Core-Selective Evaluation Process: An Efficient & Comprehensive Approach to Identify Students with SLD Using the WJ IV

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Commentary on Schultz & Stephens's C-SEP Method for SLD Identification

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It is an honor to be asked to review and provide a commentary to Schultz and Stephens' proposed methodology for SLD identification in Texas, the C-SEP. It is a delight to see the level of leadership and practical solutions they have brought to contemporary evaluation practices, particularly because their model parallels one of the author's team design objectives for the WJ IV—the core test design. That design objective was to place the tests in an order that facilitates interpretation, with the core tests up front. In terms of administration sequence, the general principle is to begin at the beginning and discontinue testing at a defined point that provides the level of interpretive information that is desired or required. Additionally, administering the core tests facilitates an evaluation of any intra-individual differences among component scores and often yields the most essential information in the least amount of testing time.

The C-SEP methodology proposed by Schultz and Stephens represents a time-efficient method that provides a defined starting point with the option for exercising professional judgement to provide a greater level of interpretive depth. Much like the WJ IV design objective described above, the C-SEP is a common-sense departure from the notion that 14 cognitive tests must always be administered in *every* comprehensive evaluation. Instead, C-SEP recognizes the role of the educational diagnostician's professional judgement to determine if any additional tests, beyond the core tests, will provide information that may be *relevant to the determination of SLD*. Unless professional judgment or a clinical hypothesis suggests a reason, it may be unnecessary to *always* obtain cluster scores for seven cognitive factors of intelligence.

Abstract

In the last decade, many Texas educational diagnosticians have used a cognitive processing approach in lieu of discrepancy formulas to identify specific learning disabilities. As a result, educational diagnosticians are administering almost twice the number of tests to establish cognitive functioning. Often these tests are selected and administered by using selected sets of tests for every evaluation (i.e., a standard-protocol approach). Each evaluation should, by statute, be individualized, and by using a standard-protocol approach involving numerous tests, factors such as fatigue and the potential for measurement error increases. The authors propose a method for identifying SLD using a pattern of strengths and weaknesses approach that reduces testing time and results in accurate classifications. Specifically, advances made to the newest forms of the Woodcock-Johnson IV Cognitive , Achievement, and Oral Language allow for more efficient, comprehensive, and diagnostic testing. This article will highlight the use of a Core-Selective Evaluation Process (C-SEP) using the WJ IV.

Introduction

The last decade of specific learning disability (SLD) identification in Texas has been characterized by significant policy changes (e.g., no longer required to use IQ/Achievement discrepancy, response to intervention [RTI], dyslexia), new and innovative identification models (e.g., Cross-Battery, dual discrepancy, processing approaches, RTI), and most recently the revisions of major cognitive and achievement batteries. The reciprocal nature of policy, practice, and research has informed the evolution of the current practices of SLD identification. In the last ten years educational diagnosticians have added a significant amount of collective wisdom regarding the identification of SLD using cognitive processing models and have advanced the field considerably. In fact, SLD identification in Texas has decreased 25.6% between the years of 2006 and2011 partly due to this collective wisdom (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014).

However, the time spent testing has significantly increased due to the greater number of tests being administered. As the Full Scale Intelligence Quotient (FSIQ) became less relevant for SLD diagnosis and an emphasis was placed on identifying deficits in cognitive processing, educational diagnosticians have routinely administered 14 or more individual tests to evaluate cognitive functioning. In addition, individual, norm-referenced achievement testing occurred, often in areas in which the student had no previously reported difficulty or even when sufficient data already existed to determine that a student was "failing to meet age or grade level standards." The authors consider the lessons learned from the last decade and apply them to new and improved practices that answer SLD referral questions in a comprehensive, time-efficient, precise, and legally defensible manner. One such practice is the use of the Core-Selective Evaluation Process (C-SEP). This approach is characterized by integrating individualized norm-referenced

cognitive, achievement, and oral language tests with sound data analysis techniques and professional judgment in order to determine if a student has patterns of strengths of weaknesses (PSW) indicative of a SLD.

The C-SEP approach to identify SLD is an efficient, data-driven professional judgment process rooted in contemporary CHC theory. With the updates in cognitive and academic assessments, pertinent information about a student's strengths and weaknesses can be collected in a more efficient way, without over-testing. Specifically, using the Woodcock-Johnson IV (WJ IV) core battery of tests from the cognitive, achievement and oral language as a foundation of the evaluation, integrated with current policy and practice, the most salient features of SLD are assessed in order to comprehensively and efficiently describe an individual's unique pattern of strengths and weaknesses.

