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# The School Psychologist

Division of School Psychology Volume 55, Number 1

## Yes, Virginia, there is a Severe Discrepancy Clause, but is it Too Much Ado About Something?

*Ron Dumont, Fairleigh Dickinson University  
John Willis, Rivier College  
Guy McBride, Burke County Public Schools, NC.*

*There are three kinds of people in this world - those who can count and those who can't.* Unknown

.....

*Even if you are on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there.* Will Rogers

.....

*If you're enjoying this program just half as much as we've enjoyed doing it, then we've enjoyed it twice as much as you.* Michael Palin

.....

*Bad facts make bad law.* Frank Zappa

.....

*A respect for the law of parsimony is a characteristic of science, but educational psychology's penchant for simple answers to questions of complex behavior, particularly in the area of learning disability, has tended toward paucity rather than parsimony of explanation.* John McLeod

**Dear Editor of The School Psychologist:**

**I am 28 years old. Some of my friends say there is no need for a numerical severe discrepancy when determining a specific learning disability. Papa says, "If you see it in The Newsletter, it's so." Please tell me the truth, do we need a severe discrepancy to identify a specific learning disability?**

**-Virginia**

The answer to this question seems to depend upon whether you are asking about the presence of a learning disability or the presence of an educationally disabling condition. Contrary to popular opinion, Virginia, there is no federal requirement for any sort of mathematical measurement of "severe discrepancy," there is no federal requirement to base any such comparison on test scores at all, and a severe discrepancy may, in fact, be completely irrelevant to the determination of a specific learning disability (SLD).

The federal criteria carry the force of law and virtually every decision and letter we have reviewed speaks to the need for an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team to determine that there was a severe discrepancy. There are explicit dicta within the federal defini-

tion and the regulations that the disability reflect a disorder in psychological processing; and that the cause of the child's deficiencies not be primarily the result of a visual, hearing or motor impairment; mental retardation; or social, economic, or environmental factors CFR sections 300.7 (10); 300.541. Additionally, CFR section 300.534 prohibits the classification of a child under any classification if:

- (1) The determinant factor for that eligibility determination is—*
  - (i) Lack of instruction in reading or math; or*
  - (ii) Limited English proficiency; and*
- (2) The child does not otherwise meet the eligibility criteria under Sec. 300.7(a).*

Probably nothing related to the identification of specific learning disabilities causes multidisciplinary teams (MDTs) more problems than the decisions they are asked to make regarding whether the child has or does not have a severe discrepancy. Teams are often struggling for clear guidelines to help objectify the process. Questions related to the area of severe discrepancy often include: Does the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) actually demand that a team find a severe discrepancy? Is a severe discrepancy defined or clarified anywhere in IDEA?

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## Professional Communities of the Future

Jack Cummings, Indiana University

Jack Cummings



Professional organizations give members a sense of community. As members of Division 16, we share values of caring and working for the benefit of children. We share knowledge of tools for academic and social/behavioral

interventions designed to improve learning environments. We strive to understand children's difficulties in more than a within child framework, to consider classroom dynamics, and reflect on

broader systems level issues. In this context we influence schools as well as other environments outside the traditional P-12 domain. We work to protect children's psychological and educational rights through advocacy and legislative efforts.

Normally we think of professional organizations as "place-based" communities. I am a member of the Indiana Association of School Psychologists, but do not belong to the comparable state organizations in Florida or California. It is not that, on a snowy day like today, I haven't looked at announcements of the Florida or California state conferences and thought, "what nice locations to gather with colleagues for a couple

days in the winter." I am a member of the American Psychological Association, but not the British Psychological Association. The travel time and costs prohibit me from regular attendance at the British conferences.

Psychologists across various regional and national psychological associations encounter children who have learning difficulties, as well as those who struggle with behavior in classrooms and those with problems initiating and maintaining social relations with peers. These problems are not place-based, they are common difficulties of children in schools regardless of region or nation. A recent email on the EPNET, a listserv that serves educational psychologists in Great Britain, illustrates the point. The psychologist requested information on ways to address the problem of bullying. In response, individuals on the listserv suggested various web sites that address the problem.

Most members who have been part of a listserv for a number of months will note that these electronic venues share characteristics with conventional face-to-face communities. Norms develop for what are socially accepted communications. If someone strays from the norm, other members will remind the individual to behave properly. Over time, a shared history of interactions develops. A sense of identi-

ty develops and members share a form of community where they are able to exchange or share ideas and resources.

Listservs offer a glimpse of potential future electronic communities. Recently developed Web-based software allows a presenter to communicate with a small or large group. The powerful value-added aspect of using the Web is that the location of the audience is irrelevant. The meeting can be open to anyone with access to the Internet, or it can be closed by requiring the user to enter the conference space with a password. A Web-based presentation can be quite similar to those conducted in a face-to-face format. The speaker may present a sequence of PowerPoint slides, be heard (audio only) or be heard and seen in real-time video. The audience can submit questions or be polled for their reactions to points made by the speaker. Software exists to allow sharing of a "whiteboard" space, such that the presenter and the participants can work together as they would on a conventional blackboard.

Other web tools exist to allow asynchronous communications. Web forums have the advantage of requiring neither geographic proximity nor assembling at the same time, hence the term asynchronous. Within the Indiana University School Psychology Program we have used web forums for debates

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## Editor's Message

Vincent C. Alfonso, Fordham University

As I begin my first of three years as editor of The School Psychologist, I thought it would be a good idea to make some opening remarks. First, I'd like to recognize Dr. Steven G. Little for his significant contributions to the newsletter these past six years. Steve has edited TSP with great professionalism and scholarship. He has helped me tremendously in my transition to editor. Second, I'd like to bring your attention to the editorial staff of TSP by directing you to the back cover. A perusal of the names and institutions will, in all likelihood, impress you. I am grateful to Dr. Linda A. Reddy, associate editor, for taking a leadership role in the production of the newsletter. Third, I invite

you to be a part of the newsletter by contributing materials such as an article or test/ book review. Although there are printing deadlines, I can assure that most submitted material will be printed in an issue. Fourth, I invite you to submit comments to Linda (reddy@alpha.fdu.edu) regarding any printed information in the newsletter especially the feature article. Finally, Dr. Angeleque Akin-Little has agreed to edit the "people and places" column that was a part of previous issues. Angeleque can be reached at psyaza@hofstra.edu. I hope that you enjoy reading TSP during the next three years!

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Fall (4)	September 1	September 15	October 15

\* Allow 3 to 6 weeks for delivery of 3rd class mail.

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## Yes, Virginia, there is a Severe Discrepancy Clause, but is it Too Much Ado About Something?

How severe is severe? What is the severe discrepancy discrepant from? What IQ or other ability score (e.g., Wechsler Full Scale, Verbal, Performance IQ; Differential Ability Scales General Conceptual Ability or Cluster Score, Woodcock-Johnson Tests of Cognitive Ability III General Intellectual Ability or Cluster Score, etc.) can be used when determining IQ-Achievement discrepancies? Are there other, acceptable ways to determine severe discrepancy besides using the IQ-Achievement test score comparison?

The real problem is that neither the federal definition nor the federal regulations have ever defined any of the key terms (e.g., "achievement," "intelligence," "severe," and even "primarily"). Definitions of these terms are left to the IEP teams with whatever guidance their states provide them. In some instances, States have provided guidance for what these terms might mean, but when IEP teams have taken them too literally, the Office for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) has slapped their hands, with the injunction that "no one formula" may be used to establish eligibility.

Various professions have encouraged different definitions of learning disabilities. These definitions, although often very similar to each other, have enough difference between them to cause problems for MDIs when it comes to choosing among them. Below are a few of the many conceptualizations of what constitutes a learning disability. [We have included one State definition (New York) as an example of how the State definitions may differ from other definitions.]

### IDEA [§300.7 (c)(10)]

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, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as per-

ceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. . . . The term does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.

### The Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDA)

Specific Learning Disabilities is a chronic condition of presumed neurological origin which selectively interferes with the development, integration, and/or demonstration of verbal and/or nonverbal abilities. Specific Learning Disabilities exist as a distinct handicapping condition and varies in its manifestations and in degree of severity. Throughout life, the condition can affect self-esteem, education, vocation, socialization, and/or daily living activities. [Association for Children with Learning Disabilities (1986). ACLD Description: Specific Learning Disabilities. ACLD Newsbriefs, Sept./Oct. (166), 15. Note: The Association for Children with Learning Disabilities is now the Learning Disabilities Association of America.]

### The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities

Learning disabilities is a general term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities. These disorders are intrinsic to the individual, presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction, and may occur across the life span. Problems in self-regulatory behaviors, social perception, and social interaction may exist with learning disabilities but do not by themselves constitute a learning disability. Although learning disabilities may occur concomitantly with other

disabilities (e.g., sensory impairment, mental retardation, serious emotional disturbance), or with extrinsic influences (such as cultural differences, insufficient or inappropriate instruction), they are not the result of those conditions or influences. [National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (1990).]

