

Truth, Lies and Testing...

**Information is not knowledge.
Knowledge is not wisdom.
Wisdom is not truth...
(Frank Zappa)**

All tests can lie, as all tests are biased. Test scores in isolation do not represent truth. Test results may present a collection of artifacts, not facts. All information requires interpretation. Without interpretation, there can be no truth. Teams of teachers and related educational professionals must seek truth to qualify students and determine appropriate educational interventions; test scores and mathematical formulae do not. Always seek truth by understanding lies.

**A lie told often enough
becomes truth. (Lenin)**

**The primary purpose of
testing should be to find out
more about the problem,
not to just get a score.
(Richard Woodcock)**

The selection of appropriate assessment strategies and tests for assessing English Language Learners (ELL's) for special education referrals must be made



carefully, with regard to the background and individual needs of each student. One-size-fits-all assessment strategies fit no one and harm students and teachers. Such strategies are not only illegal (IDEA, USOE Rules), but yield an inaccurate picture of an individuals' strengths, weaknesses and limitations.

According to the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* (American Psychological Association (APA), American Educational Research Association (AERA), and the National Council on



Measurement in Education (NCME): “For a non-native English speaker and for a speaker of some dialects of English, every test given in English becomes, in part, a language or literacy test...test results may not reflect accurately the abilities and competencies

being measured if test performance depends on these test takers’ knowledge of English.”(p.73)

Because of cultural factors (including Limited English Proficiency) more than 5 million students are tested (and/or scores interpreted?) inappropriately by standardized tests each year. Best practice for test developers is to examine possible test bias and provide guidance to practitioners regarding use for specific populations or conditions. Any test that does not provide interpretation information for diverse learning populations (language, culture, disability) should not be used as a formal assessment component. If standardized tests are used for the assessment of English Language

Learners, the effects of language and culture must be understood.

The use of the WJ III Cognitive Battery may be considered as one component of a thorough evaluation for some English Language Learner students whose English language dominance is English, and whose Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALPS) is adequate to warrant testing in English. The WJ III does provide a mechanism for testing (screening) the English proficiency assumption. English language proficiency is indicated by the Oral Language Relative Proficiency Index (RPI) score and the CALPS score (Figure I). If the student obtains an Oral Language RPI between 34/90 and 67/90, (or CALPS 2.5-3.5) he or she may be limited in English Language Proficiency; and test interpretation should be made cautiously and with the understanding that scores may underestimate the student’s aptitude.

If the student obtains an Oral Language RPI under 33/90, (or CALP 2.5 and lower), he or she exhibits limited or lower English language proficiency; and scores

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ORAL LANGUAGE RPI	CALPS	ENGLISH PROFICIENCY LEVEL	STUDENT WILL FIND RELATED ENGLISH LANGUAGE TASKS AT AGE OR GRADE LEVEL:
96/90 to 99/90	4.5-5	Average to Advanced	Very Easy to Manageable
82/90 to 95/90	4	AVERAGE	MANAGEABLE
68/90 to 81/90	3.5	Limited to Average	Manageable to Difficult
34/90 to 67/90	3	Limited	Difficult
19/90 to 33/90	2.5	Very Limited to Limited	Difficult to Extremely Difficult
5/90 to 18/90	2	Very Limited	Extremely Difficult
3/90 to 4/90	1.5	Negligible to Very Limited	Extremely Difficult to Impossible
0/90 To 2/90	1	Negligible	Impossible

