The Ever Increasing Conundrum of the Specific Learning Disability (SLD) Category for School Based Teams:

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What is the Truth about SLD?

Answer the following statements either True or False about the category of Specific Learning Disability:

1. In 2009-2010, the highest category nationally was Specific Learning Disability at 37.5% (for 6.48 million students).

2. Massachusetts identification rate from 2009-2010 was 17.80% just below Rhode Island at 18.68%, the highest in the US.

3. Over the last 10 years nationally, the numbers of students identified in the SLD category dropped from 6.1% (2.86 million students) to 4.9 % (2.43 million students).

4. Experts state the downward trend for SLD is more subjective and influenced by changes in policies and procedures, budgets and personnel.

Scull, J. and Winkler, A.M., Shifting Trends in Special Education 5. 2011, Thomas B. Fordham Institute, Washington, DC

What is the Truth about SLD?

Answer the following statements either True or False about the category of Specific Learning Disability:

5. In the 10 year period of gathering statistics, Massachusetts experienced the greatest percentage decrease in the SLD category from 9.8% in 2001 to 5.9% in 2010.

6. RTI (implemented at 61% in school districts in 2010) is seen as the best support to impact the SLD population, thus preventing mislabeling of struggling learners as well as misidentified learners who need more enhanced and redundant instruction and practice.

7. The highest categories of disabilities in Massachusetts as of 2010 was autism, developmental delay, speech and language impairments emotional disturbance and SLD.

8. In Massachusetts, RTI is the reason behind the decreased trends in the SLD category due to more rigorous procedures to reduce the over identified learners with SLD, thus proving its effectiveness.

Scull, J. and Winkler, A.M., Shifting Trends in Special Education 5. 2011, Thomas B. Fordham Institute, Washington, DC

What is the Truth about SLD?

Answer the following statements either True or False about the category of Specific Learning Disability:

9. The nature of Specific Learning Disabilities may coexist with sensory deficits, language impairment, behavior problems but not caused by these conditions. Learners with SLD frequently have a disability in reading (over 80%).

10. The SLD category can "morph" from the original category of developmental delay, speech and language impairment (communication).

Scull, J. and Winkler, A.M., Shifting Trends in Special Education 5. 2011, Thomas B. Fordham Institute, Washington, DC

Intention for this Session

➢Review of eligibility determination for SLD.

➢Comprehensive Formal and /or Informal Assessment for SLD. (cursory overview of reliable batteries)

➢Assessment including History and Observations

➢Determining consistency of patterns through review of the history and testing.

➢Determining the finding of no special needs

➢Case studies:

- No special needs
- Communication Category….to SLD
- Developmental delayed Category…to SLD

Specific Learning Disability

Definition based on the current law as…

"a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations".

Specific Learning Disability category includes "conditions such as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia." This category excludes children who have learning problems which are primarily the result of visual, hearing , motor impairments, emotional disturbances, cognitive impairment or environmental disadvantage.

IDEA 2004, Section 602

Elements for SLD Determination

➢ Historical Review and Educational Assessment

➢ Area of Concern and Evaluation Method

➢ Exclusionary Factors

➢ Observation

Elements for SLD Determination

As of 2008, the determination process is a more authentic assessment of the student in his/her learning environment. Specialists review and evaluate the instruction, the methods, the communication with parents, as well as other factors, and determine if the student's lack of achievement is due to a Specific Learning Disability or to other factors.

Elements for SLD Determination

Historical Review

Official Intention: to determine if poor or lack of instruction is not the reason for the student's low achievement in reading or math by answering the following two questions:

1. Has the student received high-quality instruction in ELA and Math from qualified teachers?

2. Have the parents been informed of the student's progress through grade reports, standardized testing, weekly quizzes, or other assessment measures?

