School Psychology IN VIRGINIA

Fall 2017/Winter2018

The Newsletter of the Virginia Academy of School Psychologists

Editor: Amy Dilworth Gabel, Ph.D., NCSP

Table of Contents

Check us out at http://www.vaspweb.org!

President's Message

I hope that everyone has had a great start to the school year and that you picked up some great information at the VASP Fall Conference. My presidency is coming to a close in January, but I am confident that our President Elect, Linda Noelle, will continue to make VASP even stronger.

The VASP Fall Conference was a great success and I would like to thank the entire VASP board for all of their hard work – especially Linda Noelle, Kelly Acevedo, Kate Grisdale, Larry Sutton, Maribel Saimre, and Tom Byrnes. The conference featured amazing speakers too numerous to list. Dr. Kathy McNamara and Dr. Stephen Sroka, both of whom traveled from Ohio to share their knowledge, were standouts among a strong group of speakers. Other highlights included the Move and Mingle 5K to raise money for graduate student grants, the Happy Hour, and the all-around amazing food at the Hilton The Main in Norfolk.

I was honored to have to opportunity to present VASP School Psychologist of the Year to Emily Morgan, a school psychologist for Prince William County Public Schools. Emily is doing a fabulous job and is very deserving of the award! I also had the privilege of awarding VASP Graduate Student of the Year to Mandi Simmers of James Madison University. Mandi has a bright future ahead of her. Congratulations to both Emily and Mandi – VASP is proud to have such great talent among its ranks!

Sarah Nevill, M.A., NCSP
VASP President

We are still hard at work to ensure that VASP members have access to quality professional development. Mark your calendars now - the VASP Spring Conference will be held April 27, 2018 at the Doubletree Hilton in Charlottesville, Virginia. Our speaker will be Dr. Melissa Reeves, past president of NASP and a Nationally Certified School Psychologist, Licensed Professional Counselor, and Licensed Special Education Teacher. Dr. Reeves is an excellent and engaging speaker, so I encourage you to plan to attend! In the morning, she will discuss DSM-V: Implications for School Psychologists. In the afternoon, she will present Cognitive Behavioral Strategies for Children and Adolescents.

Continued on page 2

Identification of Specific Learning Disabilities using a Pattern of Strengths and Weaknesses

Jack A. Naglieri and Steven G. Feifer

Drs. Naglieri and Feifer are the authors of the tests used in this illustration of the Discrepancy Consistency Method for SLD eligibility determination using a Pattern of strengths and Weaknesses in cognitive processing and academic skills.

In this paper, we describe a method to identify children with a specific learning disability (SLD) based on a pattern of strengths and weaknesses in basic psychological processing and academic skills. We will use the Discrepancy/Consistency Method as described more fully by Naglieri and Otero (2017). This method is used to operationalize a Pattern of Strengths and Weaknesses (PSW) approach involving the Planning, Attention, Simultaneous, and Successive (PASS) neurocognitive theory. We chose this theory not only because it has considerable empirical support (Naglieri & Otero, 2017), but also because it answers the critical questions, "Why does the student struggle?" and importantly "What can be done to address the disorder in processing and improve academic functioning?" We present the Discrepancy/Consistency Method so that practitioners can utilize an approach that is consistent with IDEA and state definition of SLD, theoretically sound, empirically supported, requires far less time for evaluators, and better informs intervention decision making. This brief discussion provides practitioners with an efficient and legally defensible way to identify students with specific learning disabilities consistent with the state of Virginia and IDEA regulations.