A basic premise for C-SEP is that test selection and data analysis are proportional to problem complexity and based on the presenting problem or referral question. A medical analogy would be as follows: When an individual exhibits some type of presenting problem (e.g., cough, headache, etc.), routine tests and procedures may be sufficient to diagnose and provide treatment while in other cases more specialized assessments and procedures (i.e., x-rays, lab work) are required to rule out other conditions or diagnose a specific subtype of a problem. In the case of suspected SLD, students present with similar problems in varying degrees and some kids can be identified with limited testing while others need more, and in some cases, different types of assessments. The C-SEP is not a radical departure from current practice; it is best described as a refinement of current practice by applying the lessons of the last decade.

Consequently, the purpose of this paper is to describe a method of SLD identification in which patterns of strengths and weaknesses (PSW) are identified using what the authors refer to as the Core-Selective Evaluation Process (C-SEP). As described earlier, the C-SEP approach is a deliberate and thoughtful evaluation process that provides evaluators with an efficient and comprehensive framework for identifying SLD. C-SEP is a data-driven, professional judgment process rooted in contemporary Cattell-Horn-Carroll (CHC) theory. With the improvements made to cognitive and academic assessments, pertinent information about a student's strengths and weaknesses can be collected in a more efficient way using a more targeted approach. The WJ IV core battery of tests of the cognitive, oral language, and achievement serve as a foundation for the evaluation and can be used to answer most referral questions. Integrated with current policy and practice, the most salient features of SLD, including greater emphasis on the language component are assessed in order to comprehensively and efficiently describe an individual's unique pattern of strengths and weaknesses.

The WJ IV has been designed specifically to be used in this manner and will be used to illustrate this process; however, the logic underlying this approach can also be applied with other co-normed or comprehensive assessment batteries. The overarching theme of this approach is that it is comprehensive in scope, efficient, and results in a more accurate identification. An appealing aspect to this approach is that it is compatible with the different types of methods of SLD identification outlined in the IDEA. Current approaches of SLD identification will be discussed in order to provide context for this methodology.

Current Status of SLD Evaluation in Texas

The Texas special education regulations allow several options to school districts to develop local policy in order to identify SLD. The approaches currently used include IQ/Achievement approaches, response-to-intervention (RTI), cross battery approaches (XBA), processing approaches, and integrated models such as RTI/XBA (Simpson, Spicewood, & Lynch, 2011). Each of these methods have features that help answer complex referral questions, however each of these methods also have disadvantages related to comprehensiveness, efficiency, and precision. The authors will introduce and highlight the use of the C-SEP, which is compatible with these other approaches. However, the authors contend that this assessment strategy is not just a different method, but a better way to identify students with SLD.

Some school districts in Texas continue to use IQ/Achievement discrepancy as the method of SLD identification. While this methodology is relatively easy to apply and arguably efficient, IQ/Achievement discrepancy lacks comprehensiveness as the construct of language is often deemphasized and precision is lacking as the full scale IQ or global functioning score is the main emphasis of interpretation. Many of the long standing criticisms of this mathematical method remain despite the improvement in test design. For example: its overreliance on the standard scores, assessment does not inform intervention, and under- identifies students with low-average IQs and over-identifies students with high IQs. Additionally, this method relies on norm-referenced achievement test scores to make a high stakes decision. While individualized, norm-referenced achievement tests provide much useful data, certain limitations are inherent. For example, achievement tests may not be aligned exactly with the child's curriculum or classroom instruction and provide scores that are based on a relatively small sample of items. These limitations can be addressed when achievement data are contextualized with other data; however, the "discrepancy" is based strictly off the standard scores. This approach is improved when integrated with RTI, however RTI practices are implemented with varying degrees of fidelity and practices have been traditionally reading focused. The latest revision of Cross Battery Assessment (XBA) (Flanagan, Ortiz, & Alfonso, 2013) has also introduced the dual-discrepancy method of determining strengths and weaknesses. This re-introduces the concept of discrepancy using an aggregate global score and is subject to many of the same issues associated with the IQ/Achievement discrepancy model described earlier.

Many districts in Texas have moved away from IQ/Achievement discrepancy in favor of a cognitive processing approach to identify a PSW. Consequently, XBA (see Flanagan, Alfonso, & Ortiz, 2013) is widely used in Texas as an example of this type of process. This method of SLD identification corrects for many of the weaknesses in the IQ/Achievement procedures such as aiding in informing intervention and identifying students with low-average IQs. This approach is also useful when using single batteries that ***do not*** sufficiently measure theory-based constructs (i. e, CHC factors) requiring additional tests from other batteries are needed and when assessing special populations such as English language Learners (ELLs). The cognitive processing approach requires professional judgment throughout the assessment process and a high level of expertise to be viable and accurate.