### Diagnostic and Statistical Manual-Fourth Edition Text Revision (DSM-IV-TR; 2000)

#### 315.00 Reading Disorder

- A. Reading achievement, as measured by individually administered standardized tests of reading accuracy and comprehension, is substantially below that expected given the person's chronological age, measured intelligence, and age-appropriate education.
- B. The disturbance in Criterion A significantly interferes with academic achievement or activities of daily living that require reading skills.
- C. If a sensory deficit is present, the reading difficulties are in excess of those usually associated with it. [Note: definitions of Mathematics Disorder (315.1), Disorder of Written Expression (315.2), and Learning Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (315.9) are similar.]

Additionally:

Learning Disorders are diagnosed when the individual's achievement on individually administered, standardized tests in reading, mathematics, or written expression is substantially below that expected for age, schooling, and level of intelligence. The learning problems significantly interfere with academic achievement or activities of daily living that require reading, mathematical, or writing skills. A variety of statistical approaches can be used to establish that a discrepancy is significant. *Substantially below* [italics in original] is usually defined as a discrepancy of more than 2 standard deviations between achievement and IQ. A smaller dis-

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crepancy between achievement and IQ (i.e., between 1 and 2 standard deviations) is sometimes used, especially in cases where an individual's performance on an IQ test may have been compromised by an associated disorder in cognitive processing, a comorbid mental disorder or general medical condition, or the individual's ethnic or cultural background. If a sensory deficit is present, the learning difficulties must be in excess of those usually associated with the deficit...Individualized testing is always required to make the diagnosis of a Learning Disorder...Learning Disorders must be differentiated from normal variations in academic attainment [boldface in original] and from scholastic difficulties due to lack of opportunity, poor teaching, or cultural factors (pp. 49-51).

**New York [Part 200.1, (mm) (6)]**

"Learning disability" means a student with a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which manifests itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, neurological impairment, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. The term does not include students who have learning problems which are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor handicaps, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage. A student who exhibits a discrepancy of 50 percent or more between expected achievement and actual achievement determined on an individual basis shall be deemed to have a learning disability.

While all of these definitions have merit, none has the force of law in establishing eligibility under IDEA, which provides legal entitlements to children meeting the congressional and regulatory criteria. State definitions and

regulations cannot supersede the federal criteria although they can exceed them—that is, they can provide a higher level of entitlements, but they cannot restrict the entitlements provided under the act.

In 1997, Congress passed a substantial revision of IDEA. In 1999, OSERS published its final regulations implementing IDEA, defining a specific learning disability in the same way as it did in 1977. It is interesting to note that in the Federal definition of a learning disability [§300.7 (c)(10)] as well as in the definitions of most advocacy groups and States, there is no mention of the term "severe discrepancy." One must read further in the relevant *Regulations* in order to find any mention of severe discrepancy. In IDEA the term is found at §300.541 under the heading "Criteria for determining the existence of a specific learning disability" (below, italics added):

- (a) A team may determine that a child has a specific learning disability if
  - (1) The child does not achieve commensurate with his or her age and ability levels in one or more of the areas listed in paragraph (a)(2) of this section, if provided with learning experiences appropriate for the child's age and ability levels; and
  - (2) The team finds that a child has a *severe discrepancy between achievement and intellectual ability* in one or more of the following areas:
    - (i) Oral expression.
    - (ii) Listening comprehension.
    - (iii) Written expression.
    - (iv) Basic reading skill.
    - (v) Reading comprehension.
    - (vi) Mathematics calculation.
    - (vii) Mathematics reasoning.

We would note that, in this one instance, the *Regulations* say a team "may determine." Is there a difference between "may determine" and "must determine" or "this is the only way to determine?" Note that the *Regulations* do not define a severe discrepancy.

There appears to be a distinction between the definition of a learning dis-

ability and the criteria used to establish qualification for special education services based upon a disability. The definition of specific learning disability establishes the presence of a "disorder" which is manifesting itself in one or more areas of academic achievement as listed above. With respect to other disabilities, the term "severe" and the phrase "adversely affects educational performance" are generally thought of as referring to some absolute deficit. However, when considering SLD eligibility, "severity" must be measured against the child's expected performance, not against some arbitrary general standard. The common requirement is that in determining eligibility under the SLD classification as in others, the team must also find that the child needs special education in order to receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE)—still another term in special education law that is not operationally defined. [Although it is generally accepted by the courts that the benefits expected must be non trivial or meaningful, "need" must be determined by looking at the whole child—a team may not assume that a child does not need special education services simply because he or she is receiving passing grades and/or is being passed from one grade to the next (see *Florence County v. Carter*, 1991).]

If this IDEA '97 regulation [§300.541] is taken at face value, there must be a severe discrepancy between ability (IQ?) and achievement (test scores?) in order for a student to be identified as having a learning disability. Obviously one should not read this section of the regulations in isolation and believe that the mere presence of a severe discrepancy establishes the presence of a learning disability. The severe discrepancy may be the result of factors other than a "disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes." As noted above, the *Regulations* require that the multidisciplinary team rule out other factors before determining eligibility as having a learning disability. IDEA '97 Final Regulations,

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***Yes, Virginia, there is a Severe Discrepancy Clause, but is it Too Much Ado About Something?***

Subpart A §300.7 (c)(10)(ii) notes:

**Disorders not included. The term does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.**

The criteria for determining SLD involve a multi-step process. One step is for the team to determine that the child is not achieving at a level commensurate with age and ability when provided with educational opportunities. This forces the team, in the ideal world, to rule out apedagogia (lack of instruction) and dyspedagogia (inappropriate instruction) as the source of the learning problem. Unfortunately, teams seldom determine, or even consider, that the source of the child's learning problems is the teacher(s) or the administrator(s), or a mismatch between the child and the curriculum. Instead, the child usually is identified as the problem.

Additionally, as a condition of eligibility, the team would need to determine that the child required special educational services in order to receive FAPE [§300.7(a)(1)].

- Okay, I see the difference between the specific definition of a child with a learning disability and the general definition of one who meets the "criteria for eligibility for special education services," but doesn't the IDEA language, and more specifically the language of the courts, offer more definitive answers than these?

Sorry Virginia, but the courts, in many instances, seem to offer little true guidance in these matters. For example, taking it out of the realm of SLD one would at least expect Circuit Court judges to have some sort of consensus over procedural matters—due process is, after all, their bread and butter. But even in such seemingly "legal" areas of special education law as "Who bears the burden of proof?" the Federal Circuit

Courts are split as to how that should be determined. "Is additional evidence allowed upon appeal?" is another seemingly clear-cut legal question upon which the courts should be expected to rule with decisiveness. The First Circuit Court allows supplemental evidence but no embellishments of previous testimony; the 3rd Circuit Court says district courts may exclude additional evidence but with discretion; the 4th says if the evidence was available at the time of the due process hearing, district courts may exclude it; the 6th allows new evidence, but not on new issues; the 7th allows "supplemental" evidence; the 9th agrees with the 1st and 7th; and the 11th Circuit Court threw up its hands and said that whether additional evidence will be allowed is up to the "sound discretion" of the district court judge (TSE, December 15, 2000, p. 5). We make this point only to emphasize how perilous it is to base a conclusion on any single case, much less a due process hearing.

Due process decisions only have force in the system wherein they were issued, and then only if not overturned by a court of competent jurisdiction. There is a danger in over-generalizing the results, because they may contain some "bad law;" that is, legal decisions based in part on findings that would have been overturned on appeal, or decisions agreed to by the school simply because settling was more cost effective than litigating over principle. For example, a hearing officer might find that a child had failed to make progress based on standard scores that remained constant over time, certainly a finding that can be appealed—but if the IEP were inappropriate, the hearing officer's possible error would never be reviewed and, therefore, never be corrected.

Additionally, some caselaw has force only in the region in which the case was decided. For example, a fairly well-known case, *Larry P. v. Riles*, which sought to prohibit the use of intelligence tests in assessing African-Americans was upheld in The 9th Circuit Court (1984) but it applies only

to California. No other circuit has ruled against using IQ tests for African-Americans (OCR, 2000).

- Given what the law says, isn't the use of some statistical formula or computer program not only required, but probably the only way to determine a severe discrepancy?

First, Virginia let us say that discrepancy formulae are statistical nightmares (Aaron, 1997; McLeod, 1974; Reynolds, 1990). Furthermore, the absence of some discrepancy should not be used as the sole criterion to exclude children from a specific learning disability (SLD) classification. Discrepancies might be better thought of as presumptive in nature, not exclusive. Since the regulations provide little guidance and no specific requirement regarding any particular way of measuring the discrepancy, teams appear to have great latitude regarding how they make discrepancy decisions.

One state, New York, added a sentence into its definition of Learning Disability (see above) that notes "A child found to have a 50% discrepancy between expected achievement and actual achievement shall be deemed to have a learning disability." Almost 20 years ago, in *Riley vs. Ambach* (United States Court of Appeals, Second Circuit 668 F.2d 635; 1981 U.S. App. December 16, 1980, Argued May 19, 1981, Decided), the court ruled that New York could not use the absence of the "50% discrepancy" to exclude children. The Court concluded that the use of the 50% standard interferes with the proper identification of learning disabled children since it operates to eliminate consideration of factors and the use of techniques that do not, "given the present state of the art," lend themselves to quantification. The clause has come to be defined, maybe as it should have been all along, as a presumptive clause: If all things are in place you can presume the child eligible. But, if a numerical discrepancy isn't clearly evident, you cannot, on that fact alone,

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## ***Yes, Virginia, there is a Severe Discrepancy Clause, but is it Too Much Ado About Something?***

exclude the child. We argue that this is true of IDEA. IF there is a discrepancy you MAY identify the child as having a Learning Disability, BUT if there is no numerical discrepancy, you cannot automatically exclude the child. Similar to catching the child red-handed in the act of committing a crime—you have the evidence, presume the child guilty. But what if you don't catch the child red-handed, does that mean the child could not be guilty? Obviously, there may be other convincing evidence.