SLD Identification

According to Virginia Regulations at 8VAC-20-81-10 and the Individuals with Disabilities Educational Improvement Act (IDEA) a "Specific Learning Disability means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak read, write, spell or do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, dyslexia, or developmental aphasia." (COV § 22.1-213; 34 CFR 300.8 (c) (10)). The rules continue as follows: "Specific learning disability does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities; of intellectual disabilities; or emotional disabilities; of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage." (§ 22.1-213 of the Code of Virginia; 34 CFR 300.8(c) (10)). Furthermore, the current statute also defines dyslexia as "*a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities.*" We suggest that it is essential for practitioners in Virginia to utilize a test taht was specifically designed to measure basic psychological processes and academic skills that are consistent with those processes in order to adequately determine if a student has an SLD which meets State and Federal standards. Using PASS neurocognitive scores from the Cognitive Assessment System-Second Edition (CAS-2; Naglieri, Das & Goldstein, 2014) along with academic processing scores from either the Feifer Assessment of Reading (FAR; Feifer & Gerhardstein, 2015) or Feifer Assessment of Mathematics (FAM; Feifer & Clark, 2016) provides an ideal testing battery for this purpose. Practitioners are encouraged to use these tools and follow the Discrepancy/Consistent Method (DCM) as a primary means to determine eligibility for special education in a theoretically consistent, valid, and psychometrically defensible manner.

PASS: A Neurocognitive Approach

A.R. Luria's (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 Cognitive Assessment System-Second Edition (CAS2) (Naglieri, Das & Goldstein, 2014) and most recently described by Naglieri and Otero (2011, 2017). The four PASS processes represent a fusion of cognitive and neuropsychological constructs that students use to determine, select, and apply 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; Naglieri & Otero, 2017).

The Discrepancy / Consistency Method

Naglieri (1999) first described the Discrepancy/Consistency Method for the identification of specific learning disabilities based on a pattern of strengths and weaknesses in basic psychological processes which correspond to academic strengths and weaknesses. The method is based on an analysis of theoretically defined measures of basic psychological processes that correspond to brain function (see Naglieri & Otero, 2011). We strongly recommend that analysis of differences among basic psychological processing scores be based on (a) a theoretically derived test of cognitive processing; (b) the focus should be on scales that represent the theory, not individual subtest scores; and (c) the academic skills that are assessed should correspond to the measure of cognitive processes. We 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.

Continued on next page.

Determining if the PASS 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) which compares the scores a child earns to his or her average and to the national norm. This results in a two-dimensional analysis of processing scores: low scores in relation to the student's average processing score (relative differences) and low scores in relation to the national average (absolute differences).

Naglieri (1999) first suggested that a low score in basic psychological processes relative to a specific student's average PASS score 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. Thus, a pattern of strengths and weaknesses in basic psychological processes and academic achievement can be detected and used to justify an eligibility determination.

The Discrepancy/Consistency Method is illustrated in the case example that follows. This case 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 and a consistency between the child's low processing and low achievement scores. This is how to detect a pattern of strengths and weaknesses in a way that is consistent with State and Federal definition of an SLD. Furthermore, this method saves practitioners time, requires far less testing, leads to more targeted and specific interventions, and is more ecologically valid since the focus is placed directly on cognitive processes that directly relate to the academic skill in question.

The Case of Paul

Paul is currently in 4th grade and performing below grade level in both reading and mathematics despite numerous interventions and classroom accommodations. His struggles to remember the sequence of steps when doing math equations, is inconsistent with basic math facts. He also struggles with long passages when reading, and has difficulty decoding and spelling hard words. What remains puzzling is that Paul has an outstanding memory for details and he excels when remembering specific aspects of a field trip or any type of experiential learning experience.

Table 1.1. Paul's PASS and Full Scale Scores from the Cognitive Assessment System – Second Edition.

Cognitive Assessment System - 2			Difference from PASS Mean of:	Significantly Different (.05) from PASS Mean?	Strength (S) or Weakness (W)
PASS Scales	Standard Score	Percentile	92.2		
Planning	92	30	-0.3	no	
Attention	92	30	17.8	no	
Simultaneous	110	75	-0.3	yes	S
Successive	75	5	-17.3	yes	W
CAS-2 Full Scale	92	30			

Paul's CAS-2 Full Scale score of 92 was in the Average range, and at the 27th percentile compared to peers (see Table 1). This score does not illuminate Paul's disorder in basic psychological processing and should be de-emphasized. Importantly, most of his PASS scores are in the Average or above ranges, except for his Successive processing score of 75, which falls at the 5th percentile rank and was a relative weakness. Lower scores on this scale reflects his difficulty working with any kind of information or task that demands sequencing. It is important to note that difficulties with Successive processing can hinder both verbal information (i.e. remember multiple step directions) or non-verbal information (i.e. remembering longer algorithms or steps when engaged in more complex mathematics) as well as reading decoding and spelling.

