



The Woodcock-Muñoz Foundation

RESEARCH BRIEF

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

COGNITIVE PERFORMANCE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

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The Woodcock-Muñoz Foundation (WMF) is a private non-profit operating foundation that supports the advancement of contemporary cognitive assessment practices. The Doctoral Dissertation Abstract Project is part of the Foundation's efforts to disseminate research findings that bridge the theory-to-practice gap in cognitive assessment.

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Abstract

The present investigator set out to dispel the myth that performance on cognitive assessments and tests of academic achievement are two separate entities, by evaluating the performances of students who are learning English as their second language. A review of the literature indicates that individuals that are culturally and linguistically different from the mainstream, monolingual English population are at risk for receiving a discriminatory assessment of their cognitive abilities, which in turn will lead to an erroneous classification as a student with a disability, as per criteria set forth by the Individual with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004). Sixty-one students in a suburban public school district that were designated as Limited English Proficient (LEP) were given the Woodcock-Johnson-Third Edition-Tests of Cognitive Abilities (WJ-III) during the spring term of the 2005-2006 academic year to coincide with the annual administration of the New York State English As a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT). The sample included students from the four NYSESLAT proficiency groups: 4 Beginner (7%), 14 Intermediate (23%), 29 Advanced (47%), and 14 Proficient (23%). The results support the investigator's hypotheses and confirm the existence of a linear relationship of moderate strength between the WJ-III and the NYSESLAT. In addition, analyses of the data collected demonstrated the impact of acculturation and English language proficiency on the overall General Intellectual Ability (GIA) scores, obtained from the WJ-III and on the performance of those specific subtests that have been deemed linguistically demanding and culturally loaded. Generally, performance on tests of cognitive abilities approached the average range as English language proficiency increased. By studying the impact of second language acquisition and acculturation on measures of cognitive abilities, school psychologist will be better able to differentiate between developmental issues related to second language acquisition and disabilities that affect learning. This information will in turn prevent the number of LEP students that are currently referred to and over-represented in special education programs.

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