XBA is a comprehensive methodology; however current applications have resulted in questions regarding efficiency and precision. While XBA is designed to be a dynamic assessment process, it is often applied in static manner with the same tests being used for all referral questions. Regarding efficiency, a relatively large number of tests (minimum 14) are required to identify deficits in cognitive func-

tioning. In order for scores to represent broad CHC factors, two tests must be given for each factor and they have to be statistically similar (cohesive) in order to adequately represent the ability. Often times, test scores that represent a broad ability are not cohesive. Additional tests are often administered in order to obtain cohesiveness. An unintended consequence of this approach, despite cautions, is that "divergent' scores are often de-emphasized and not considered to represent the construct. In addition, further statistical analysis (dual discrepancy) is often made without inclusion of that score as the dual-discrepancy approach uses an estimated global score (Facilitating Cognitive Composite) for discrepancy based on composites of the broad abilities. The issue of efficiency is also evident when single-battery scores are transferred to scoring software. Valuable time is spent on entering data into two different programs and the chance of data entry error also increases.

The C-SEP approach addresses these questions concerning precision and efficiency; rather than pursue cohesiveness, the C-SEP approach suggests to go beyond standard score analysis and instead interpret and investigate at the test and task demand level. A simple illustration of this concept would be to consider two memory tests: one that measures memory for numbers and one that measures memory for names. If these two tests yielded statistically dissimilar scores or were "split" then the task demands and individual differences may account for the difference. In addition, the GIA score obtained by the WJ IV is considered the best estimate of overall intellectual functioning (g), and represents the best index of a wide variety of outcomes. Comprehensive analysis can occur as it includes the primary seven CHC broad abilities evaluated by the first seven tests and can be compared to achievement and language performance for a deeper understanding of the learner.

With the newly updated, ecologically complex, technically advanced, and comprehensive WJ IV Tests of Cognitive, Oral Language, and Achievement batteries, all of the broad CHC factors and many narrow abilities can be adequately assessed. Further, the new WJ IV was specifically designed by authors to efficiently and adequately assess student performance. For example, each of the first seven cognitive tests was chosen by the authors to represent the best and most predictive measures of the respective broad CHC ability (McGrew, LaForte, & Schrank, 2014). All scores obtained are entered into the scoring system and with one set of data to input, more attention can be given to interpretation.

The WJ IV online scoring system is comprehensive, data-based, and can be used without supplementation. In addition, because the WJ IV and most batteries are scored via computer, the practice of inputting scores in two or more different programs increases the chance for error and uses valuable interpretation time (e.g., when putting scores in XBASS, Psychological Processing Analyzer [PPA], etc.). This practice also diminishes the power of the WJ IV interpretive utility as the WJ IV scoring system can report the scores and make numerous comparisons using actual norms. In addition, a student's functioning can be more comprehensively analyzed through multiple lenses. In addition to the GIA score and CHC factor standard scores, relative proficiency index (RPI) scores can be obtained as well as a Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) or a Comparative Language Index (CLI) score. A Scholastic Aptitude Cluster score (4-test cognitive cluster that is linked to achievement) can be obtained as well as comparing and understanding the degree of influence of language functioning. Grade norms as well as age norms can also be used. The scoring capability greatly enhances the diagnosticians ability to interpret performance through new "lenses" and gain a deeper understanding of the student's needs.

Legal Support

An appealing feature of discrepancy approaches whether it be IQ/Achievement or dual discrepancy approaches outlined in XBA3 is the "legal comfort" of a mathematical formula. It is of critical importance that evaluators understand what the law states regarding using a pattern of strengths of weaknesses and also what federal law states concerning the overall process. According to the Texas Regulations: A student with a learning disability is one who:

(II) exhibits a pattern of strengths and weaknesses in performance, achievement, or both relative to age, grade-level standards, or intellectual ability, as indicated by significant variance among specific areas of cognitive function, such as working memory and verbal comprehension, or between specific areas of cognitive function and academic achievement.

In addition, other provisions regarding SLD identification and pertinent to the core-selective method can be found in federal regulations in section §300.304. Specifically those public agencies:

(1) Use a variety of assessment tools and strategies to gather relevant functional, developmental, and academic information about the child

Also, assessment tools

(iii) Are used for the purposes for which the assessments or measures are valid and reliable;

(v) Are administered in accordance with any instructions provided by the producer of the assessments.

