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CASP Con '17 promotes equity for all students

By **Raina LeGarreta**, CASP Communications Specialist

Merriam-Webster's Dictionary defines equity as justice according to natural law or right; specifically, freedom from bias or favoritism.

In terms of school psychology it is important to place equity at the forefront of the profession in order to make sure that every student receives what they need to succeed, and all families are equally supported.

CASP's 68th Annual Fall Convention, "Equity," to be held at the Hyatt Regency Orange County, Oct. 5-7, will give professionals and future pros in the field a deeper understanding of the topic as related to different aspects of school psychology via workshops, mini-skills sessions, and paper and poster presentations.

And as always, no CASP Convention is complete without the presence of opportunities to network with fellow professionals or just kick back and relax.

Here's what's in store!

General Session

The Convention will begin with the General Session on Thursday morning with CASP President **Pedro Olvera's** address, Equity: The Battle Has Just Begun.

Dr. Olvera, director of Brandman University's School Psychology graduate program and a published writer and teacher in the area of assessment of ELLs, cognitive assessment and enhancing collaboration with Latino families, is passionate about ensuring that the voices of the culturally diverse are heard. (Read more about Pedro Olvera on page 3) in this issue of *CASP Today*)

Following his address will be keynote speaker **Dr. Shaun Harper**, president of the Association for the Study of Higher Education and founder and executive director of the Center for the Study of Race & Equity in Education. Dr. Harper studies topics concerning equity trends, race and gender in education and social settings, and climate issues on college campuses, and his research has been cited in nearly 5,000 published studies.

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Goodbye Discrepancy Model, Hello PSW: Using Science and Best Practice to Assess for Specific Learning Disabilities

By **Scott Gutentag, PhD**, Licensed Educational Psychologist
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and **Jack A. Naglieri, PhD**
Research Professor, University of Virginia and Senior Research Scientist,
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The purpose of this article is to describe a procedure that can be used to identify children with SLD using the pattern of strengths and weaknesses model and the Discrepancy/Consistency Method. One such approach to defining and measuring basic psychological processes which form the basis of the pattern of strengths and weaknesses is based on the PASS neurocognitive theory that has been extensively studied.

The goal of any best-practice and legally defensible assessment is using measures that are theoretically sound, empirically supported and straightforward to use. Our hope is that we can help practitioners more accurately identify and instruct students with specific learning disabilities according to California Educational Code Title V and IDEIA.

What PSW is and What it Means for SLD Identification

According to California Code of Regulations, §3030 Eligibility Criteria, SLD means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may have manifested itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. The basic psychological processes include attention, visual processing, auditory processing, sensory-motor skills, and cognitive abilities including association, conceptualization and expression.

One of the ways in which students in California can be identified with an SLD is if he/she exhibits a pattern of strengths and weaknesses (PSW) in performance, achievement, or both, relative to age, state-approved grade-level standards, or intellectual development, that is determined by the group to be relevant to the identification of a specific learning disability, using appropriate assessments.

More specifically, a student must present with cognitive strengths that are inconsistent with his/her academic weaknesses and cognitive weaknesses that are consistent and logically relate to his/her academic weaknesses. These relationships must result in an actual educational impairment.

An empirically based application of PSW is the PASS neurocognitive approach as described below.

Neurocognitive Approach to the Assessment of Thinking and Problem Solving

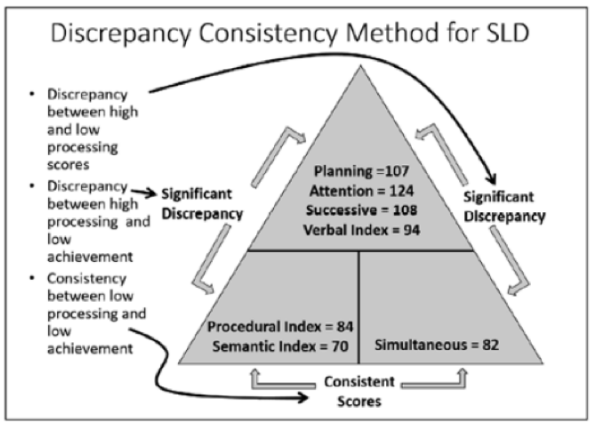
Luria's (1966, 1973, 1980) research on the functional aspects of the brain provided the basis for the PASS neurocognitive approach as an alternative to traditional notions of intelligence which was, initially described by Das, Naglieri, and Kirby (1994) and operationalized by the CAS (Naglieri & Das, 1997) and more recently updated by Naglieri and Otero (2007, 2017). The four PASS processes represent a fusion of cognitive and neuropsychological constructs such as executive functioning (Planning and Attention); determine, select and use strategies to solve problems where self-monitoring and self-correction are especially important (Planning); selective, sustain and shifting, attention (Attention); visual-spatial processing of information into a coherent whole (Simultaneous); and serial processing of information (Successive) (Naglieri & Das, 2005). The four PASS neurocognitive processes can be measured by the CAS2 the CAS2: Brief and the CAS2: Rating Scale (Naglieri et. al., 2014a, 2014b, 2014c).