Second, as far back as August 23, 1977, the newly created OSERS published its first regulations in implementation of Public Law 94-142. Those regulations included the following statement:

**“No single procedure is used as the sole criterion for determining an appropriate educational program for a child” (emphasis ours).**

One might argue that if a MDT uses a severe discrepancy as the sole criterion to exclude a child, it has violated this clause of IDEA. The Department of Education indicated an intent to review current research on learning disabilities and to make changes to the definition, but as of May, 1999, it had not done so, saying this in the appendix to the regulations:

**“[T]he Department plans to carefully review research findings, expert opinion, and practical knowledge over the next several years to determine whether changes should be proposed to the procedures for evaluating children suspected of having specific learning disabilities.”**

Many teams and districts are tempted to establish mathematical formulas to identify students with specific learning disabilities. Some commercially produced computer scoring programs automatically calculate discrepancies. These formulas attempt to measure the severity of the discrepancy between ability and achievement. We advise that such formulas not be used

as the be-all and end-all of learning disability determination. Over reliance upon a "magic number" can expose a system to an adverse finding (e.g., Long Beach Unified School District, 1998). It is therefore not wise to try to use automatic formulas to establish specific learning disabilities, mental retardation, hearing impairment, or any other educational handicap. If a team or district were absolutely determined to use a "discrepancy formula," professional "best practice" would suggest the following rules [see also McLeod, 1974 and Reynolds, 1990. These issues are also discussed thoughtfully in Flanagan, McGrew, and Ortiz (2000) and Mather and Schrank (2001).]

1. The formula should use some form of standard score (including normal curve equivalents). Percentile ranks cannot be used for mathematical comparisons. Grade and age equivalents should not be used for making eligibility decisions. The ability and achievement tests should, of course, be reported with the same statistics (grade equivalents are deceptively simple and may misrepresent the severity of a child's problem (e.g., Willis & Dumont, 1998, p. 223). Therefore, they should be used with caution. However, they can sometimes be used more effectively than standard scores in documenting progress (e.g., the 9th Circuit Court in a recent case wrote, "HISD argued that passing marks and advancement from grade to grade were sufficient indicia to satisfy the IDEA). And on this dispute the district court is correct that a disabled child's development should be measured not by his relation to the rest of the class, but rather with respect to the individual student, as declining percentile scores do not necessarily represent a lack of educational benefit, but only a child's inability to maintain the same level of academic progress achieved by his non-disabled peers " (Houston Independent School District v. Caius, 2000).

2. The formula should take into account the phenomenon of "regression toward the mean," although a number of states have adopted non-regression formulas for the sake of simplicity. When one attempts to predict one variable from another, the predicted score is likely to be closer to the mean than is the predictor. If the student's ability score is not exactly average, the achievement score can be expected to fall between the ability score and the mean.

Since discrepancy formulas are concerned only with achievement lower than ability, there are two situations to consider. If the student's ability measure is higher than the mean (for instance, 100 for most intelligence tests), the expected achievement level without learning disabilities or other damaging influences will fall between the mean and the ability score, or above 100 and lower than the ability score. If the ability score is lower than the mean, the normally expected achievement score will again fall between the ability score and the mean, higher than the ability score. In this instance, the discrepancy would be from an expected achievement score higher than the ability score. The lower the ability score, the more the expected achievement score will exceed it. The amount of regression toward the mean is determined by the correlation between the two measures. The lower the correlation, the greater the regression. Contrary to general belief, the correlation between measures of ability and achievement is modest. In one example, Hammill and McNutt (1981) reviewed all correlational studies between reading and other variables in 25 journals from 1950 through 1978. Their meta-analysis found, among other things, that the median correlation between WISC and WISC-R Full Scale IQs and read-

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ing scores, based on 34 coefficients in 13 studies, was only +0.44. This means that about 19% of the variance in reading scores could be accounted for by WISC(-R) Full Scale IQs. The remaining 81% of the variance in reading scores was attributable to other factors!

3. The measurement of a discrepancy between ability and achievement should take into account the Standard Error of Measurement of Differences (SEmdiff). SEM bands around both scores, preferably offset to reflect regression toward the mean can provide a rough approximation with less mathematics. Any formula devised by a team would have to yield a band of discrepancies rather than a single cut-off number. However, such bands are arbitrary cut-offs, so provisions would still need to be made for considering cases falling at the edges of such bands.

4. If the team were considering all seven achievement areas blindly, the size of the differences required for significance would be slightly higher than that needed for a single, predetermined achievement area, based on referral data. The more potential discrepancies being considered, the greater the possibility of a significant discrepancy occurring by accident, by pure chance.

5. It is highly improbable that the most valid measure of ability for a learning disabled student is the Full Scale IQ (GCA, GIA, etc.). The same learning disabilities that depress achievement are likely to depress scores on at least some parts of ability tests as well (Mark Penalty). The team is evaluating discrepancies between achievement and levels of intellectual ability, not overall intelligence. Consequently, the team should often use measures of intellectual ability other than full scale scores (IQs, GCAs, GIAs, etc.).

IDEA, at §300.535, reminds teams to examine the child's ability, without allowing the very disability you might be identifying to impact the scores:

**(e) Tests are selected and administered so as best to ensure that if a test is administered to a child with impaired sensory, manual, or speaking skills, the test results accurately reflect the child's aptitude or achievement level or whatever other factors the test purports to measure, rather than reflecting the child's impaired sensory, manual, or speaking skills (unless those skills are the factors that the test purports to measure).**

6. The achievement test scores may not be the most valid measures of a student's achievement. Some students perform poorly on standardized tests, but succeed in class and do not require special education services. Other students may do well on individual, standardized tests, but still have legitimate special education needs because they cannot function in class without a program of special education. It is not reasonable to use the standardized test scores as the only measures of achievement. Measures of classroom performance must also be considered.

7. Tests are not interchangeable. Two intelligence tests, even from a District's "approved" list (another unwise practice, unless exceptions are allowed for special circumstances), are not likely to yield the same score for the same student. In fact, the same test probably will not give the same score to the same student twice in succession. Consider, for example, a hypothetical student with a significant strength or significant weakness in fluid reasoning (Gf). The strength or weakness would have almost no direct effect on the Wechsler Scales, but would be central to one-seventh of the WJ-R or WJ III, and one-third of the DAS (Flanagan, McGrew, & Ortiz, 2000;

Flanagan & Ortiz, 2001; McGrew & Flanagan, 1998). Differences among content, formats, and scores among academic achievement tests are even more extreme. Discrepancy formulas can lead to bizarre efforts to find combinations of IQ and achievement tests that will confirm someone's belief that the student does, or does not, have an educational disability.

Clearly, the mathematical process of rigidly determining severe discrepancies is not a simple matter. In fact, we do not believe that it is worth pursuing. Rigid adherence to any formula will often violate the most important consideration of all: to be considered to have an educational disability, a student must require a program of special education. In this respect, learning disabilities are no different from other educational disabilities. For instance, one student with an intellectual disability (mental retardation) with a certain IQ score will require special education services and will have an educational disability. Another student with the same score on the same test will not. The same consideration applies to students with various Snellen vision ratings or better ear average hearing ratings. Some students with a given score will require special education and some will not. Only those who require a program of special education have educational disabilities. No mathematical formula should be used to deny services to students who truly require a program of special education. No mathematical formula should be used to falsely "label" a student who does not require special education services, even if the student may require accommodations under PL 94-142 (U.S. Congress, 1975). "The determination of an educational handicap is a Team decision, not an exercise in arithmetic" (Willis & Dumont, 1998, p. 112).

The question as to whether a child does or does not have a severe discrepancy is not as straightforward as it might appear. While mathematical

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formulas offer a statistical method for calculating the severity of a child's discrepancy, they do not take into account some of the other factors that a team might (must) consider in reaching its determination. At the Learning Disabilities Association of North Carolina (LDANC) website, they say:

The Department of Education, in its letter to LDA of North Carolina, wrote that it is "generally" appropriate for the multidisciplinary team to include in its written report (to determine eligibility) information regarding "outside or extra" instructional help or support which "may indicate the child's current educational achievements reflects the service augmentation, not what the child's achievement would be without such help." Such information should be considered by the team in deciding if the child has "a severe discrepancy between achievement and ability that is not correctable without special education and related services." If, for example, a student with an IQ of 125 and significantly lower achievement scores maintains passing or even exemplary grades, the team should consider whether or not the student achieves only because of special assistance or support. If the student receives no special help, the multidisciplinary team might conclude that student would not need special education. If, on the other hand, the student has tutoring several times a week, works for three to five hours each night on homework with parental assistance, and must have extra time to complete tests in order to pass or maintain a certain grade level, that student might be considered to have a "specific learning disability." His/her grades may reflect all the assistance the student is getting rather than the student's actual achievement level. [Reference: Letter of Clarification from Thomas Hehir, Director, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), to Ms. Patricia M. Lillie, and Rebecca Felton, Ph.D., Learning Disabilities Association of North Carolina, Inc., dated April 5, 1995.]