While not regulatory in nature, the Texas Education Agency (2010) provided guidance to schools by publishing a guidance document regarding § 89.1040 Eligibility Criteria Frequently Asked Questions. Some excerpts that provide support for using a core selective approach include the following:

> In evaluating specific areas of cognitive functioning to determine a pattern of strengths and weaknesses, schools should take into consideration the federal definition of SLD as "a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language" (CFR §300.8(c)(10)). An identified pattern of strengths and weaknesses should be linked to the failure to achieve adequately as described above when used as a determination of SLD. Students whose classroom achievement indicates a pervasive weakness that does not constitute a pattern of strengths and weaknesses should not be determined to have a SLD. Students who meet the criteria as having mental retardation should not be determined to have a SLD. (p. 4).

In addition,

> The determination of SLD must be made through the use of professional judgment, including consideration of multiple information/data sources to support the eligibility determination. Information/data sources may include statewide assessment results, formal evaluation test scores (IQ; achievement; cognitive function/processing), RTI progress monitoring data, informal data (e.g. rating scales, student work samples, interviews) and anecdotal reports. Such information/data sources must include an observation of the child in the child's learning environment as related to the area of SLD. (p. 4)

The C-SEP approach considers the federal definition of SLD and requires the use of professional judgment (Schultz & Stephens, 2009) to make eligibility decisions. Professional judgment is also required when

contextualizing the information obtained from using the core-selective approach and using integrative data analysis techniques. The remainder of this paper will describe in greater detail a framework for identifying SLD using a core-selective approach and integrative data analysis.

Comprehensive Assessment for SLD using a Core Selective Process (C-SEP)

Improvements and revisions made in assessment tools have enabled a comprehensive assessment to be appropriately achieved and reduce the testing time for each student. This is especially true with regards to the updates that have been made to the most recent publication of the WJ IV. For example, tests were designed to be more cognitively complex and therefore measure a broader set of cognitive abilities. Not only, does this increase the "power" of the test over tests that measure a small discrete trait, but is more reflective of the interdependence of the various cognitive constructs (e.g., narrow abilities). Since no cognitive processing ability exists in isolation this translates into an increase in ecological validity as students in a classroom are using many cognitive processes simultaneously to learn.

The Woodcock-Johnson IV™

The Woodcock-Johnson IV (WJ IV) Tests represent the most significant advances in educational testing and measurement in the last decade (Schrank, McGrew, & Mather, 2014). Based on the most contemporary conception of the CHC theory of human cognitive intelligence, this set of tools has been significantly upgraded from its previous edition in a manner analogous from moving from dial-up internet to a high speed service. As the WJ IV moved beyond traditional CHC theory, tests substantially increased in both in cognitive complexity and ecological validity. New interpretive clusters allow evaluators to make decisions with increased diagnostic precision.

Each test battery was designed for efficiency and precision, consisting of a core set of tests that are technically adequate, comprehensive in scope and cognitively complex. The WJ IV COG includes 7 core tests, the WJ IV OL includes 4 core tests, and the WJ IV ACH includes 6 CORE tests. Using the referral question to guide assessment, the examiner can begin the assessment process by administering the CORE WJ IV COG, OL, and ACH. A profile of relative strengths and weaknesses can be observed in each area by interpreting the student's results on the core tests. In some cases, when combined with additional forms of data collected, the core testing may provide enough standardized testing to determine SLD. However, in other cases, additional testing may be warranted and the core tests will serve as the backbone of the student's evaluation.

Table 1. WJ IV Tests of Cognitive Ability (CORE 7)

WJ IV Tests of Cognitive Ability	CHC Broad Ability
Test 1: Oral Vocabulary	Comprehension-Knowledge (Gc)
Test 2: Number Series	Fluid Reasoning (Gf)
Test 3: Verbal Attention	Short-Term Working Memory (Gwm)
Test 4: Letter-Pattern Matching	Processing Speed (Gs)
Test 5: Phonological Processing	Auditory Processing (Ga)
Test 6: Story Recall	Long-Term Retrieval (Glr)
Test 7: Visualization	Visual Processing (Gv)

Basic Steps of the Core-Selective Evaluation Process (C-SEP)

According to the provisions in 34 CFR, §300.307, a Specific Learning Disability:

...Means a DISORDER in one or more basic PSYCHOLOGICAL PROCESSES, involved in understanding or in using LANGUAGE, either written or spoken, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations....

Step 1: Measure Psychological Processes

*...Means a **DISORDER** in one or more basic psychological processes, involved in understanding*

An assessment of a student's psychological processes should be conducted in order to determine if a disorder exists in one of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding information, a salient feature of the SLD definition. Consequently, the first step of the C-SEP is to administer the WJ IV COG CORE 7. *Table 1* provides a list of the CORE 7 tests and the CHC broad ability associated with each test.

