

## Bringing it All Back Home

Recommendations for Practice in Evaluating Students suspected of having Specific Learning Disabilities

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## Multiple Messages from this Series....

- Vincent Alfonso: using Patterns of Strengths and Weaknesses (PSW)
- Bill Rasplica: using RTI
- Federal Way: Discrepancy supported by PSW
- Vancouver: PSW after RTI
- Let's see what makes sense...

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## Washington's Practice Options

- Two routes to SLD eligibility (with model state forms for either)
  - Discrepancy
  - RTI
- PSW can (and should) support either
- Concept of Professional Judgment (WAC392-172A-03065)
  - Where the evaluation results do not appear to accurately represent the student's intellectual ability or where the discrepancy between the student's intellectual ability and academic achievement does not appear to be accurate upon application of the discrepancy tables, the evaluation group, described in, may apply professional judgment in order to determine the presence of a specific learning disability.

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## What remains the same:

### SLD and the basic criteria for establishing an SLD

- Statutory Definition: SLD involves a deficit in one of the basic psychological processes or the manifestation of such a deficit (i.e. discrepancy) that impacts one of the eight areas of learning (e.g. reading comprehension)
- We are bound to complete a Comprehensive Evaluation of all areas of concern.
- Still required is the documentation of:
  - a disability;
  - an adverse impact of the disability on learning;
  - and the need for specially designed instruction

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## What we hope to change: Your assessment approach

- The approach of:
  - administering an IQ test for the purpose of getting a FSIQ,
  - administering an achievement test,
  - looking up standard scores on a table, and
  - then saying 'yea or nay' to special education placement,
- Seems an underutilization of your talents and an exercise in frustration
- Does not meet the call for a comprehensive evaluation

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## What we hope to change: Your assessment approach

- As the Idaho state department recently told their directors, teams, and psychs- "Eligibility for special education program and placement will be dependent on you using your brains"
- The MDT is to decide what data are required in a formal assessment that will allow a decision to be made regarding the need for SDI

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## What we hope to change: Your assessment approach

- What we are hoping will change is that your team will engage in thoughtful, data-based decision making
- There will be a logic to the decision leading to assessment
  - Hypothesis driven
  - Linked to what the research says about areas of concern
- There will be a logic to which tests or subtests are chosen for assessment

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## What we hope to change: your approach

- There will be a logic to the decision for eligibility based on data that support:
  - The existence of a disability (based on a pattern of strengths and weaknesses characteristic of students with learning disabilities)
  - The adverse impact of that disability on learning and progress to standard
  - The need for specially designed instruction based on response to targeted evidence-based intervention delivered with fidelity

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## What we hope to change- Your Assessment Approach I. Referral

- Referrals should begin **after** recognizing 'dual-discrepancy' namely a documented underachievement (universal screening a good start) and a failure to adequately progress despite appropriate evidence-based intervention (Thus we must incorporate progress monitoring data).
- You should ask questions during referral that focus on the academic challenges and what we know in research. Hypothesize which broad cognitive abilities might be strengths, which weaknesses

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## Using RTI and PSW to rule out Exclusionary Criteria

- The following possible causes of underachievement have been ruled out (SLD Exclusionary Factors (WAC 392-172A-01035 (k)(ii))):
  - A visual, hearing, or motor disability
  - Intellectual disability (formerly known as mental retardation)
  - Emotional or behavioral disability
  - Cultural factors
  - Environmental or economic disadvantage
  - Limited English proficiency
  - Lack of appropriate instruction

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## Using RTI and PSW to rule out Exclusionary Criteria

1. A visual, hearing, or motor disability
  - Easiest but we may often overlook
  - Review of records
  - Plan for this before referral
  - Make this known to teachers/staff

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## Using RTI and PSW to rule out Exclusionary Criteria

2. Intellectual disability (ID, formerly known as mental retardation)
  - May be identified first through RTI as a Non-Responder.
  - Through Comprehensive Evaluation:
    - A profile where all broad abilities are low suggests ID and FSIQ with Standard Score below 70.
    - Follow up with Adaptive Behavior from Multiple Sources.
    - Consider long term needs of the student and encourage team to make these tough decisions rather than mis-labeling student as SLD.