There are other issues that may be argued before a hearing officer when a child does not appear to meet state criteria. Brody v. Dare County, a North Carolina case argued by Peter Wright, an eminent attorney in the area of special education law, included the following (Findings of Fact provided by a state hearing officer):

Dyslexia is a learning disability for the purpose of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. Section 1400 et seq. (IDEA), and a child with special needs pursuant to North Carolina's Special Education Act, G. S 11C, Article 9 (State Act).

The "Matthew Effect" refers to individuals, who have difficulty learning to read, and whose reading problems are not remediated effectively early in their school career. Because of this these children often remain significantly behind peers in reading skills. If an individual fails to learn well in first, second, and third grade—which are critical grades—then these individuals do not read the amount of material that is necessary to continue to develop good reading skills.

- Q. When determining a severe discrepancy, doesn't the child have to have at least average ability?

There are some misconceptions that exist about the regulations regarding learning disabilities and a level of cognitive functioning, some that are even codified into state regulations. IQ is not an exception to eligibility. Whether a child's IQ is high or low, the team must still consider whether he or she meets the eligibility criteria in 300.541. (Letter to Ulissi, OSEP, 1992). There is no place in IDEA that necessitates an IQ level for classification as a child with a learning disability. IDEA '97 Final Regulations, Subpart A §300.7 (c)(10)(ii) does note:

(ii) Disorders not included. The term

does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.

On first glance, this section would appear to exclude, among others, any child who is cognitively impaired (mentally retarded). However, the clause contains the operative phrase "primarily the result of . . ." A child with low cognitive scores may in fact be a child with a disorder in a basic psychological process and more appropriately identified as LD than MR. Also, a child with mental retardation may additionally have a disorder in a basic psychological process that depresses the child's achievement in one academic domain significantly below even the low expectations from the child's measured levels of intellectual ability and below the child's levels of achievement in other domains. Such a child would have both mental retardation and a specific learning disability, because the excessively low achievement in the one domain was caused by the processing disorder: that particular "learning problem" was not "primarily the result of . . . mental retardation."

States have run afoul of OSERS when they have written state regulations that are more restrictive than the federal criteria in CFR Section 300.541. Wisconsin's original definition of a specific learning disability was confusing, and led some teams to conclude that otherwise qualified children weren't eligible because they had IQs below 90, and other teams to conclude an otherwise eligible child under the federal statute was not eligible in Wisconsin because there was only one area of discrepancy.

An audit of their public school systems showed that while most schools were in compliance, some teams believed (1) children with IQs

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below 90 could not qualify for services, or (2) that if children only qualified in one area they could not be served, or (3) that if a child had only a discrepancy, s/he was automatically eligible without first determining a need for special educational services. They issued the following statement to the local educational agencies (LEAs) as part of their corrective action plan (a plan necessary for them to continue receiving special education dollars from the federal government, ED having frozen their funds):

**“If an M-team determines that a child has a significant discrepancy between functional achievement and expected achievement in one or more of the areas listed at 34 CFR 300.541 and needs special education and related services because of that significant discrepancy, the child may not be excluded from LD eligibility because: 1) The child's intellectual capacity is below a particular level (unless the child is determined to have a cognitive disability), or 2) the child has a significant discrepancy in only one of the academic or readiness areas identified at 34 CFR 300.541.”**

Wisconsin's interpretation, unchallenged by OSERS, is summarized in the following paragraph from their letter to Thomas Hehir, then OSERS' director:

**“M-teams in Wisconsin generally recognize that the criteria contained in both the federal regulations and the state rules must guide an evaluation, but do not direct an M-team to make a finding of LD eligibility or ineligibility for a particular child. Both the state and federal criteria are permissive in that they require evaluation teams to consider certain eligibility criteria, but they do not require an evaluation team to reach a conclusion solely because the child meets or fails to meet those stated criteria. The rules require evaluation teams to consider the criteria and**

**the performance of the child against those criteria, but they also require the evaluation teams to use professional judgment in making individual eligibility determinations.”**

- Q. So what are the issues that a MDT might consider when deciding whether a child qualifies as a child with a specific learning disability?

It is probably not possible to list ALL the factors that a team might consider in reaching a decision, but court decisions and OSERS letters have given us some suggestions.

1. Neither a low IQ score nor a high IQ score (see above) may be used to exclude a child from consideration as LD. [http://www.ldanatl.org/bulletins/AC\\_1\\_96.html](http://www.ldanatl.org/bulletins/AC_1_96.html)
2. The absence of a numerical severe discrepancy cannot, alone, be used as the criterion for excluding or for including a child from or in special education.
3. It is "generally" appropriate for the multidisciplinary team to include in its written report (to determine eligibility) information regarding "outside or extra" instructional help or support which "may indicate the child's current educational achievements reflects the service augmentation, not what the child's achievement would be without such help." Within context, for example, a child need not have failing grades, if he or she is passing only as a result of special service or support such as tutoring twice a week or a parent who spends three to five hours with the child on homework each evening.
4. The team should understand and take into consideration both the Mathew Effect (Stanovich, 1994) and the Mark Penalty. If there is prior evidence of higher IQ, and present testing shows a decline (Mathew Effect) that results in the child being ineligible, the team may consider whether the disability may have resulted in significantly different

learning experiences which have negatively impacted the scores. IQ scores, depressed by a disorder in basic psychological processes, cannot be used in any ability-achievement comparisons. If the team believes that the same disorder in basic psychological processes that has caused low achievement has also depressed an IQ score (Mark Penalty), the team may consider this in the explanation of no discrepancy.

5. If the multidisciplinary team determines that the assessment measures do not accurately reflect a discrepancy between achievement and ability, the team should state in writing the assessment procedures used, the assessment results, the criteria applied to judge the importance of any difference between expected and current achievement, and whether a substantial discrepancy is present that is not correctable without the provision of special education.

Additionally, here are a few things that a team can consider in determining if there is a severe discrepancy:

- A. How much help did the student receive (within the context of OSEP's letter, referring to the help provided by parents, but certainly a standard that could be extrapolated to children who, for example, no longer had a severe discrepancy after three years of intensive service)?
- B. Did the child's IQ scores go down as a result of the Matthew Effect or Mark Penalty? [In theory, if the team believes that the child's FSIQ went down as a result of his or her having failed to thrive academically; that is, the child wasn't exposed to the same things as other children of the same age and intelligence—then it can infer higher potential, especially if previous test scores were higher. There is a potentially interesting Catch 22 (Heller, 1961) there; the team would also have to rule out inappropriate instruction as being primarily causal.]

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C. Is there another way of documenting the federal standard other than the state's formula? [If so, the team could consider the child for eligibility. While we do not have documented instances of this, failure to consider other standards could leave one vulnerable under Section 504.]

Other jurisdictions outside the 9th Circuit Court have not accepted the limitations imposed by *Larry P. v. Riles*. However, when teams doubt the validity of an IQ score based on one or more of the reasons noted above, we advocate that the team consider the same factors that California would review in making an eligibility determination (i.e., using data from the child's educational and social history as well as adaptive behavior data to make inferences about the child's potential). The total evaluation and determination of eligibility for Special Education must be an integrated process. Again, SLD identification is a professional judgment by a team, not an exercise in arithmetic.

According to IDEA §300.540:

**The determination of whether a child suspected of having a specific learning disability is a child with a disability as defined in §300.7, must be made by ...the child's parents and a team of qualified professionals . . .**

8. The federal regulations require that the child demonstrate a disability in a basic psychological process which would include (but is not restricted to) a perceptual disability. This is basic to the identification process, but it is not as complicated as some would make it. While the idea that there must be a processing disorder that is inherent to or intrinsic to the child seems complex, in fact for most children establishing such a disorder can be as simple as identifying the child's learning problem and narrowing in on other, highly probable causes.

"[I]t is not necessary for the multi-

disciplinary team to demonstrate or measure the existence of a basic disorder in psychological processing in order to determine that a child has a specific learning disability. Rather, if a psychological processing disorder exists, it could manifest itself through a variety of symptoms that could be observed such as hyperactivity, attention problems, concept association problems, etc. See 34 CFR [Section] 300.542. The end result of these symptoms is a severe discrepancy between achievement and ability." [Letter to Kennedy, IDELR 16 EHLR 1082, (OSEP, 1990).]