The evaluator should administer the CORE 7 tests and analyze the student's performance. If the scores on all of the tests which measure aspects of the seven broad CHC abilities do not display a pattern of relative strengths and weaknesses, there may be no reason to administer more cognitive tests because no pattern relative to SLD is displayed. If a specific test is identified as a relative weakness, however, a possible processing weakness exists that evaluators may wish to explore further by administering another test measuring the process. For example, an identified weakness in phonological processing may suggest that Test 12: Nonword Repetition should be administered so that the Auditory Processing cluster score can be evaluated as a possible weakness.

However, if one of the scores representing an underlying cognitive process (e.g., Working Memory) is not average or above average, further exploration is warranted through the use of selective testing procedures. It is important to remember when measuring and analyzing specific CHC cognitive abilities to consider the interdependence of each factor and the tasks demands of the test. For example, an individual's long-term retrieval process is also dependent on the information cemented in crystallized intelligence. Attention and executive functioning are also likely explanations for strengths and weaknesses and need to be considered as well.

If further exploration of underlying cognitive factors is indicated, use the selective testing table within the easel of the WJ IV COG; choose the appropriate test to further investigate the cognitive process if unable to determine if this construct is intact. Further analyze the results to gain insight into the student's functioning. Triangulating the data collected from the cognitive assessment with the other forms of data collected and using professional judgment in the analysis process is pertinent for making conclusions regarding the student's performance (Schultz, Simpson, & Lynch, 2012).

The goal of this step is to establish if the student's difficulties can be explained cognitively. If further testing is conducted and scores of the same theoretical construct are "split" or non-cohesive, they should be analyzed at the task demands level. Rather than engaging in the relentless pursuit of cohesiveness, the evaluator

Table 2. WJ IV Oral Language (CORE 4)

WJ IV Oral Language Tests	CHC /Ability
Test 1: Picture Vocabulary	Comprehension-Knowledge (Gc)/ Oral Language
Test 2: Oral Comprehension	Comprehension-Knowledge (Gc)/Oral Language-Listening Comprehension
Test 3: Segmentation	Auditory Processing (Ga)/Phonetic Coding
Test 4: Rapid Picture Naming	Processing Speed (Gs)/Speed of lexical Access

should further investigate the reasons for such performance. Such performance might reveal important information regarding the student's limitations in a very narrow aspect of cognitive processing. Further testing should be done to improve precision and explain performance and not to generate cohesive cluster scores. The Gf-Gc composite may be of interest if intact cognitive processes are not established after giving the CORE 7 tests. This is an additional way to analyze scores and understand performance (see Assessment Service Bulletin 3 for full description; Schrank, McGrew, & Mather, 2015).

Step 2: Measure Language

*….. or in using **LANGUAGE**, either written or **SPOKEN**, and which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak….*

An assessment of the student's language abilities should be conducted to determine possible deficits in the ability to use language. Language mediates cognition and achievement and is critical in a person's ability to use their executive functions. Most SLD identification models lean heavily toward a cognitive explanation of SLD; however a student's language ability may be an explanatory factor in a student's underachievement. Often, comorbid disabilities exist and therefore, speech and language impairments may be suspected as well with this population. C-SEP allows further exploration of language and therefore represents a more comprehensive assessment of SLD and may lead to a more precise diagnosis and subsequent treatment. It should also be noted that additional clusters can be obtained and compared with the cognitive battery. Therefore, the second step of the Core-Selective Evaluation process is to administer the WJ IV OL CORE 4 tests. Table 2 provides a list of the WJ IV OL CORE 4 tests.

The CORE 4 WJ IV Oral Language tests should be administered and results analyzed. If all of the scores are within the average range, the evaluator can be confident that results sufficiently measure oral language; therefore, there is no reason to do more assessing in the area of oral language. However, as with the cognitive testing, if one of the scores on a test falls below the average range, there is a need for further exploration. This can be accomplished by comparing scores obtained with the WJ IV COG or using selective testing procedures. If the results are not sufficient, an evaluator may give another test for the area of interest. The referral question should guide the assessment. It may be warranted to explore the possibly of Dyslexia using the oral language battery if for example the Segmentation (Test 3) results are below average, selective testing can be conducted; or in the case of a referral concern involving listening, then Test 6: Understanding Directions can be administered. Being able to precisely identify this subtype of SLD is a strength of this approach. In addition to Dyslexia identification, speech-language pathologists will be able to use this data in collaboration with the educational diagnostician. Some students who are suspected to have SLD may be more accurately classified as having speech and language impairments.