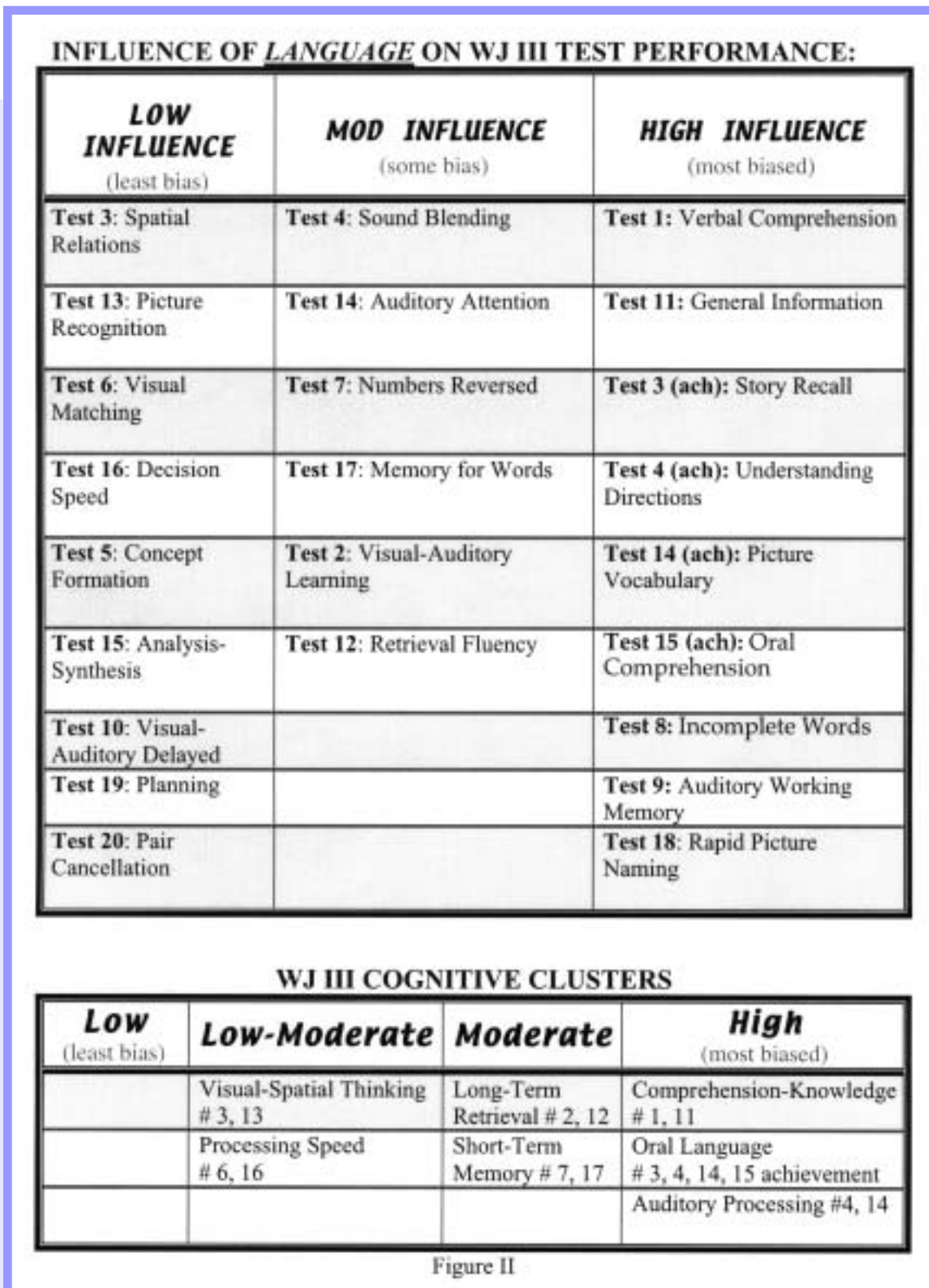
Figure I

from any test with language requirements may severely underestimate the student's aptitude and the assessment may not provide a valid representation of his or her academic potential.

Figure II illustrates the effects of language on WJ III cognitive subtests and clusters. Low influence subtests and clusters are relatively language free and considered most valid for ELL's, while high influence subtests and

clusters are considered potentially the most biased and least valid.

While it is easy to imagine how a lack of English proficiency may affect test performance, the possible effect of cultural differences are less universally understood. The formal educational system represents a cultural norm, and mirrors the dominant culture of the community and educational professionals who run it.



INFLUENCE OF CULTURE ON WJ III TEST PERFORMANCE:

LOW INFLUENCE (least bias)	MOD INFLUENCE (some bias)	HIGH INFLUENCE (most biased)
Test 3: Spatial Relations	Test 4: Sound Blending	Test 1: Verbal Comprehension
Test 13: Picture Recognition	Test 14: Auditory Attention	Test 11: General Information
Test 6: Visual Matching	Test 7: Numbers Reversed	Test 3 (ach): Story Recall
Test 16: Decision Speed	Test 17: Memory for Words	Test 4 (ach): Understanding Directions
Test 5: Concept Formation	Test 2: Visual-Auditory Learning	Test 14 (ach): Picture Vocabulary
Test 15: Analysis-Synthesis	Test 12: Retrieval Fluency	Test 15 (ach): Oral Comprehension
Test 10: Visual-Auditory Delayed		Test 8: Incomplete Words
Test 19: Planning		Test 9: Auditory Working Memory
Test 20: Pair Cancellation		Test 18: Rapid Picture Naming

WJ III COGNITIVE CLUSTERS

Low (least bias)	Low-Moderate	Moderate	High (most biased)
Fluid Reasoning # 5, 15	Visual-Spatial Thinking # 3, 13	Long-Term Retrieval # 2, 12	Comprehension-Knowledge # 1, 11
	Processing Speed # 6, 16	Auditory Processing #4, 14	Oral Language # 3, 4, 14, 15 achievement
		Short-Term Memory # 7, 17	

Figure III

Norms and expectations of students within this system may be in direct conflict with heritage language traditions or expectations of individuals outside the mainstream population. "Simple" expectations within school settings, such as making eye contact, listening and responses to questions and tests may have to be implicitly taught in order for them to be generalized. Cultural differences do affect test results, and can invalidate scores if not understood and interpreted correctly. The effects of cultural difference can be independently examined in relation to WJ III cognitive subtests and clusters.

Figure III represents the potential effects of culture on WJ III test results. Interpreters of test scores must consider the possible effects of cultural difference when discussing a student's "true" score. *Continued page 54*

The pure and simple truth is rarely pure and never simple (Oscar Wilde)

Figure IV presents a worksheet (with sample scores) for comparing cognitive cluster scores most affected by language/cultural differences with clusters least affected by language/culture. After tests are administered and scored, standard scores (SS) and relative proficiency scores (RPI) are transferred to the worksheet. Look for patterns in the big picture to examine a hypothesis of; 1) learning difference OR; 2) learning disability. Performance on the clusters highly influenced by culture and environmental learning can be compared to performance on the clusters influenced by culture and environmental learning to a lesser degree. If there is a statistically significant difference between performances on clusters highly influenced and less influenced by culture, the assessment may not meet adequate reliability and validity requirements. Some variance between processing abilities is natural. Look for a PATTERN of strengths/weaknesses that fit the cluster comparisons, and may help to explain uneven performance.

What might the pattern of scores in Figure IV imply? If the hypothesis is that low performance in school may be due more to second language issues rather than disabilities, then the scores support this hypothesis. Long-Term Retrieval is most likely a strength for this student, as the average score is unexpected for an ELL student. This profile suggests that of an English Language Learner student whose performance in English is improving, yet not quite to an average CALPS level. Accommodations for low performance areas, particularly Short-Term Memory are indicated. ESL intervention would be essential. ■

**The truth is more important than the facts
(Frank Lloyd Wright)**