For example, if the child has trouble with word identification, it would be reasonable to infer that, if the child's learning problems are not a result of cultural, environmental, or economic factors or one of the other exclusionary factors listed above, that the child might have a deficit in phonological processing, fluent retrieval, and/or oral vocabulary—all basic psychological processes within the meaning of the *Regulations*. These hypotheses could be tested quickly and easily by observation or by specialized tests. So, Virginia, to summarize our points, we offer:

### LOGICAL STEPS IN DETERMINATION OF A SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITY

**1. Is there a problem with academic performance?** *Problems may be subtle or difficult to document, but if there are no academic problems at all, there is no educational disability. [A problem with an important life function other than academic performance might trigger identification under Section 504 of P.L. 93-112 or the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).] Pay close attention to reports of problems that do not result in low grades even though they interfere with learning. For example, the teacher might already be providing an informal program of special education;*

*grades might be based 25% on attendance, 50% on simply turning in homework regardless of quality; and 25% on class participation; or grades might be based on an erroneous perception of the student's academic potential.*

A. Does the student have low scores on group or individual achievement tests?

1. Look at any history of test scores. Be cautious, though, with tests that are used so frequently that the expected growth from test to retest is less than the 90% confidence band or even the SEM. Check the tables.

2. Look at the pattern of strengths and weaknesses on the test scores. Some group tests offer item analyses. Even though the norm-referenced tests do not function well as criterion-referenced measures, those analyses may contain useful information.

B. Is the student receiving low or failing grades in a class?

1. Again, track the history of class grades.

2. Try to determine the basis for the student's grades. High grades might be based on special marking considerations.

C. Is the student working much too hard or much too long to earn adequate grades?

1. Parents may be the best source of this information. A parent interview is essential. We need to know also what the parents would like to learn from the evaluation.

2. Be sure to interview the student. Sometimes it helps to obtain a copy of the report card and discuss it in detail with the student. What does the student want to learn from the evaluation?

D. Is the teacher making extraordinary adaptations or accommodations for the student?

1. Teacher interviews are essential. We need to know what has been

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done, what is being done, how well those interventions have worked and are working, and what specific things the teachers would like to learn from the evaluation.

2. The classroom observation is often more useful for observing the teaching and the environment than for observing the student.

E. Is there a notably deficient specific area of performance (e.g., tests, homework, note-taking, etc.)?

F. Is there another indication of insufficient academic performance?

### 2. Are there one or more disorders in basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written?

[See [http://alpha.fdu.edu/~dumont/basic\\_disorders.htm](http://alpha.fdu.edu/~dumont/basic_disorders.htm).] *This step follows next in a logical sequence, but determination of any disorder(s) may not be clear until completion of psychological, educational, speech and language, occupational therapy, physical therapy, vision, hearing or other evaluations. There should be multiple, convergent confirmations of any disorders.*

A. Can each disorder be observed or inferred from academic performance?

1. Again, consider all aspects and all measures of academic performance.

2. Looking for possible cause-and-effect relationships between basic processes and academic performance. There needs to be a real-life connection between the hypotheses and what is actually happening with the student's performance in school.

B. Can each disorder be documented through assessment?

1. Once we have documented the deficient achievement and are looking for possible reasons, it becomes more permissible to use poorly normed and completely informal measures and observations. Formal assessment

of ability and achievement levels needs to be done, at least in part, with extremely well-normed, reliable instruments that are valid for their intended purposes, but exploring within the area of deficient achievement may (and sometimes, given the state of the art, must) be done with less statistical rigor. The disorders need to be demonstrated clearly, reliably, and convincingly, but not always as test scores. The severity of a learning disability is measured by the severity of its impact on achievement, not by the severity of any basic-process disorder.

2. The McGrew, Flanagan, and Ortiz integrated Cattell-Horn-Carroll (CHC) Cross-Battery Approach is a very useful framework for considering many, though not all, basic-process disorders [See <http://home.att.net/~gfgc/index.htm>.]

### 3. Can the team make a logical argument that each identified disorder manifests itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations? It is not enough simply to specify deficient achievement and a disorder. There needs to be a logical, cause-and-effect relationship between the two.

A. As noted above, we need to demonstrate how the purported basic-process disorder is impairing the carefully documented achievement area. This demonstration will require a thorough analysis of the student's academic skills. A low test score or low class grade is not enough. We need to show the mechanisms operating in the deficient achievement area(s). Examples of misaligned math problems worked left-to-right and bottom-to-top might, for instance, demonstrate the effect of a visual perception problem on math. The assumption that a visual per-

ception problem impaired listening comprehension might be more difficult to justify unless, for example, we could show how deficient visual imagery was interfering with the listening comprehension.

B. Research evidence can be cited to show relationships between certain basic processes (e.g., phonological abilities or rapid naming) and certain areas of achievement (e.g., reading decoding). [See <http://home.att.net/~gfgc/recent.htm> for some examples.]

C. Some clearly identifiable disorders have no discernable effect on achievement. Simply finding a disorder does not establish a learning disability (e.g., one author's (JOW) severe rhythm disorder impairs his singing, dancing, and clapping in time to music, but the effect on academic achievement is trivial, only diminishing his appreciation of poetry).

D. It is the disorder in the basic psychological process that distinguishes a specific learning disability from the disabilities and disadvantages ruled out in the federal regulations [(300.7(c)(10)] for learning disabilities ("... learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.")

E. It is essential, as much as possible, to distinguish learning disabilities from dyspedagogy and apedagogy [300.541(1) "The child does not achieve commensurate with his or her age and ability levels in one or more of the areas listed in paragraph (a)(2) of this section, if provided with learning experiences appropriate for the child's age and ability levels" (emphasis ours).]

### 4. What is the best estimate of

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**the student's actual intellectual ability?** See Mark 4:25. The team must not allow a psychological processing disorder to depress estimates of both intelligence and achievement and then mindlessly conclude there is no discrepancy between the two. For example, verbal and visual/spatial learning disabilities, respectively, will depress verbal (Gc) and visual, spatial (Gv) intelligence measures. For another example, a disorder in quantitative knowledge (Gq) would depress the WISC Arithmetic and Verbal IQ scores and DAS Sequential & Quantitative and Nonverbal (fluid) Scale scores. Logically, the intelligence test should be chosen only after the basic-process disorders have been delineated. The McGrew, Flanagan, and Ortiz integrated CHC Cross-Battery Approach can be a very useful framework for considering intellectual abilities [See

<http://home.att.net/~gfgc/index.htm>.]

- A. Which scales, factors, or subtests on intelligence tests are likely to be depressed by the disorder or disorders?
- B. Which intelligence test, scales, or factors would be likely to yield an estimate of actual intellectual ability uncontaminated by the disorder or disorders?
- C. What is the best estimate of the student's actual intellectual ability based on those measures?
- D. Have we considered at least all of the broad abilities in the McGrew, Flanagan, and Ortiz integrated CHC theory? It is not prudent, for example, to use a test, such as the WISC-III, that omits fluid reasoning unless we supplement it with a measure of that ability.

### 5. Is there a severe discrepancy between the student's level of intellectual ability (4.C.) and the student's achievement in one or more of the following areas?

Remember that achievement and ability may be assessed by means other than test scores (I. B.–I. F.). Achievement tests must be chosen

thoughtfully. For example, a brief achievement test is not a valid measure of academic performance for a student with a short attention span, and an untimed, silent reading test will not pick up problems with reading fluency. Do not obsess over formulae. Some data will not fit formulae. The team must apply reasoned, professional judgment, not simply indulge in an exercise in arithmetic. By our interpretation of federal law and by most state laws, it is not lawful to deny services to a student who truly has a learning disability simply because of the results of a statistical exercise. [See [http://alpha.fdu.edu/~dumont/riley\\_v\\_ambach.htm](http://alpha.fdu.edu/~dumont/riley_v_ambach.htm)]. A statistical comparison of ability and achievement must use only one set of norms (e.g., national age or grade) [See [http://alpha.fdu.edu/~dumont/age\\_vs\\_grade\\_based\\_scores.htm](http://alpha.fdu.edu/~dumont/age_vs_grade_based_scores.htm)] and should use predicted achievement scores rather than simple differences

[[http://alpha.fdu.edu/~dumont/Severe\\_Discrepancy\\_Discrepancies.htm#SD2](http://alpha.fdu.edu/~dumont/Severe_Discrepancy_Discrepancies.htm#SD2), [http://alpha.fdu.edu/~dumont/Determining\\_predicted\\_ach.htm](http://alpha.fdu.edu/~dumont/Determining_predicted_ach.htm), and <http://home.att.net/~gfgc/psycho101b.htm>].

Remember that these achievement areas have many components, including, for example, vocabulary or factual knowledge, fluency, independence. Few, if any, achievement tests cover all aspects of the requisite skills. Do not use tests on which the student receives very low or nearly perfect raw scores, but find tests on which the student passes and fails several items

[<http://alpha.fdu.edu/~dumont/McGee.htm>].

6. Are the discrepancies caused primarily by the disorders? There is absolutely nothing in IDEA to suggest that a student cannot have a learning disability *in addition* to other disorders. However, the particular dis-

crepancy ("learning problems") in question must not be primarily the result of a vision, hearing, or motor disability, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage [300.7 (c) (10) (ii)], even if one or more of those disorders or disadvantages may be causing other, separately identified learning problems. For example, a child with mental retardation might also have a specific learning disability in math with extremely low achievement severely discrepant from low predicted achievement because of a disorder in working memory. Similarly, a deaf or blind child might have unusual difficulty learning American Sign Language or Braille because of spatial perceptual weaknesses. If we have been careful in our identification and analysis of the disorder(s), we should be able to separate them and their effects from the effects of disadvantages and other disabilities.

