the object. The attention to detail required to identify objects from a limited number of key features is an important developmental task that precedes the ability to learn to read.

Number Sense is an intriguing new test that measures a critical developmental familiarity with numbers and how to think with numbers. Number Sense measures a broad sampling of number development skills, such as number recognition, counting, sequencing, and understanding of magnitude and quantity estimation with a variety of tasks that are both attractive and engaging to young children.

The other six tests in the ***ECAD*** are alternate forms of ***WJ* IV** tests and feature greater item density to capture changes in growth and development in the preschool ages. The ***ECAD*** versions also include different items so that children who are subsequently evaluated with the ***WJ* IV** are not over-exposed to the same items. This is particularly important for skills and abilities that typically increase rapidly during this period of development, such as those measured by the Letter-Word Identification, Rapid Picture Naming, Sentence Repetition, and Writing tests. The Writing test is a downward extension of the ***WJ* IV** Spelling test that focuses on early pencil and paper writing skills. Sound Blending and Picture Vocabulary also have different items than, and increased item density when compared to, their corresponding ***WJ* IV** tests.

School psychologists who know how to administer and interpret the ***WJ* IV** will find it easy to use the ***ECAD***. The extension of the ***WJ* IV** CHC model down to the preschool level with this dedicated battery of tests will be helpful for identifying the specific cognitive and early academic skills that need to be targeted for intervention. In addition to the comprehensive evaluation of the different cognitive abilities and overall cognitive ability score, the ***ECAD*** can also be useful as a screening instrument for a delay in expressive language or the development of early academic skills.

Sensitivity to Developmental Delay

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) includes provisions for identification and education of children under a category of developmental delay for children aged 3–9, or any subset of that age range, including ages 3–5. Most states allow use of the developmental delay category for ages 3–5; many states have extended the option to use the developmental delay terminology for ages 6–7; some states allow a child to receive special educational services under this or a similar non-categorical term through age 9.

A developmental delay is different from a handicapping condition or learning disability—it is a noticeable lag in the acquisition of critically important developmental abilities or skills. A delay can occur as the result of a number of genetic or environmental factors. Environmental factors, such as lack of enrichment or learning opportunities, are particularly responsive to early intervention. A developmental delay can be in any one (or more) of five domains: cognitive, communication, adaptive, social, emotional, and motor development.

To promote early identification and intervention services for children with disabilities, IDEA 2004 requires public schools to provide screening and comprehensive assessment for developmental delay for children beginning at age 3. It is important to identify delays early so that an individual education plan can be put in place to increase the acquisition of ability or skill development, or, in some cases, eliminate the delay entirely.

The *ECAD* provides an accurate description of the presence and severity of any specific cognitive developmental delay.

The ***ECAD*** can be useful for school psychologists who are called upon to provide an evaluation for cognitive developmental delay for at least two reasons. First, the ***ECAD*** can help examiners identify a delay in the early acquisition of the broad CHC abilities. Second, the ***ECAD***'s underlying W scale is sensitive to the degree of disability through direct comparison to children of the same age, month by month. The W Diff, or W difference score, provides the most accurate description of the child's developmental status relative to other children of the same age, although other scores for determining developmental delay are also available in the ***ECAD*** (i.e., Months Delay; Percentage Delay; Standard Deviation Delay).

The *ECAD* Promotes Early Intervention

The ***ECAD*** is sensitive to, and identifies developmental delay in, important aspects of emerging cognitive abilities. One of the attributes which makes the ***ECAD*** so exciting is its usefulness in identifying specific cognitive and academic delays at an early age. Although designed primarily for children in the 2:6 through 7:11 age range, the ***ECAD*** is also appropriate for use with children up to age 9:11 who have, or are suspected of having, a cognitive or academic developmental delay. School psychologists who work at the elementary school level will find the ***ECAD*** a valuable resource for identification of children in Kindergarten and Grade 1 or 2 who may continue to benefit from non-categorical special educational services for cognitive developmental delay.

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The ***WJ* IV** authors are very excited about the promise of the ***ECAD*** because cognitive developmental delay can sometimes be minimized or even eliminated with early identification and intervention. With accurate identification, interventions can be tailored to create an individualized educational plan for each child. Early interventions that target important and specific cognitive deficits can foster learning readiness and enhance the probability of success for a child entering Kindergarten or Grade 1.

References

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