The diagnostician can triangulate the data by comparing the results of the cognitive data with other forms of data collected. Professional judgement should then be used in the analysis process to help draw conclusions regarding the student's language performance (Schultz, Simpson, & Lynch, 2012). Further, below average or non-cohesive scores obtained should not be ignored; they should be analyzed and interpreted (every score tells us something about the student).

Step 3: Measure Achievement Levels

… read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations….

An assessment of the student's academic performance should be conducted to identify and verify deficits. C-SEP allows examiners to use the core set of tests and/or selective procedures when assessing achievement. Texas regulations state that a student with a learning disability is one who: "does not achieve adequately for the student's age or meet state-approved grade-level standards." The child's lack of adequate achievement is indicated by performance on multiple measures such as: in-class tests, grade point average over time (e.g., six weeks, semester); norm- or criterion-referenced tests; statewide assessments; or a process based on the child's response to scientific, research-based intervention (19 Texas Administrative Code Chapter 89, Subchapter AA). Norm-referenced tests are not required; however they are allowed and recommended in areas of suspected disability ONLY. Educational diagnosticians often get vague and unclear ("test them in everything') referral questions that result in testing in areas where enough concurrent data exist to establish educational levels. The educational diagnostician should choose the most comprehensive and efficient methodology when making their assessment plan during the initial referral or when conducting the Review Existing Evaluation Data process. Furthermore, interviewing referral sources to clarify referral questions is an additional assessment strategy that will help focus the assessment (Sattler, 2008)

There are cases in which the core achievement battery would be appropriate to use. A broader assessment of all academic areas can be conducted by administering the WJ IV ACH CORE 6 tests. *Table* 3 provides a list of the WJ IV Achievement CORE 6 tests. Often students have difficulties in several areas of achievement or lack sufficient data to show "meeting age or grade level standards" in a particular area. In these cases an examiner should begin the assessment with the core sets of test. Additional tests can be added as needed.

The use of the selective testing procedures should be implemented in order to comprehensively measure the area(s) of concern (e.g., Written Expression). The referral question should be used as a guide when selecting tests; these should include the particular skills that

Table 3. WJ IV ACH (CORE 6)

WJ IV ACH Core Tests
Test 1: Letter-Word Identification
Test 2: Applied Problems
Test 3: Spelling
Test 4: Passage Comprehension
Test 5: Calculation
Test 6: Writing Samples

the student is not "meeting age or grade level expectations." Texas regulations do not require individualized norm-referenced tests to be administered to establish underachievement; however they certainly should be used for areas of suspected disability. It is not necessary to administer individual norm referenced achievement tests areas in which student data indicates "meeting age or grade level standards." For example, a student who is not experiencing difficulty in his math class, passing his math benchmarks, and Math STARR test but is struggling in reading would be better served by being assessed more broadly using reading tests. Again, this illustrates the principles of precision and efficiency of the C-SEP method. Testing in areas where the student is meeting age and grade level standards (e.g., math) contributes to testing time and any results obtained are already substantiated.. A more effective and efficient use of time would be to explore further the cognitive correlates of the referral question.

Whether the evaluator chooses to administer tests that comprehensively measure area(s) of concern or choose to conduct a more comprehensive evaluation using the CORE 6 tests, analysis of the results must be conducted.

Step 4: Considering Exclusionary Factors

Examining exclusionary factors is an essential and required component of SLD identification (Stephens, Dykes, Proctor, Moon, Gardner, & Pethick, 2013). While exclusionary factors should be considered and ruled out **prior** to referring a child for SLD evaluation, there are times when the referral occurs and the evaluator must analyze and consider whether a lack of academic performance is due to one of the following exclusionary factors: visual, hearing, or motor handicaps, intellectual disabilities, emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage; the lack of appropriate instruction in reading and math, and limited English proficiency (LEP) (34 Code of Federal Regulations, §300.3ll(a)(6); IDEA, 2004).

While a review of records and other collected data can assist in ruling out vision, hearing, motor, intellectual disabilities, emotional disturbance, other factors are more difficult to rule out. A thorough review of the student's life experiences will assist in ruling out environmental, cultural, or economic differences and a review of attendance records, teacher quality, and academic performance on report cards can contribute to ruling out the lack of instruction in reading and math; LEP is a little more involved. The student's home language survey can indicate the language spoken at home, but more formal information gathered from the WJ IV can assist in ruling out LEP as being the primary cause of academic struggle. Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) scores and the Comparative Language Index (CLI) scores can be used to determine language proficiency in English and Spanish.