Elements for SLD Determination
Historical Review

➢ Work samples are important to gather; reading records, writing samples from a variety of assignments, a variety of assessments: quizzes and tests; not just the content ,but also the formatting of the assessments. Documenting a variety of instructional approaches serves to respond to these questions, such as group activities, simulations, jigsaw approach, projects and presentation, and use of technology.

➢ Review of the student's files. Search for patterns of skills and learning trends through their education history. Historical grade and standardized testing reports as well as teachers' comments provide an insight into a student's consistent growth and development or inconsistencies in their learning basic skills.

Elements for SLD Determination
Educational Assessment

➢ This assessment, completed by a general education teacher or teachers, focuses on basic skills for classroom performance. The teachers have knowledge of the student in the general educational setting.

➢ Assessments of the student's

- attention skills

- participation behaviors

- communication skills

- memory

- social relations with groups, peers, and adults

Based on the teacher or teachers' documentation,

the evidence indicates one of the following about

said student:

➢ consistently performed **within the range** of performance of same-age peers.

➢ consistently performed **better** than same-age peers.

➢ consistently performed **less well** than same-age peers.

➢ demonstrated **inconsistent** performance throughout his/her educational history.

Area of Concern and Evaluation Method

Area of Concern

The student is not adequately achieving due to his or her inability to process (understand and use) spoken or written language in one or more of the following areas:

- ➢ Oral Expression
- ➢ Written Expression
- ➢ Basic Reading Skills
- ➢ Reading Comprehension
- ➢ Reading Fluency Skills
- ➢ Listening Comprehension
- ➢ Mathematics Problem Solving
- ➢ Mathematics Calculation

Area of Concern and Evaluation Method

When the student is using skills and knowledge to the best of his/her ability, when trying to listen, think, speak, read, read fluently, write, spell, or do math calculations and is not demonstrating progress (achievement is not adequate), then the Team must determine if that lack of achievement is due to an obstruction in the student's ability to process (understand or use) spoken or written language.

Areas of Concern are within ELA and Math, since they are the foundation of all areas of learning. A student must have these skills to succeed in all academic areas. When the referral is made, there should be a conversation with the person(s) who made the referral to determine the Area of Concern. It is going to be in this area where the evaluation will focus. **In order to find a student eligible with a SLD, inadequate achievement is only necessary in one of these eight areas, although more areas may be affected.**

Evaluation Method

➢ Response to Scientific, Research-Based Intervention

➢ IQ / Achievement Discrepancy

   ➢ If you can meet the requirements for a response to scientific, research-based intervention method, then you can use it or the IQ/Achievement discrepancy method.
   ➢ If you cannot meet the requirements for a response to scientific, research-based intervention method, then you must use the IQ/Achievement discrepancy method.
   ➢ One method is required, but you can use both if you wish.

RTI

➤ Different tiers of intensity or services. Most popular models use three tiers, but any number of tiers can be used.

➤ Continuous student progress monitoring occurs.

➤ Data is used to inform instructional decision making.

RTI

➢ In implementing a response to scientific, research-based intervention as an evaluation method, best practice would advise the student should already be participating in the RTI process before the referral for an evaluation begins.

➢ If gathered data through the response to scientific, research-based intervention provides limited information to how the student learns, impacting the development of an IEP, then supplementary data may be required. Appropriate diagnostic tests could supplement how the student learns and what is impeding learning.

Evaluation Method

Prior to any assessments, the specialist(s) should review:

➢   previous grade level records

➢   teacher reports

➢   district or out-of-district testing

These documents could provide a snapshot of the potential shift in strengths and weaknesses over time and improvements that have been gained.

In addition, analyzing a variety of the assessments to determine any commonalities of behavior patterns through the classroom/teacher and test reports. This review may hone the specific or comprehensive assessments to be administered.