Applying the PASS Theory to the PSW Approach for Assessment

Naglieri (1999) first described the Discrepancy/Consistency Method for the identification of specific learning disabilities. The method is based on a systematic examination of both cognitive and academic achievement test scores. Determining if the processing scores show a pattern of strengths and weaknesses is accomplished using a modified version of the method originally proposed by Davis (1959), popularized by Kaufman (1979), and Silverstein (1993).

It is important to note that the ipsative approach that is used in the Discrepancy/Consistency Method is based on an analysis of theoretically defined measures of basic psychological processes that correspond to brain function (see Naglieri & Otero, 2007, 2017). We also recommend that analysis of differences among basic psychological processing scores be based on (a) a theoretically derived test of neurocognitive processing; (b) the focus should be on scales that represent the theory, *not* subtest scores; and (c) the academic skills that are assessed should correspond to the measure of neurocognitive processes. Stated more exactly, we strongly recommend using scores from scales that reflect a *specific* neurocognitive theory for determining if there is a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes and scores that measure *specific* aspects of academic performance. We also advocate a two-dimensional analysis of processing scores: low scores in relation to the *student's* average processing score and low scores in relation to the *national* average.

Figure I: Discrepancy Consistency Method for SLD



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Naglieri (1999) first suggested that a low score in a basic psychological process could provide evidence of a *specific* disorder in processing *only* if the score is also below the Average range relative to age mates. Additionally, the student must have deficient academic performance. The student with a weakness in basic psychological processing is very likely to have significantly lower achievement scores and have been identified as exceptional (Naglieri, 2000). This approach is illustrated in Figure 1 which shows that SLD can be detected when there is a significant *discrepancy* between the child's high cognitive processing scores and some specific academic achievement, a significant *discrepancy* between the child's high and low cognitive processing scores (using the ipsative approach), and a *consistency* between the child's low processing and low achievement scores. This is a method to operationalize the Pattern of Strengths and Weaknesses (PSW) approach.

The Case of Cheryl and Her Difficulties with Simultaneous Processing and Math

Cheryl is an 8th grade student whose advanced language and memory skills appear to be no match for the spatial types of skills needed to pass her Geometry class, as this marked the first time in her academic career that Cheryl was failing a course. She especially struggled on problems involving spatial relationships and estimation skills, as Cheryl appeared out of her element when thinking in pictures and not in words. A review of her CAS-2 PASS scores provided an explanation for her learning difficulty as seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Cheryl's PASS and Full Scale Scores from the Cognitive Assessment System – Second Edition.

Cognitive Assessment System - 2			Difference from PASS Mean of: 102.6	Significantly Different (.05) from PASS Mean?	Strength (S) or Weakness (W)
PASS Scales	Standard Score	Percentile			
Planning	107	68	4.4	no	
Attention	124	95	21.4	yes	S
Simultaneous	82	12	-20.6	yes	W
Successive	108	70	5.4	no	
CAS-2 Full Scale	92	30			

Table 2. Feifer Assessment of Math Scores for Cheryl

FAM Index	Standard score (95% CI)	Qualitative Descriptor
Procedural Index	84(+/-8)	Moderately Below Average
Verbal Index	94 (+/-8)	Average
Semantic Index	70 (+/-5)	Moderately Below Average
FAM TOTAL INDEX	82 (±8)	Below Average

Cheryl has a strength on Attention scale (124) and a cognitive weakness on the Simultaneous scale (82) with average scores on Planning (107) and Successive processing (108). It is likely that she has compensated for the Simultaneous weakness by developing and using strategies (Planning), having excellent ability to focus and resist distractions (Attention), and good ability to work with and remember information in sequence (Successive processing). However, geometry relies primarily on Simultaneous processing to draw upon a visual-spatial image, or gestalt, when dealing with questions of shape, size, relative position of figures, and the properties of space. Cheryl's cognitive weakness in Simultaneous processing could be a significant factor hindering the acquisition of specific math skills.