Continued on next page.

Table 1.2. Paul's Scores on the Feifer Assessment of Math

FAM Index	Standard score	Percentile	Category
Procedural Index	**76**	**5**	Moderately Below Average
Verbal Index	**82**	**12**	Below Average
Semantic Index	**98**	**45**	Average
FAM TOTAL INDEX	**86**	**18**	Below Average

The Feifer Assessment of Mathematics (FAM: Feifer, 2016) is a comprehensive test of mathematics designed to examine the underlying processes that support the acquisition of proficient math skills. Testing with the FAM revealed significantly low scores on the Procedural Index, which involves a collection of sequence-based skills such as skip counting forward and backward from various points on a number line, as well as recognizing patterns and sequences among number relationships. His Procedural Index score was 76, which was in the Moderately Below Average range, and at the 5th percentile compared to peers. Paul's core deficit with Successive processing influences mathematics in both a symbolic fashion (i.e. difficulty identifying number patterns) as well as a conceptual fashion (i.e. difficulty remembering the sequences of steps needed to solve more complex equations). In addition, Paul also struggled on the Verbal Index, he scored 82, which is a measure of automatic or reflexive problem solving of single digit math facts. His scores are in the Below Average range and at the 12th percentile compared to peers. Paul had difficulty retrieving basic math facts when timed, though his conceptual understanding of mathematics was sound (Semantic Index). Difficulty with math fact retrieval in lieu of a good conceptual understanding of mathematics is often seen among students with language-based types of learning disabilities.

The Feifer Assessment of Reading (FAR: Feifer, 2015) measures four specific subtypes of reading disorders, all of which are derived from deficits in one or more PASS basic psychological processes. Paul also obtained a FAR Total Index score of 84, which was in the Below Average range of functioning and at the 14th percentile compared to peers (see Table 3). He especially had difficulty within the Phonological Index, which required use of Successive processing to sequence individual sounds or phonemes to identify words. His strategy was to rely on his stronger Simultaneous processing, as evidence by his good performance on the Fluency Index and on the CAS2. For example, Paul performed well on a task that required him to identify phonologically irregular words (i.e. yacht, debt, onion, etc...), because these words require the use of orthographic strategies. In other words, the ability to utilize Simultaneous processing to identify the visual word unit as a wholistic entity was a relative strength for Paul. However, he had considerably more difficulty identifying words that were more readily decodable, since these words often rely upon Successive processing to combine sounds in a linear or sequential fashion. In summary, Paul struggled on the decodable words because of his weakness in Successive processing, so he often over-relies upon his strong Simultaneous processing to take in the entire printed word form, a strategy much better suited for phonologically irregular words that cannot readily be decoded.

Table 1.3. Paul's Scores on the Feifer Assessment of Reading

FAR index	Standard score	Percentile	Category
Phonological Index	**79**	**7**	Moderately Below Average
Fluency Index	**92**	**32**	Average
Mixed Index	**85**	**14**	Below Average
Comprehension Index	**90**	**27**	Average
FAR Total Index	**84**	**14**	Below Average

Continued on next page.

The case of Paul illustrates (see Figure 1) how the Discrepancy/Consistency method provides a way to examine the specific processing strengths and weaknesses. As can be seen from Figure 1 there was a significant discrepancy between Paul's Successive processing and the rest of his psychological processing scores as measured by the CAS-2. In addition, the FAM indicated that his Procedural Index was a relative weakness, and the FAR indicated that his Phonological Index was a weakness. Finally, there was a consistency between Paul's difficulties in the sequential aspect of mathematics (Procedural Index) and sequential aspects of reading (Phonological Index), and lower Successive Processing scores. Therefore, it is important to note that PASS basic psychological processes as measured by the CAS-2 help us understand variation in the development of numerous skills.