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## Using RTI and PSW to rule out Exclusionary Criteria

### 3. Emotional or behavioral disability

- May also be a non-responder through RTI
- Data might indicate possible "won't do vs. can't do;" see BP in School Psychology, Ch 137 (VanDerHeyden & Witt, 2008).
- Take problem-solving approach after standard protocol approach with evidence-based intervention.
- Use multi-source, multi-method approach to assessment.
- If the team decides that lower achievement or performance in the classroom is due to causes that are primarily emotional/behavioral, team should consider EBD category rather than SLD
- Students may evidence both SLD and EBD symptoms. Pattern of PSW may be helpful if team decides learning problems are primary cause of adverse impact in schools.

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## Using RTI and PSW to rule out Exclusionary Criteria

### 4. Cultural factors/Limited English Proficiency

- Student may be a non-responder and need MORE TIME. Fletcher (2013, NASP) emphasizes that reading difficulties fall along a continuum; many students need more time with evidence-based intervention.
- With PSW, can use Matrix of Cultural Loading and Linguistic Demand (Cross Battery Culture-Language Interpretive Matrix; Ortiz, XBA C-LIM on CD)
- Question: Are obtained test data primarily influenced by cultural or linguistic factors? Not a simple question!

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## Using the C-LIM to support Validity Statements

- Provides example statements for how results from analysis with the C-LIM may be used for inclusion in an evaluation report.
- Four statements that may apply to four different evaluation scenarios.
  - Statement 1 may be used in cases conducted for the purpose of suspected learning disability and where use of the C-LIM has resulted in a clear declining pattern that merits declaration of the scores as being invalid due to the primary influence of cultural and linguistic variables on test performance.
  - Statement 2 is also written for cases conducted for the purpose of evaluating suspected learning disability but where the results have been declared valid and the results point to limited difficulties such as a learning disability.

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### Using the C-LIM to support Validity Statements, cont.

- The third and fourth statements are similar to the second and apply in cases where the results have been declared to be invalid but the manifest patterns are more consistent with significant types of dysfunction including global cognitive impairment (Statement 3) and speech-language impairment (Statement 4).
- We have posted the example statements in our link with power-points: <http://www.wsasp.org/lecture2014.html> The links are free to use and modify.
- See sample case study at end of today's presentation.

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### Using RTI and PSW to rule out Exclusionary Criteria

#### 5. Environmental or economic disadvantage

- Again, student may be a non-responder, may lack opportunity for practice at home
- Must build opportunities within school.
- This is not to say that a student from a home with economic disadvantage won't have SLD.
- Thus, use the comprehensive RTI + PSW approach and focus on patterns of academic and cognitive strengths and challenges.

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### Using RTI and PSW to rule out Exclusionary Criteria

#### 6. Lack of Appropriate Instruction: WAC 392-172A-03055

"prior to, or as a part of the referral process, the student was provided with appropriate instruction in the general education setting that was delivered by qualified personnel; and that **repeated, valid assessments of progress** were completed at reasonable intervals to assess the student's academic growth."

**NOTE: this is a requirement for all teams evaluating SLD, regardless of which approach the team uses (i.e., even teams utilizing a discrepancy approach are required to document use of repeated, valid assessments, as well as the adequacy of the instruction the student received).**

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## What we hope to change- Your Assessment Approach II. Underachievement

- Adverse impact should be based on underachievement documented from a number of sources:
  - Universal screening results
  - State assessment results
  - Classroom originated curriculum-based assessment
  - Norm-referenced assessment results
  - Classroom performance incl. grades, observations, work samples

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## What we hope to change-Your Assessment Approach III. Cognitive Assessment

- The existence of a learning disability should be supported by the existence of a Pattern of Cognitive Strengths and Weaknesses using a cross-battery approach
  - In addition to an area(s) of relative cognitive weakness, there needs to be identified cognitive areas that were spared (relative strengths)
  - Areas of weakness must be predicted from referral data (broad cognitive ability correlates with area(s) of weakness)