Evaluation Method

➢Discrepancy model examines potential ability and achievement in one or more of the following areas:

  ➢Oral Expression

  ➢Written Expression

  ➢Basic Reading Skills

  ➢Reading Comprehension

  ➢Reading Fluency Skills

  ➢Listening Comprehension

  ➢Mathematics Problem Solving

  ➢Mathematics Calculation

➢What information is revealed through the multiple assessment; patterns of strengths and weaknesses as well as consistencies or inconsistencies?

Standardized Assessment Tools
for Accurate Determination of SLD

Reading
TORC-4- Test of Reading Comprehension

Woodcock-Johnson Reading Mastery Tests

GORT-5-Gray Oral Reading Tests

GSRT- Gray Silent Reading Test

TERA- Test Of Early Reading Ability

Written Language
TOWL- Test of Written Language

TWS- Test of Spelling

Early Reading Skills and Phonological Awareness
Test of Word Reading Efficiency (assesses efficiency of sight word recognition and phonemic decoding

CTOPP- Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing

TOPAS-Test of Phonological Awareness Skills

Oral Language
CELF-4- Clinical Evaluation of Language Functions

PPVT-4- Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised

EVT-2-Expressive Vocabulary Test-Revised

CASL-Comprehensive Assessment of Spoken Language

TOPS-2-Test of Problem Solving (elementary and adolescent levels)

Evaluation Method

➢ Diagnostic test results are only as outstanding as the examiner's ability to administer and interpret those assessment findings and the raw data.

➢ Training and practice increases the testing outcomes.

➢ Observation skills during testing support the premise of identifying patterns of consistency and inconsistency along with the standardized test scores.

Informal Assessments

Reading

Time sampling

Reading record

Written Language

Analysis of Written Assignments (creative and expository)

Early Reading Skills and Phonological Awareness

Informal assessment of rhyming, phoneme and word production

Oral Language

Story telling and retelling

Analysis of quality and quantity of language from a language sampling

Exclusionary Factors

Cultural factors

Cultural differences may impact the student's learning and educational history. Linguistic or cultural elements related to learning should be taken into account and **not** considered as a contributing factor to the student's disability.

Environmental or economic disadvantage

It is important that environmental or economic disadvantage **not** be considered when assessing the student's actual ability to learn.

Limited English proficiency

A student's lack of knowledge of the English language alone is **not** an indicator of a disability. Language proficiency, both receptive and expressive, in relation to all aspects of school communication must be assessed to determine the relationship of linguistic/cultural background to school achievement. The lack of comprehension of language impacting the student's lack of achievement is **not** considered a disability.

Exclusionary Factors

Visual, hearing, or motor disability

➢ Reading problems can be the result of poor visual acuity. Examining a student's vision is critical to the evaluation; to eliminate visual impairment as the cause.

➢ Hearing loss can impact understanding what is being said or responding . Assessing the student's hearing is important to determine if a hearing loss is involved.

➢ a disability that impacts fine or gross motor skills—could **not** be considered a SLD, and needs to be assessed as part of considering a writing difficulty.

Cognitive Impairment

Cognitive Impairment is defined as "significantly sub-average general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period, that adversely affects a child's educational performance" [§300.8(c)(6)]. Cognitive Impairment is a separate disability category under IDEA.

Emotional disturbance

An emotional disturbance can impact learning in multiple ways similar to a specific learning disability. However, it is defined as a separate disability category under IDEA. If a student's learning difficulties are *principally* the outcome of an emotional disturbance, then the student cannot qualify a SLD.

Observations

Observation is a critical component of the assessment process. The observation can contribute to understanding why the student is not doing well in the areas of concern. Additionally, an observation can be a powerful tool to rule out the exclusionary factors.

The Observation should be in one of the following areas of concern:

➢ Oral Expression
➢ Written Expression
➢ Basic Reading Skills
➢ Reading Comprehension
➢ Reading Fluency Skills
➢ Listening Comprehension
➢ Mathematics Problem Solving
➢ Mathematics Calculation

Consider that more than one observations may be required in order to gain an accurate understanding of the student's abilities. When observing keep explicit notes focused on the behaviors being evaluated.