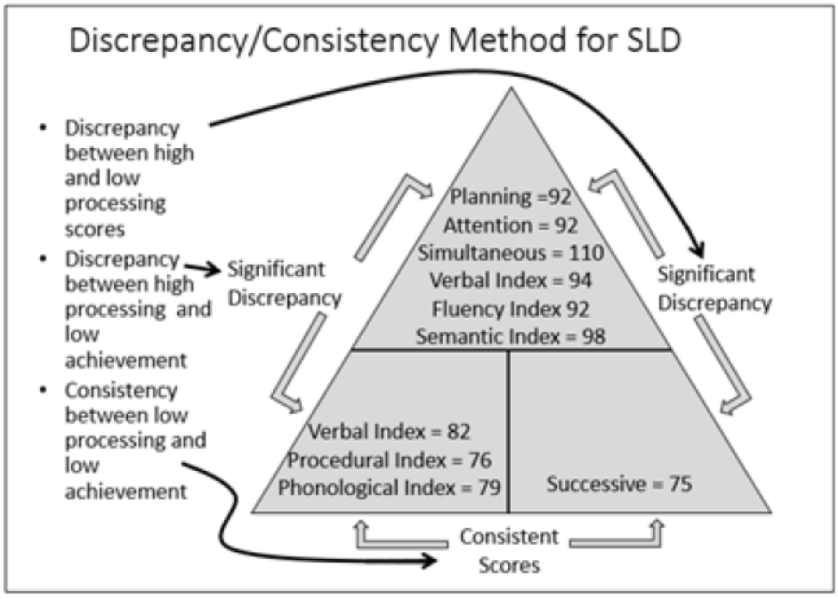


Figure 1 Discrepancy/Consistency Method for SLD

Put simply, the CAS-2 can identify core neuropsychological processing deficits concomitant to most learning endeavors, whereas the FAR and/or FAM can capture how these processes are specifically manifested in a targeted academic area. The combination of using a cognitive processing measure and an academic processing measure provides a much more ecologically sound assessment while remaining consistent with current Virginia statutes and regulations.

Paul has a disorder of a basic psychological process that impacts phonology, and would meet the state criteria for SLD (i.e., Dyslexia). However, his deficit with Successive processing hinders reading and math domains, and therefore, practitioners need to ensure that interventions are crafted to address these, and other, academic needs. The results suggest that Paul would benefit from an explicit phonological approach to reading (i.e. Fundations, Wilson, Orton-Gillingham, etc...) that allowed him to develop more automaticity with respect to blending and sequencing sounds to recognize words. Additionally, specific strategies to assist Paul in math may include learning how to chunk information, practice on number line fluency skills, playing math games such as the 24 game to develop greater procedural knowledge when problem solving, and utilizing mnemonic strategies to remember longer mathematical algorithms. See Naglieri and Pickering (2010) and Naglieri & Feifer (2017) for more information about interventions.

Take Home Points and Concluding Comments

We suggest that practitioners manage the transition from previous discrepancy methods to more current scientific and theory-based methods for SLD eligibility determination. Only though 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 method and tools we have described will aid in the identification of students with SLD.

Continued on next page.

References

Das, J. P., Naglieri, J. A., & Kirby, J. R. (1994). *Assessment of cognitive process: The PASS theory of intelligence.* Needham Heights, MA: Allyn *&* Bacon.

Davis, F. B. (1959). Interpretation of differences among averages and individual test scores. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 50,* 162–170.

Feifer, S. G. & Gerhardstein, R. N. (2015). *Feifer Assessment of Reading (FAR).* Lutz, FL: PAR.