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## What we hope to change- Your Assessment Approach IV. Academic Assessment

- A pattern of Academic Strengths and Weaknesses is supportive of the SLD diagnosis:
  - For example the student whose reading and writing are advancing at expected and acceptable rates but math is lagging significantly behind
  - Academic subtests could be used in helping to determine a cognitive Pattern of Strengths and Weaknesses,

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### What we hope to change-Your Assessment Approach V. Need for SDI

- The need for Specially Designed Instruction is best provided by the type of data collected in an RTI process
  - Universal Screening (at grade level)
  - **Diagnostic** assessment data:
    - Tell us WHY the problem is occurring
    - Tell us WHAT to teach
  - Progress Monitoring data (at instructional level)

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### What we hope to change: your assessment approach

- Decisions regarding progress and whether interventions need to be changed or continued need to be based on data-progress toward goals and not simply gut feelings
  - Processes for setting goals
  - Decision making rules for referral

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### The Essence of our Guidance paper

- The Comprehensive Evaluation that will hopefully lead to:
  - A better understanding of the disability by entire team
  - A feeling of comprehensiveness and not merely 'getting the task completed'
  - A logical framework to support the decision
  - A feeling of team empowerment in making eligibility (and continued eligibility) decisions

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## Addressing the Issues

- Are you saying that grades and MSP scores count as much as the discrepancy criteria from regression tables?

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## Addressing the Issues

- The CBAs that you speak of have questionable standardization, especially if student is special ed-can we really use those scores? And what are the norms around those scores?
- Isn't there a danger of using a score of say 55% when class average is 75% and calling it sufficiently deficit as to support a claim of SLD? What was the standard deviation? What was the normal range?

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## Addressing the Issues

- If the standard scores from norm-referenced tests are not being used to determine a discrepancy, of what real use are they?

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## Addressing the Issues

- There is a very good chance that the norm-referenced standard scores reveal a different picture than grades, MSP scores etc. In the past, that usually meant that the student might not qualify for services. Given that students would not be referred if they were doing well, have we completely eliminated the DNQ evaluation?

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## Addressing the Issues

- A bottom line concern- districts have had their wrists slapped so often for overuse of Professional Judgment that directors are very gun shy of using PJ. Now you are suggesting that we use PJ every assessment. Don't think the directors will go for that

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## Addressing the Issues

- Just how many cognitive and academic batteries are needed in our test closet to pull off PSW?

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## Addressing the Issues

- I can barely keep my head above water in terms of assessments, as it is- PSW, no matter how you cut it, will require more time than typical assessment. Is your day longer?

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## Addressing the Issues

- I am concerned that there isn't a one subtest/one broad or even narrow cognitive ability relationship. Its also obvious that there isn't a one broad ability/ one achievement area relationship. Aren't we going back in time 40 years when we just looked for these 'magical' processes? If visual processing didn't relate to achievement then, why now?

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## Addressing the Issues

- PSW seems to have all sorts of rules around it such as how many areas must be spared. Aren't we just replacing one set of rules-discrepancy, with another set of rules-PSW?

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## Addressing the Issues

- I've heard it said that PSW is our best hope of distinguishing between low achievers and learning-disabled. Can you elaborate?

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## Addressing the Issues

- It seems like more often than not, the two subtests I choose to reflect a Broad Cognitive Ability, are disparate. The PSW disc refuses to function when that happens. Is there a guide or table to help me decide which follow-up subtests should be given?

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## Addressing the Issues

- With all the new editions of our norm-referenced tests coming out, what would you suggest be our basic tool kit (small budget)?

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## Addressing the Issues

- Can achievement subtests be part of the PSW when looking at impacted vs spared cognitive abilities? The Arithmetic section on the WISC for example seems like a good fit for the Gq or Quantitative broad cognitive ability

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## Addressing the issues

- "what if a student is not borderline IQ but 100 IQ but they don't show any specific strengths or weaknesses, does that mean we don't have PSW evidence for SLD? What if they are struggling in math but don't show any PSW?"