7. Does the student require special modifications of, or accommodations in, the educational program in order to achieve at levels commensurate with age and ability (4. C.)? Here is the crucial issue for identification under Section 504 or the ADA. The needed accommodations or modifications should be more than we would routinely ask of a teacher of moderate skill, experience, and dedication.

8. Does the student require a uniquely designed program of special instruction in order to achieve at levels commensurate with age and ability (4. C.)? This is the crucial issue for identification of an *educational* disability. If the student does not require a uniquely designed program of special instruction, but meets the other criteria, the identification should probably be under Section 504 rather than the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

### References

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# Finding School Psychology's Identity, Still

Ronald S. Palomares, Ph.D.

American Psychological Association

School psychology is still searching for an identity embraced by all. School psychology's identity appeared to have reached an impasse almost 20 years ago, resulting in a dilemma that was written about and discussed many times since. It is clear from Jack Bardon's writings (Bardon, 1982a, 1982b, 1983) and the accompanying comments and responses that the ideological and philosophical differences between the American Psychological Association (APA) and the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) we see today were just as vast and separate two decades ago (e.g., Kratochwill, 1982, Reschly, 1982, Winkur, 1982). On one hand, there is APA's psychology "specialty in search of an identity" (Bardon, 1983) and on the other hand we find NASP's view of school psychology being its own profession with the entry level for independent practice being at the non-doctoral level (Bardon, 1982b). APA's School Psychology Division (Division 16) weighed in heavily in the mid-1990's in this discussion (e.g., see president's columns from 1995 to 2000 in *The School Psychologist*). Since the discussions stirred by Bardon and others began, there were advances in consolidated meetings and agreements between the two organizations of APA and NASP with these underlying differences that seemed to have been set aside, but were never able to ignore.

Division 16 (D16) surveyed its membership in 1995-1996 to determine its view on defining our profession. Based upon those results and additional discussions, the Executive Committee for D16 forwarded a motion that detailed the role of D16, defined its mission and stated that the "...most appropriate name for the practice specialty is doctoral school psychology" (Illback, 1996, p. 41). The APA/NASP Interorganizational Committee (APA/NASP IOC) has struggled with these philosophical issues while at the same time working to strengthen school psychology as both a profession and as a specialty of the profession of psychology. In the early 1980s, there

was even a joint accreditation project between both organizations (APA/NASP to Try Joint Accreditation, 1982). Similarly, there was mutual work and agreement between APA and NASP, due in large part to D16 and the work of the APA/NASP IOC on the development of APA's Specialty Guidelines for School Psychology (1998). Recently, Rick Short (2000) discussed the two cultures, similar to Bardon's (1982a) discussion and brought the issues back to the forefront as NASP completed the process of renewing their guidelines for practice and training.

Unfortunately we find that although there are things that the two organizations can mutually agree upon, the basic philosophies do impede complete agreement and successful collaboration. The recent adoption by NASP of their Standards for the Credentialing of School Psychologists, Standards for the Training and Field Placement Programs in School Psychology, and Standards for the Provision of School Psychological Services (NASP, 2000) have resulted in accentuating the differences between NASP and APA. No longer do we see minor differences with similar overall goals. NASP has clearly diverged from the previously agreed upon mutual accepted standards. The new NASP documents are clearly different in training, accreditation, credentialing/licensing, and practice standards from APA's.

One result of NASP's move away from the status quo has been to bring to flame the smoldering aspects of this identity issue in school psychology. Is school psychology a "Separate Profession Culture" as defined by Short (2000) and unique among helping professionals or are we a specialty of professional psychology with training and experiences in schools designed to extend beyond the walls of school buildings? The search for an identity continues.

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**President's Message: Professional Communities of the Future**

and for discussion of cases. Our first debate took place within a cognitive assessment seminar offered in the fall of 1997. Students were asked to present positions for or against the use of cognitive assessment. Each student was assigned an aspect of the debate to cover. The subtopics included item bias, differential predictive validity, construct validity, etc. First, a student entered an initial position statement, either pro or con, on the assigned subtopic. Then two days later, after a critical analysis of the position statement of the student's opponent, a rebuttal was posted. This mirrored the rebuttal phase of a conventional face-to-face debate, except that the students could read and analyze the sources used by the opponent in the initial position statement. Finally, students in the class reviewed all the statements and rebuttals, and developed their own personal

statements, which were shared in the public forum that the class had access to.

Another use of web forums is to collaborate on cases. Indiana University interns from across the country, some in urban settings, some in rural settings, submitted cases to an electronic forum. Teams of first year school psychology graduate students reviewed the cases, went to the professional literature, proposed interventions supported by the empirical literature and were critiqued by peers and faculty. Their presentations were posted in the electronic forum so that interns had the opportunity to react.

I am not advocating that electronic communities replace conventional place-based professional associations. However, members of what have been place-based associations may now interact in new ways. New electronic com-

munities will supplement conventional professional associations in ways we cannot even imagine. In other words, we are no longer place-bound or time-constrained when interacting as professionals.

I look forward to 2001 as a time when we will explore the possible uses of electronic media to develop professional communities where colleagues can interact, share resources, and debate the merits of ideas. We have much to gain from the experiences of colleagues across the world. The new Internet-based technologies will permit us to form alliances and professional communities that hitherto would have been unworkable. The old adage, "Think globally, Act locally," might be turned around to form a new challenge, "Think globally, Act globally." ■

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**Comments, thoughts, and opinions regarding this article for the Comment Section of The School Psychologist should be e-mailed to: [Reddy@alpha.fdu.edu](mailto:Reddy@alpha.fdu.edu).** ■

# What Was the Most Important Event In School Psychology's First Century?<sup>1</sup>

By Tom Fagan, University of Memphis

I am often asked what I think was the most important event in the history of school psychology. Since school psychology's history is little more than 100 years old, and since this is officially the beginning of the 21st century, now is as good a time as any to register my opinion.

There are many worthy nominations. Among them would have to be the founding of the first psychological clinical in 1896 or the Department of Scientific Pedagogy and Child Study in the Chicago Public Schools in 1899; the enactment of compulsory schooling laws; the development of special education; the development of the age-based Stanford Revision of the Binet Simon Scales in 1916, or the deviation IQ concept of the Wechsler scales a few decades later; Gesell's practice as a "school" psychologist 1915-1919; the widespread acceptance of normative psychoeducational assessment in school settings; the development of a school psychology training program at New York University in the 1920s; the development of state education agency credentials for practitioners in the 1930s; the founding of the Ohio School Psychologists Association in 1943; the reorganization of the American Psychological Association (APA) in 1945 with a separate division for school psychologists; APA's first code of ethics in 1953; the Thayer Conference in 1954, or the Spring Hill and Olympia Conferences in 1980 and 1981, respectively; the publication of Psychological Service for School Problems in 1930, or the Journal of School Psychology in 1963 and Psychology in the Schools in 1964; the founding of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) in 1969; APA accreditation in school psychology and the NASP-NCATE relationship since the early 1970s; the development of standards documents by APA and by NASP; the approval of learning disability as a special education category in the late 1960s; PL 94-142 (Education of All

Handicapped Children Act, 1975) and PL 93-380 (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, 1974); the widespread acceptance of the importance of mental health and of therapy in the past 40 years; NASP's program of National Certification in School Psychology in 1988; the emphasis on consultation-based alternative delivery systems since the late 1970s and nontraditional assessment emphases of the 1990s; and finally, official specialty recognition granted to school psychology through APA in 1997.

Of course, all of these have made important contributions to the development of school psychology in the 20th century and no single event could account for the current condition of school psychology. Nevertheless, I have forced myself to choose the most important. After considerable deliberation I decided that the following was the most important single event: The fact that early psychologists chose to become employees OF the schools rather than practitioners TO the schools. The choice has had bittersweet outcomes. The increasingly frequent decision of early practitioners to accept employment with school districts led quickly to the following circumstances in many aspects of practice. Some have been adverse and they are presented here in no particular order:

1. The school psychologist became an employee of the school board rather than a professional whose client was the school board.
2. The purpose and focus of the school psychologist's work could be primarily determined by the employer.
3. Resources available for practice could be limited to the resources of the employing school district.
4. Scope of practice could be limited to school-related learning problems, undervaluing related mental health and family concerns.
5. Scope of practice could be limited

to school district personnel and physical facilities, undervaluing parental and community involvement.

6. Supervision often would be provided by persons having no prior training or experience in psychology.
7. The school psychologist would practice in a setting where non-doctoral credentials would be desired and acceptable.
8. The political status of the school district and public education could influence the work of the school psychologist.
9. The school psychologist became most closely connected to special education.
10. The school psychologist might need to be a teacher before being a psychologist.
11. Practitioners would often be perceived as pupil personnel services workers rather than professional psychologists or health service providers.
12. Regulation of training and credentialing would become the responsibility of education-related groups and authorities, in addition to or exclusive of, those in psychology.
13. Like the separation of the schools from the broader community, school psychology would often be separated from the broader field of professional psychology.