Types of Observations

Behavioral Observations resulting in quantifiable results:

➢ Time sampling

➢ Event recording

➢ Interval recording

Methods relating to a student's classroom behavior to instructional conditions.

Informal and anecdotal recordings to focus on:

➢ referral questions

➢ instructional practice

➢ student performance

➢ instructional reliability

Observations should be conducted in different classes and by different team members. A rotation of team members could be implemented.

Finding of No Special Needs
This can be a challenge!

Complete all the Elements for SLD Determination:

➢ Historical Review and Educational Assessment

➢ Area of Concern and Evaluation Method

➢ Exclusionary Factors

➢ Observation

Determine patterns of consistency and inconsistency in the data collected: historical review and educational assessment, RTI, standardized and informal assessments, and observations. One or two formal test results that are below average do not indicate a true disability. Team members must be able to document a disability in an area of concern. Poor homework grades is not a disability!

Category Determination Shifting Overtime

While a student's disability may be identified during preschool or kindergarten, the nature of this disability shifts and 'morphs' overtime. Thus, requiring educators and specialists to determine the appropriate category for continued special education services.

Language based-learning disabilities 'morph' from early speech and language disorders to more subtle, but still significant, disabilities in reading comprehension of content, written language and below average academic performance. (Wallach, Charlton, &Christie, 2010)

"… the link between early and later language disorders , remains a critical one

(Ehren, 1994). As children grow and develop, the language problems continue into adolescents and adulthood. Thus ,determining the nature of the language difficulties and the impact on reading, written language and spoken language is also critical. (Ehren, 1994)

Research study results have indicated that 40% to 75% of preschoolers with language disorders have reading problems including word recognition and comprehension (Aram, Ekelman, & Nation, 1984; Scarborough & Dobrich, 1990.) Further studies (Lierbergott et all, 1989) with students with specific language impairments reported that 70% of the children with language impairments had problems with syllable and phoneme segmentation of words, judging grammatical correctness, labeling and story recall.

Category Determination Shifting Overtime

We are proposing that determination of SLD should be considered with students who have an initial evaluation and determination of Communication or Developmental Delay. Updated evaluations in the areas of concern are critical. Students with language based learning disabilities experience challenges as the demand of the curriculum and skill level increases. The disability "morphs" from difficulty with phonological awareness to reading chapter books as well as writing a sentence to organize and drafting an essay.

Case Study A: Finding No Special Needs

<u>Student A</u>

WISC IV Description	%Rank	Qualitative
VCI	75	High Average
PRI	70	Average
WMI	55	Average
PSI	58	Average
FSIQ	73	Average
FSIQ	112	

Finding of No Special Needs Student A

WIAT-III		SS	Classification
LC		103	Average
RC		91	Average
Math PS		99	Average
Sent. Comp.		110	Average
Word Read	86		Average
Essay Comp.	116		Above Average
Pseudoword	94		Average
Num. Operation		98	Average
Oral Expression	104		Average
Oral Read Fluency		88	Average
Spelling		87	Average
Math FL (Add)	96		Average
Math Fl (Sub)	87		Average
Math Fl (Mult)		94	Average

Finding of No Special Needs Student A

➤ GORT-5   %   Classification

➤ Rate   37

       Average

➤ Accuracy   37   Average

➤ Fluency   37   Average

➤ Comprehension   63   Average

➤ Total Test: % 50   Oral Reading Quotient: 100

➤ GSRT- % 65th   Silent Reading Quotient: 106

Finding of No Special Needs Student A

➢TOWL-4 %

➢Vocabulary 25 Average

➢Spelling 50 Average

➢Punctuation 25 Average

➢Logical Sent. 63 Average

➢Sent. Comb. 63 Average

➢Context Conv. 50 Average

➢Story Comp 37 Average

Finding of No Special Needs

➢No consistent pattern(s) in the area(s) of concern.