Table 4. WJ IV OL Comparative Language Index Scores

English Cluster	Spanish Cluster
Oral Language Test 1: Picture Vocabulary Test 2: Oral Comprehension	*Lenguaje oral* Test 10: Vocabulario sobre dibujos Test 11: Comprensión oral
Broad Oral Language Test 1: Picture Vocabulary Test 2: Oral Comprehension Test 6: Understanding Directions	*Amplio lenguaje oral* Test 10: Vocabulario sobre dibujos Test 11: Comprensión oral Test 12: Comprensión de indicaciones
Listening Comprehension Test 2: Oral Comprehension Test 6: Understanding Directions	*Comprensión auditiva* Test 11: Comprensión oral Test 12: Comprensión de indicaciones

CALP Scores

Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) is defined as language proficiency in academic situations or those aspects of language proficiency that emerge and become distinctive with formal schooling (Mather & Wendling, 2014). The WJ IV online scoring software program can report CALP scores for the Comprehension-Knowledge (Gc) cluster in the WJ IV COG, clusters in the WJ IV OL (e.g., Oral Language, Broad Oral Language, Listening Comprehension, and Oral Expression), and clusters in the WJ IV ACH that measure oral language, acquired knowledge, reading and writing (Refer to the WJ IV Examiner's Manuals for further information).

The evaluator can examine the CALP scores obtained and use the data to make decisions regarding the impact language has on academic performance. Using the CALP scores, a student's performance on cognitive-academic tasks can be compared to same age or grade peers. CALP scores range from 1 to 6 with 1 being extremely limited and 6 being very advanced. A student earning a CALP score of 6 on Picture Vocabulary would indicate if the student were provided with vocabulary instruction at his chronological age, it is expected that he would find the language demands to be extremely easy.

Comparative Language Index Score

Further investigation into a student's language proficiency can be conducted through the use of the Comparative Language Index (CLI) scores obtained through the administration of the parallel English and Spanish tests from the WJ IV OL (See Table 4 for a list of tests). The WJ IV online scoring platform will calculate the CLI and through an analysis of the scores (see the WJ IV OL Examiner's Manual for in-depth information) the evaluator can determine the student's English and Spanish language proficiency. RPI scores are used to report the CLI by using the numerator obtained from English and Spanish. The CLI consists of the Spanish numerator presented first and then the English numerator on the bottom. For example, if Katarina obtained a CLI of 66/15, this indicates that she performs with 66% proficiency those tasks in Spanish that she performs at 15% proficiency in English.

Step 5: Use Integrated Data Analysis Procedures to Identify PSWs

Once the tests have been administered and scored, all data that were collected should be compared and contrasted with each other using integrated data analysis techniques. Integrated data analysis is the analysis of multiple data sets (e.g., norm-referenced test results, RTI data, criterion-referenced test, etc.) that have been pooled into one (Curran & Hussong, 2009). It involves examination of a chain of evidence by determining the trustworthiness (weight, accuracy) of data collected, organized, triangulated, and cross-validated analysis (Schultz, Simpson, & Lynch, 2012).

This type of data analysis is particularly

Table 5. Standards for Educational & Psychological Testing (2014)

Standard	Criterion
10.12	In testing individuals with disabilities for diagnostic and intervention purposes, the test should not be used as the sole indicator of the test taker's functioning. Instead, multiple sources of information should be used (p. 108)
11.20	In educational, clinical, and counseling settings, a test taker's score should not be interpreted in isolation; collateral information that may lead to alternative explanations for the examinee's test performance should be considered. (p. 117)

useful when using different types of data (e.g., qualitative, qualitative, archival, informal, formal) to establish patterns of strengths and weaknesses. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2010) define a pattern as a systematic relationship between two or more phenomena within a case. The educational diagnostician is tasked with exploring and explaining systematic relationships between cognitive processing and academic achievement as well as other relationships that occur in a child's education. This includes the relationship between instruction and response of student as well as the relationship between the exclusionary factors and the student's performance. This approach will improve the precision and comprehensiveness of SLD identification and understanding of the learner. Traditional approaches (e.g., IQ/Achievement; XBA) rely heavily on cognitive explanations to explain performance. Children with SLD present a much more intricate set of needs beyond just the cognitive domain and require a multifaceted approach to thoroughly understand the instructional implications.

The Standards for Educational & Psychological Testing address the use of multiple data sets as does the TEA guidance document and the code of federal regulation of IDEA. Table 4 provides descriptions of the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (2014).