The widespread employment opportunities in the schools looked like a Garden of Eden to early practitioners. Perhaps picking the fruits of school district employment became the field's original sin. I have deliberately emphasized the controversial aspects of this event. For much of the 20th century, school psychologists complained about, atoned for, and tried to alter these conditions, many of which helped to shape long-standing conflicts such as the doctoral and non-doctoral issue, or the

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## ***Division 16 APA Convention Hospitality Suite Program***

In addition to activities included in the Division 16 Conference Program, special sessions, events, and meetings will be scheduled as part of the Division 16 Hospitality Suite Program. Special events are being scheduled to provide opportunities for learning, discussing, and socializing. Detailed information will be available in the summer edition of *The School Psychologist*.

Meetings and other special events are being scheduled in the suite from 8:00 a.m. Friday until 5:00 p.m. Monday. Events will be scheduled subject to availability. If you would like to schedule a meeting or special event in the suite, please contact Angeleque Akin-Little: email psyaza@hofstra.edu; telephone (516) 463-5638; or post to Hofstra University, Department of Psychology, Hempstead, NY 11549

The suite is sponsored this year by American Guidance Service (major sponsor), Riverside Publishing (sponsoring the Division's cocktail party), Psychological Corporation, Psychological Assessment Resources, the American Academy of School Psychology/American Board of School Psychology, Division 16, and the Society for the Study of School Psychology. ■

## **Call for Members of the Division 16 Web Board**

At the August meeting of the Division 16 Executive Committee, a motion was passed establishing a Web Board for the Division's website. The Editor and Board will be responsible for site design, selection and approval of links, usability testing, and supervision of electronic conference forums. There are multiple questions the Board will need to address. How can the Division Webpages better serve the membership? How should the site be promoted? Are there web resources that should be listed on the Division website? Are there constituent groups we should serve other than the membership? Teachers? Parents? School administrators?

If you have interest in contributing to the Division 16 Web Board, please send an email to Jack Cummings (cummings@indiana.edu). Include in your email the URL of sites to which you have contributed. If you have visited websites that are psychological in nature and wish to nominate the author/developer as some who may be able to contribute to the division website, likewise please contact Jack Cummings. ■

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### ***What Was the Most Important Event In School Psychology's First Century?***

gatekeeper role in special education. Many of the other nominated historical events are themselves outgrowths of the fact of school employment (e.g., NASP-NCATE relationship, SDE credentialing). Of course, there have been numerous advantages to being school district employees: office space, secretarial and communication services, materials and equipment, professional status in the system, fringe benefits

such as retirement and health insurance, relatively good salaries, steady employment, 10 month contracts, direct access to serving children, etc.

History is the interpretation of events. For what it is worth, this is my interpretation of the most important event in the history of school psychology. It shaped us into "school" psychologists instead of psychologists in the schools (a controversy of its own). I am

interested in your interpretations. Please send them to me at Department of Psychology, 202 Psychology Building, UM, Memphis, TN 38152-3230, or <tom-fagan@mail.psy.memphis.edu>  
Internships

<sup>1</sup> a copy of this article will also appear in the March 2001 Communicue. ■

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### ***Call for Nominations for Division 16 Awards***

The Division of School Psychology of the American Psychological Association requests nominations for the following Division Awards, to be presented at the August, 2001 meeting of the American Psychological Association, as well as nominations for Fellowship status in APA. Please see the announcements below for information about eligibility criteria and submission deadlines. The Chairs of the respective award nominations committees are also found below.

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### ***Call for Nominations: Senior Scientist Award***

The Division of School Psychology (Division 16) of the American Psychological Association requests nominations for the Senior Scientist Award. This award is presented to school psychologists who throughout their careers have demonstrated exceptional programs of scholarship that merit special recognition. This is not an award necessarily for the amount of writing done by a scholar, but rather for a sustained program of outstanding theoretical and research activity. Nominees must be: (a) either 20 years past the granting of their doctoral degree or at least 50 years old by December 31, 2001, and (b) a Fellow, Member, or Associate of Division 16. The award recipient will be asked to prepare an address for the Division to be presented at the subsequent APA annual convention, submit a manuscript based on that address to School Psychology Quarterly (the Division 16 journal), and serve on a committee to select subsequent award winners. Anyone, including a candidate him or herself, may nominate a school psychologist for the award. Five sets of materials should be submitted for each nominee, including a vita, 3-5 supporting letters, and five major papers or publications. Send all nomination materials by April 1, 2001 to the chair:

Dr. Jerome Sattler  
Emeritus Professor,  
Department of Psychology  
San Diego State University  
5500 Campanile Drive  
San Diego, CA 92182-4611  
619-594-6231 (phone)  
619-594-1332 (fax)  
Jsattler@sunstroke.sdsu.edu

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### ***Call for Nominations: Lightner Witmer Award***

The Division of School Psychology (Division 16) of the American Psychological Association requests nominations for the Lightner Witmer Award. This award is presented to school psychologists who have demonstrated exceptional scholarship early in their careers. Continuing scholarship, rather than a thesis or dissertation alone, is the primary consideration in making the award. Nominees must be: (a) within seven years of receiving their educational specialist or doctoral degree as of September 1, 2001, and (b) a Fellow, Member, Associate, or Student Affiliate of Division 16. A person does not need to have a doctoral degree to be eligible. The award recipient will be asked to prepare an address for the Division to be presented at the subsequent APA annual convention, submit a manuscript based on that address to School Psychology Quarterly (the Division 16 journal), and serve on a committee to select subsequent award winners. Anyone, including a candidate him or herself, may nominate a school psychologist for the award. Five sets of materials should be submitted for each nominee, including a vita, 3-5 letters of support, reprints, and other evidence of scholarship. Send all nomination materials by April 1, 2001 to the chair:

Dr. Christopher Skinner  
Psychoeducational Studies Unit  
The University of Tennessee  
438 Claxton Addition Building  
Knoxville, TN 37996-3400  
W (865) 974-8403  
H (865)588-9501  
cskinne1@utk.edu

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### ***Call for Nominations: Jack Bardon Distinguished Service Award***

The Division of School Psychology (Division 16) of the American Psychological Association requests nominations for the Jack Bardon Distinguished Service Award. This award is presented to mature school psychologists who throughout their careers have demonstrated exceptional programs of service that merit special recognition. This award is given for accomplishments relating to: (a) major leadership in the administration of psychological services in the schools, (b) major contributions in the formulation and implementation of policy leading to psychologically and socially sound training and practice in school psychology, (c) sustained direction and/or participation in research that has contributed to more effective practice in school psychology, and/or (d) the inauguration or development of training programs for new school psychologists or for the systematic development of in-service training for psychologists engaged in the practice of school psychology. The award recipient will be asked to prepare an

**Continued on page 19**

address for the Division to be presented at the subsequent APA annual convention, submit a manuscript based on that address to School Psychology Quarterly (the Division 16 journal), and serve on a committee to select subsequent award winners. Anyone, including a candidate him or herself, may nominate a school psychologist for the award. Two sets of materials should be submitted for each nominee, including a vita, supporting letters (minimum of three), and other appropriate supporting documentation. Send all nomination materials by April 1, 2001 to the chair:

Ronda C. Talley, PhD, MPH  
Executive Director and Professor  
Rosalynn Carter Institute for Human Development  
Georgia Southwestern State University  
800 Wheatley Street  
Americus, GA 31709  
Talleyrc@aol.com  
229-928-1234 (phone)  
229-931-2663 (fax)

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### ***Call for Nominations: Outstanding Dissertation in School Psychology Award***

The Division of School Psychology (Division 16) of the American Psychological Association requests nominations for the Outstanding Dissertation in School Psychology Award. This award is presented to a school psychologist who has completed a doctoral dissertation which merits special recognition and which has the potential to contribute to the science and practice of school psychology. Nominees must: (a) have successfully defended the dissertation between January 1, 2000 and December 31, 2000 and (b) be a Member or Student Affiliate of Division 16 at the time of receipt of the award (August, 2001). The award recipient will be asked to serve on a committee to select subsequent award winners, give an award presentation based on the dissertation at the subsequent APA annual convention, and submit a manuscript to School Psychology Quarterly (the Division 16 journal). Anyone, including a candidate her or himself, may nominate a school psychologist for the award. Four copies of the nominee's vita and letters of support from at least two members of the dissertation itself should be submitted for each candidate, along with a copy of the dissertation. Send all nomination materials by April 1, 2001 to the chair:

Dr. Kimberly P. Ray  
Child Development Clinic  
2500 N. State Street  
Jackson, MS 39216-4505  
Fax: 601-984-2975  
Phone: 601-984-5239  
kray@ped.umsmed.edu

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### ***Call for Nominations for Division 16 Fellows of APA***

The Division of School Psychology requests your nomination of individuals for Fellowship status in APA. Nominations to initial Fellow status are reviewed by the Division's Fellows Committee, and forwarded to the APA Membership Committee, which has the responsibility of making recommendations to the APA Board of Directors. The APA Council of Representatives then elects individuals to Fellow status upon recommendation of the Board. Nominees must hold a doctoral degree, have been an APA member for at least one year, be engaged in the advancement of psychology, and have at least five years of professional experience after the doctorate. Election to Fellow status requires evidence of unusual and outstanding contributions or performance in the field of psychology. Fellow status requires that a person's work have had national impact on the field of psychology beyond a local, state, or regional level. Three letters of endorsement from current APA Fellows will be required in support. Anyone, including a candidate her or himself, may nominate a school psychologist as a candidate. Upon receipt of a nomination, necessary information will be sent to the candidate who will prepare and return a formal application with supporting material to the Division Fellows Committee. Please send nominations as soon as possible to the chair:

Dr. Marian Fish  
School of Education  
Queens College, CUNY  
Flushing, NY 11367  
718-997-5230 (phone)  
718-997-5248 (fax)  
Mfish@gc.cuny.edu

## Is There Black Culture Learning Style?

Mary Levinsobn

The purpose of this paper is to explore the empirical base of literature around learning styles and culture as related to academic achievement. The field of learning styles has been examined by several researchers including Dunn and her associates (Dunn, 1984; Dunn, Beaudry, & Klavas, 1989; Dunn & Dunn, 1978; Dunn, et al., 1990). A brief review of the literature on learning styles will be examined in order to give a context for the general purpose of the paper. However, the primary focus of this review is on the interaction of learning styles and culture as related to academic achievement. *The School Psychology Review* article by Frisby (1993) will be used as a guide for analyzing the germane literature. Conclusions and general themes around the Black culture learning style (BCLS) will be generated.