Further testing with the Feifer Assessment of Math (FAM) noted significant deficits with her Semantic Index, which involves a collection of subtests measuring skills such as spatial memory, perceptual estimation, and magnitude representation. In other words, the FAM provides evidence of how a particular cognitive processing deficit, as measured and defined by the CAS-2, specifically hinders mathematics. Her overall FAM index scores are shown in Table 2.

Cheryl's overall FAM Semantic Index score was in the Moderately Below Average range, and at the 2nd percentile compared to peers. This represented an absolute weakness with mathematical skills. Nevertheless, Cheryl still had a strength in the Verbal Domain of math, as she was very quick to memorize single digit addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division facts (this is very dependent on using good strategies (Planning) and remembering sequences of information (Successive processing). However, she had a poor understanding of the conceptual underpinnings of mathematics, and struggled with an array of skills in the Semantic Index including poor estimation skills, poor magnitude representational skills, and limitations with spatial memory (Simultaneous processing). In fact, Cheryl has the profile of a student with both a cognitive weakness (Simultaneous processing) and a mathematical weakness (Semantic Index) which was consistent with Semantic Dyscalculia.

The discrepancy/consistency method shows the presence of a *discrepancy* within her PASS cognitive profile of strong cognitive processing and weak Simultaneous processing. In addition, there is a *consistency* between her Simultaneous score and her academic processing skills as represented by the Semantic Index score on the FAM.

Take Home Points and Concluding Comments

We suggest that practitioners manage the transition from non-scientific methods in identifying children with SLD to more current scientific and theory-based methods to identification. As one of our country's founding fathers, Thomas Jefferson, noted: 'I am not an advocate for frequent changes in laws. But laws must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind. As that becomes more developed, more enlightened, as new discoveries are made,

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Refugee Students

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member or personnel in the district that speaks the family's dialect, consult with that person and get district permission for them to be present at meetings with the family. It is recommended that the school and district do outreach for these families who have just immigrated rather than wait for them to come to the school seeking help for their children (Winerman, 2006). The school should have a protocol set up for proactively contacting the family of the student who is enrolling. Staff and teachers should be open minded to pursuing home visits as opposed to meetings at the school site as it would be culturally appropriate for a collectivist approach to engaging with these families. Counseling services should be offered once rapport is established and group counseling is recommended. The American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee suggests that children from the ME/NA countries are much more comfortable with single-sex mingling as opposed to a group that is co-ed (2002). Historically, in the ME/NA, students with special needs may not have had any or adequate access to services and supports provided through governmental agencies (Al-Hilawani, Koch, & Braaten, 2008). It is important for staff to be knowledgeable on the political and social issues regarding the status of special education services in ME/NA countries. For example, if a refugee student presents with a disability and needs special education services, it is important for the staff and school to be prepared for how the parents may react to this news. Lastly, making sure to ask questions and build genuine rapport with the family prior to attempting to make any kind of recommendations for services for the children.

In general, families from the ME/NA are receptive toward school staff and officials as most groups see education and school as an important tool for becoming successful in the U.S. Students from ME/NA countries may face discrimination and harassment at school from their peers due to some of the ongoing rhetoric from U.S. government officials and media (Council on Arab Islamic Relations, 2015). Teaching the facts and leading open discussions with students about not just tolerance, but acceptance and respect toward their classmates who are from ME/NA countries, are effective ways to stymie targeted bullying at school (Hasson & Goforth, 2016). Local mosques and Arab churches can also provide guidance to school staff on successfully integrating students who are refugees. National and state level associations (i.e. NASP, CASP) can provide school psychologists and other school mental health practitioners with essential guidelines and assistance when working with ME/NA refugee students. Providing school staff and teachers with peer reviewed research, newsletters, articles, and other published information from reputable resources regarding refugee students from ME/NA countries can be used to help to inform as well as quell stereotypes, assumptions, and falsehoods in order to help the acculturation and acclimation of these groups of students in school.

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new truths discovered and opinions change, institutions must advance also to keep pace with the times.' Only through scientific-based change can we improve the evaluation of students with SLD and better meet the needs of the children and adolescents we serve. Using the PASS neurocognitive approach to identifying students with SLD is one such scientific-based method.

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