Feifer, S. G. & Clark, H. K. (2016). *Feifer Assessment of Math (FAM).* Lutz, FL: PAR.

Kaufman, A. S. (1979). I*ntelligent testing with the WISC-R.* New York: Wiley.

Luria, A. R. (1973). *The working brain: An introduction to neuropsychology.* New York, NY: Basic Books.

Luria, A. R. (1980). *Higher cortical functions in man (2nd ed.).* New York, NY: Basic Books.

Naglieri, J. A. (1999). Essentials of CAS assessment. *Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.*

Naglieri, J. A. (2000). Can profile analysis of ability test scores work? An illustration using the PASS theory and CAS with an unselected cohort. *School Psychology Quarterly,15,* 419-433.

Naglieri, J. A., & Das, J. P. (1997). *Cognitive Assessment System. Itasca, IL: Riverside.*

Naglieri, J. A. & Das, J. P. (2005) Planning, Attention, Simultaneous, Successive (PASS) theory: A Revision of the Concept of Intelligence. In D. P. Flanagan and P. L. Harrison (Eds.) *Contemporary Intellectual Assessment (Second Edition)* (pp. 136-182). New York: Guilford.

Naglieri, J. A., Das, J. P. & Goldstein, S. (2014). *Cognitive Assessment System – Second Edition.* Austin, TX: ProEd.

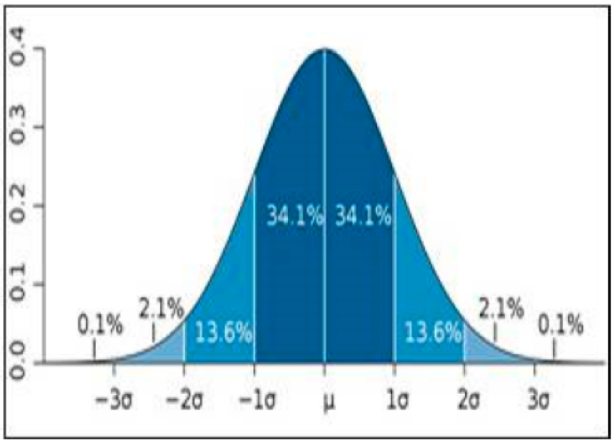
Naglieri, J. A., Das, J. P. & Goldstein, S. (2014). *Cognitive Assessment System – Brief Scale.* Austin, TX: ProEd.

Naglieri, J. A., Das, J. P. & Goldstein, S. (2014). *Cognitive Assessment System – Rating Scale.* Austin, TX: ProEd.

Naglieri, J. A., & Otero, T. (2011). Cognitive Assessment System: Redefining intelligence from a neuropsychological perspective. In A. Davis (Ed.), *Handbook of pediatric neuropsychology* (pp. 320–333). New York, NY: Springer.

Naglieri, J. A. & Otero T. M. (2017). *Essentials of CAS2 assessment.* Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Silverstein, A. B. (1993). Type I, Type II, and other types of errors in pattern analysis. *Psychological Assessment, 5,* 72–74.



Newsletter Policy

School Psychology in Virginia is the official newsletter of the Virginia Academy of School Psychologists. ***School Psychology in Virginia*** is published two times yearly (Fall and Spring). Although it is the official publication of VASP, the contents of this newsletter and the opinions expressed in it do not necessarily reflect VASP's official position. Professional materials reviewed or advertised do not imply endorsement by VASP. Permission to reproduce and use any VASP article is granted to all state or national school psychology news- letter editors, providing that the original source and author is cited. ***School Psychology in Virginia*** is mailed to all members of the association.

Authors are encouraged to submit succinct practically relevant documents. All copy must be typed double-spaced and is subject to editorial review. Submissions should be made electronically as an attached Microsoft Word file.

Send manuscripts to: Amy Dilworth Gabel, Editor

adgphd@gmail.com

Deadlines for Submissions: Fall Issue: Oct. 30th

Spring Issue: April 15th.

Remember – you may earn CPD for articles that you submit!