Interpreting data requires a high degree of expertise and professional judgment (Schultz & Stephens, 2009). The legal comfort of discrepancy models used for LD eligibility determination contains a level of interpretive comfort as well. While other data and alternative explanations are permitted in discrepancy approaches, they are often applied in a dichotomous manner: the student is SLD or is not. This dichotomy is also inherent in the categorical system of diagnosis found in the 13 IDEA categories (Sattler, 2014). Identifying SLD using PSW's relies on a normative-developmental perspective. A normative-developmental perspective consists of a combination of the normative approaches (i.e., above-below average) with developmental perspectives characterized by intra- and inter-individual differences in meeting developmental milestones including academic milestones. This shift in perspective allows diagnosticians to go beyond classifying and sorting students by offering explanations more precisely and comprehensively.

Eligibility Decisions

A primary role of the educational diagnostician is to present his or her findings to a team of qualified professionals in order to determine if the child meets the SLD eligibility requirements set forth by the local education agency (LEA). This is legally a decision of the multidisciplinary team and it is up to the educational diagnostician to present the results of the evaluation in a manner that a) determines if the student meets the SLD criteria, b) explains the student's current levels of performance, and c) informs meaningful interventions. Simply put, the role of the educational diagnostician is to identify, understand, and inform instruction. The C-SEP method can address each of these elements and is compatible with any method currently used. In fact, this approach allows for the diagnostician to use elements of several approaches in order to gain a deeper understanding of student functioning. An example of this would be that discrepancy districts can use it to identify students as eligible for services and then shift into a processing approach in order to understand the learner and inform interventions. Likewise, a district that uses a processing approach can use discrepancy approaches to gain a deeper understanding of the learner (e.g., examining discrepancies between oral language and achievement).

C-SEP is flexible in administration, and allows for a more dynamic assessment versus a static assessment where a set of tests are preselected and administered. This professional judgment approach allows for time for the educational diagnostician to critically analyze the data through many lenses regardless of which approach employed. An appropriate analogy is that of examining data through the lens of a telescope, magnifying glass, and microscope in a continuum. The level and depth of data analysis should be proportional to problem complexity and scores can be interpreted within a student's cognitive profile and then integrated with other data. (*See Chart 1.*)

Compatible and Precise

One of the primary strengths of the core-selective approach is its compatibility with all contemporary approaches of SLD identification. It is not a radical departure from current practice; rather it is a refinement of current practice. Since evaluators can obtain the GIA using this process, a discrepancy approach can still be used using the GIA/Achievement discrepancy. In addition, with the core set of tests being administered other comparisons among abilities can also be made. Third methods approaches (e.g., PSW, Concord-Discord, XBA) have greatly informed the core-selective approach. Significant improvements in test design (i.e., cognitive complexity of tests, beyond CHC theory) of the WJ IV have allowed greater efficiency with all of these models especially in the efficiency of using a single battery approach.

Districts (and states) that use RTI only approaches, may want to strengthen and augment, their procedures by using this C-SEP approach. One option is to use an abbreviated core-selective test method for RTI only districts. This would consist of using the three tests of the WJ IV COG that comprise the

Chart 1.

Types of Data Formal	
Telescope (Global)	GIA, FSIQ, Indexes
Magnifying Glass (Broad)	Clusters, Tests, Subtests
Microscope (Narrow)	Item analysis, task analysis, error analysis

Brief Intellectual Ability (BIA) score (Test 1: Oral Vocabulary, Test 2: Number Series, Test 3: Verbal Attention) and administering the two tests that make up the Oral Language Cluster (Test 1: Picture Vocabulary and Test 2: Oral Comprehension). Decisions regarding additional selective testing can be made after this initial data integration collection.

Although this model is rooted in CHC theory, it does not preclude examining other cognitive processes and alternative explanations as they relate to the student. This approach goes beyond simple cognitive explanations to identify, understand, and inform. The construct of "attention" is more prominent in other cognitive theories (i.e., Luria, PASS) than in the CHC model and significantly impacts a student with SLD whether it is a strength or weakness. If weaknesses in attention are impacting learning, then possibly a more diagnostically precise classification would be other health impaired (OHI).

Conclusion

Since the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 and the decline of the discrepancy model, states have grappled with the best method to identify students with SLD (Schultz & Stephens, 2009a; Simpson, Swicegood, & Lynch, 2011; Zirkel & Thomas, 2010). Texas has been at the forefront of the changes and continues to improve on current practices. The lessons of the last decade and the advances in testing instruments and cognitive theory have informed the C-SEP method of identifying SLD. The next decade will certainly be as eventful as the last one regarding SLD identification as theories get refined, instruments change and improve, and policies change. In order to remain current with these changes, educational diagnosticians will have to engage in reflective practices and be open to innovations and refinements to the SLD identification process. It is in this vein that the C-SEP approach is presented.

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