➢Student's grades are average. Cs are average.

➢Student's standardized testing and MCAS are proficient.

➢Student is demonstrating consistent progress in academics.

➢The evaluations /testing evidenced within the average range in areas of original concern.

➢The challenge for parents is they desperately want their child to have better grades(As and Bs).

➢Parents want their child to complete the homework more consistently.

Case Study B: Communication Category "morphing" to SLD

➢ Child B-referred for Speech/Language Evaluation due to multiple articulation errors at age 5 year, 10 mos. (K)

➢ Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals-4

➢ Concepts & Following Directions- Below Average

➢ Word Structure Subtest-Below Average

➢ Sentence Recall-Below Average

➢ EVT-2-Average

➢ PPVT-4-Average

Case Study B: Communication Category "morphing" to SLD

➤ Child B-Articulation testing formally assessed using <u>Goldman-Fristoe 2 Test of Articulation</u>.

➤ Twenty-three sounds in initial, medial, and final word positions and 16 consonant blends were tested.

➤ Results revealed the child scored in the 5th percentile, indicating below average performance.

Case Study B: Communication Category "morphing" to SLD

➢ Child B-one year after initial evaluation-
➢ Difficulty in pronoun usage
➢ Irregular plurals
➢ Sentence structure
➢ Difficulty blending and segmenting words
➢ Child's reading skills are below grade level
➢ Written language skills are below grade level

Case Study C: Developmental Delay Category "morphing" to SLD

➢ Child C- Initially identified as Developmental Delay

WISC-IV	%	Classification
VC	37	Average
PR	66	Average
WM	42	Average
PS	16	Below Average
FSI	95	Average

Case Study C: Developmental Delay Category "morphing" to SLD

- WIAT-III
- LC   Average
- OE   Average
- RC   Average
- WR   Below Average
- Pseudwords   Average
- Sent Comp   Average
- Essay Comp   Average
- Spelling   Average
- Math PS   Average
- Num Operations   Average
- Math Fluency (Add)   Below Average
- Math Fluency (sub)   Below Average
- Math Fluency (mul)   Below Average

Case Study C: Developmental Delay Category "morphing" to SLD

GORT	%	Classification
➢ Rate	5	Poor
➢ Accuracy	16	Below Average
➢ Fluency	9	Below Average
➢ Comprehension	16	Below Average
➢ ORQ	10	Below Average
➢ GSRT	16	Below Average

Case Study C: Developmental Delay Category "morphing" to SLD

TOWL	%	Classification
➤ Vocabulary	37	Average
➤ Spelling	5	Poor
➤ Punctuation	16	Below Average
➤ Logical Sentences	37	Average
➤ Sentence Comb.	63	Average
➤ Contextual Con	16	Below Average
➤ Story Comp	16	Below Average
➤ Contrived Writing	27	Average
➤ Spontaneous	14	Below Average
➤ Overall Writing	21	Below Average

Case Study D: Preschooler

➢ Child D-was very slow to begin talking. When she was three, she said very few words-mostly one word utterances. Her mother worried that her older siblings did most of the talking for her and that is why she did not need to talk.

➢ Everyone, including her doctor told the mother not to worry that the child would outgrow the delay.

➢ When she was four, she was speaking in short sentences, but was difficult to understand and made many phonological errors. She left off ending of words like plurals and past tense markers off words.

➢ She had made some progress by the time she got to kindergarten, but the teacher noted that she was having trouble identifying letter sounds and words that started with a particular letter.

➢ By Grade 1, she was having trouble with reading.

➢ By the end of Grade 2, she was quite behind her peers in reading and was not receiving any service. She was referred for a special education evaluation at this time.

Action Plan

➢Consider one practical action step you can take to impact the process for SLD Determination with your current teams and in your schools.

➢What step could you take on Tuesday morning ?

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Thank You

Question?

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