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## Addressing issues

- RTI seems to play an important role in but we are not an RTI school. Where do you suggest our data come from?
  - Explore the NCRTI Progress Monitoring Tools Chart
  - Talk with Title, LAP, and classroom teachers about what they are using

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## Addressing issues

- We screen students using DIBELS but we don't really have progress monitoring data. Where do we go from here?
- Screening data tell us the big picture but do not give us fully reliable data regarding student growth.
- Decide to Progress Monitor students in supplemental instruction programs; build into the schedule.

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## Addressing issues

- We've been trying but honestly, I question the fidelity of our interventions- we're human-should I still use screening and progress data?
- Absolutely, this is just the first step in identifying non-responders, not in identifying a disability. Some data are better than NO data! Build other sources of data when unsure.

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## Addressing issues

- We collect screening data on students who are still learning English. How do we evaluate their progress as it has to be different than fluent English speakers?

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## Addressing issues

- Since we are using RTI data for both referral and the SLD decision, should we be checking off RTI as our primary decision tool and not discrepancy?

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## Addressing the Issues

- We have been a very traditional district with traditional assessments based on traditional data. Little movement toward RTI; no worries about PSW; a norm-referenced score represents underachievement. Where would you all suggest we start?

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## Further Training Opportunities

- EWU online summer classes for RTI (for all educators to build capacity) and SLD Evaluation (see flyers).
- Fall Conference in Skamania: [www.wsasp.org](http://www.wsasp.org) has top authors of PSW and multiple research perspectives, including panel on comprehensive evaluations.
- Tell us what you want...

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# THINK SUMMER

Online For Your Convenience June 23 – August 15<sup>th</sup> with Flexible 2 week Modules!

PSYC 498/598-76 Response to Intervention: Beginning Implementers Series

20 Clock Hours- \$160 total <http://outreach.ewu.edu/ce/credit-option-and-clock-hours/courses-for-teachers.html> or

2 University Credits (\$245.73 per credit undergraduate, \$344.50 per credit graduate): [www.ewu.edu/summer](http://www.ewu.edu/summer)

Open to all educators wanting to develop a solid knowledge base regarding RTI delivery, this course provides training using the National Center for Response to Intervention (NCRTI) Implementer Series Modules. Dr. Susan Ruby is an approved trainer by OSPI and the NCRTI. This course will cover concepts and applications regarding the Essential Components of RTI.

- Module 1: Overview, screening, and Common Core Standards
- Module 2: Multi-level prevention system
- Module 3: Progress monitoring
- Module 4: Data based decision making and program evaluation for individual students, groups, and school-wide systems

Questions?

Email [sruby@ewu.edu](mailto:sruby@ewu.edu)



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# THINK SUMMER

Online For Your Convenience June 23 – August 15<sup>th</sup> with Flexible 2 week Modules!

PSYC 598-84 Evaluation and Treatment of Students with Specific Learning Disabilities

30 Clock Hours- \$240 total <http://outreach.ewu.edu/ce/credit-option-and-clock-hours/courses-for-teachers.html> or

3 University Credits (\$245.73 per credit undergraduate, \$344.50 per credit graduate): [www.ewu.edu/summer](http://www.ewu.edu/summer)

Get an overview and guidance in developing your knowledge and skills in working with students who are suspected of or have Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD). You will utilize materials from the National Research Center for Learning Disabilities, the National Association of School Psychologists, and Flanagan & Alfonso's (2011) *Essentials of Specific Learning Disability Identification*.

- Module 1: History and Current Challenges with SLD Evaluation
- Module 2: SLD and Reading: Evaluation and Treatment
- Module 3: SLD and Math: Evaluation and Treatment
- Module 4: SLD and Oral/Written Language: Evaluation and Treatment

Questions?

Email: [sruby@ewu.edu](mailto:sruby@ewu.edu)



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