### Learning Style

According to Dunn et al. (1989), "learning style is a biologically and developmentally imposed set of personal characteristics that make the same teaching method effective for some and ineffective for others" (p. 50). They go on to describe that learning style indicates the setting or context where a person learns best. Some of the examples given include whether a person learns best alone or in a group; auditorily, visually, or tactically; and with varying degrees of structure. Dunn (1984) describes learning styles as falling into five categories; environmental, emotional, physical, sociological, and psychological.

The topic of learning styles and modalities has received much attention. As Kavale and Forness (1987) indicate, the efficacy of learning style to increase achievement holds great intuitive appeal. The research put forth by Dunn and her graduate students shows potential promise for the use of learning styles (e.g., Dunn, et al., 1989). However, most of the research linking

instruction to a child's learning style is only found in unpublished dissertations. These dissertations mainly come from the university where Dunn is a faculty member. That research field would be strengthened if more empirically based research articles were published in peer reviewed scholarly journals. In addition, the meta-analysis by Kavale and Forness (1987) shows that in the overall empirical literature, support for the modality assessment and instruction is less than promising. Nonetheless, research and interest in the relationship between learning styles and academic achievement has received attention in the professional literature.

### Black Cultural Learning Style (BCLS)

According to Frisby's (1993) account, interest in the effect of culture on psychological processes (e.g., learning style, cognitive style) peaked in the 1970's. The cultural effects on learning style was promoted as an explanation for the underachievement of African-American children in the classroom. In Frisby's compilation of the BCLS literature, he gives a comprehensive description of the BCLS elements. The elements fall into four main categories; world view, cognition, learning, and communication/social. The literature he reviewed indicates that substantial differences exist in these areas when comparing African (Black) culture and European (White) culture.

### Frisby's Five Assumptions

Based on his review of the BCLS literature, Frisby (1993) conveys five assumptions that he recognized as themes in this literature. He goes on to debunk the five assumptions. Three of the five assumptions will frame the analysis of the empirical literature that will be reviewed next. Taken directly from Frisby's work the five assumptions are as follows:

- 1) Within America, Black and white culture are fundamentally incompatible (p. 541).
- 2) Characteristics of Black culture "determine" the learning style of black children (p. 543).
- 3) Learning style assessment is reliable and valid (p. 545).
- 4) Black learners are incapable of manifesting any behavior that is different from behaviors dictated by their identified cultural learning style; therefore, teachers are morally obligated to adapt their instructional practices to Black children's identified learning styles (p. 547).
- 5) There are "culture-specific" educational prescriptions that are uniquely effective in increasing academic achievement for black students relative to whites (p. 548).

### Review of Extant Literature

A search was conducted to find the empirical literature that examined the effect of BCLS on academic achievement. These articles will be summarized in both methodological and conceptual terms.

### Stated Purpose of Studies

Bell and McGraw-Burrell (1988) conducted a study that compared the performance of Black children on tasks when presented in a varied and an unvaried format. The varied format was hypothesized by Boykin's theory to be congruent with BCLS, whereas the unvaried format was aligned with white cultural learning style. The researchers also wanted to determine whether the Black students' scholastic achievement level related to their performance on the task, as a result of the format presentation (e.g., varied or unvaried).

Other studies used a correctional design to determine patterns in learning styles of Black students. Jacobs's (1990) study compared learning styles of Black high, average, and low achiev-

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**Is There Black Culture Learning Style?**

ing students. Likewise, Dunn et al. (1990) examined and compared differences between and among four ethnic groups on learning style. Howard et al. (1993) compared the learning style of preschool Black children to determine if the problem-solving strategies used systematically differed. Finally, Rech and Stevens (1996) identified variables that may affect math achievement for Black fourth and eight graders. They examined gender, attitude toward math, economic status, self-concept and learning style.

**Definition of Learning Style**

In Curry's 1990 critique of the learning styles literature, she states that one concern with the research in this area is the lack of a conceptually clear definition of learning style. To address this point, all articles were reviewed for their explicit statement of what learning style meant in their particular research. In the Bell and McGraw-Burrell (1988) research, learning style was not explicitly defined. Instead, the definition of learning style was drawn from the Boykin model using varied versus unvaried task presentation. Dunn and her colleagues (Dunn et al. 1990) defined learning style as being "composed of unique reactions to environment, emotionality, sociological preference, physiological traits, and cognitive-psychological inclinations" (p. 69). Jacobs (1990) defined learning style based on the Dunn conceptualization.

Howard, Watson, and Allen (1993) and Rech and Stevens (1996) both solely examined the effect of one aspect of learning style (i.e., field independence/dependence). Howard et al. specified that field independence means that the person is analytical, able to perceive the figure from the background, and is attentive to detail. Field dependence means that the person processes information more globally, perceives the whole context, and conforms to context cues. Rech and Stevens (1996) did not clearly state their definitions of field independence/dependence. In summary, the clarity of the definition of learning style differed across studies.

**Sample Characteristics**

The studies used diverse methods to determine their samples. However, most studies chose to include only Black subjects (Bell & McGraw-Burrell, 1988; Howard et al., 1993; Jacobs, 1990; Rech & Stevens, 1996). Dunn et al. (1990) was the only study to include other ethnic groups (e.g., Chinese-Americans, Greek-Americans, Mexican-Americans).

**Frisby's (1993) Assumption #3 "Learning style assessment is reliable and valid," (p. 545).**

These articles were analyzed with an eye toward the reliability and validity of the learning style assessments used. From the information given in the articles, it was very difficult to determine the reliability and validity of the instruments. For example, Bell and McGraw-Burrell (1988) used a varied versus unvaried format as their operationalization of learning style. Unfortunately, no standardized method of determining varied versus unvaried learning style was provided. Consequently, the validity of their independent variable manipulation is questioned.

Jacobs (1990) used the LSI (Learning Style Inventory), but failed to include any psychometric data related to reliability or validity of the measure. Dunn et al. (1990) used the LSI in their research. In their text, they claim the LSI has "impressive reliability and face and construct validity" (p. 75), but fail to include data to substantiate this claim. They cite research that supports the predictive validity. However, as was seen earlier in the research by Dunn, the citations are primarily dissertations. This research also used the GEFT, but the authors provided little information about the reliability or validity of this measure.

Howard et al. (1993) used the PEFT and gave no information substantiating the reliability or validity of the measure. The PEFT manual is the cited source. Rech and Stevens (1996) also used the GEFT but included no psychometric data on reliability or validity. In summary, as Frisby (1993) and Curry (1990) contend and as Kavale and Forness (1987) substantiate in their meta-analysis, the reliability and validity

of the learning styles assessments are highly questionable.

**Frisby's (1993) Assumption #4 "Black learners are incapable of manifesting any behavior that is different from behaviors dictated by their identical cultural learning style; therefore, teachers are morally obligated to adapt their instructional practices to black children's identified learning style," (p. 547).**

These articles were analyzed using Frisby's (1993) fourth assumption related to whether Black learners can adapt to a different learning style. In general, the empirical articles did not substantiate that Blacks were incapable of adapting to a non-Black culture learning style. This is in line with Frisby's review. Many of the reviewed articles produced an interaction between learning style and another independent variable (Bell & McGraw-Burrell, 1988; Howard et al., 1993; Jacobs, 1990; Rech & Stevens, 1996). The BCLS theory would predict that regardless of other independent variables (e.g., task, achievement, and age), the efficacy of learning style would be a constant. In other words, the congruence between learning style and instruction should be a stronger predictor of success for Black children. However, the empirical literature did not substantiate this effect. For example, Bell and McGraw-Burrell (1988) reported a three-way interaction between learning style, achievement, and task. They found that high achieving Black children did better on an "ordered recall task," when presented in an unvaried format. BCLS would predict that all Black children, regardless of task or achievement, would excel when the task is presented in a varied format.

**Frisby's (1993) Assumption #5 "There are 'culture-specific' educational prescriptions that are uniquely effective in increasing academic achievement for black students relative to whites" (p. 548).**

For many in the education field, this final assumption of Frisby's is the most compelling. Essentially, does using educational or instructional

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**Is There Black Culture Learning Style?**

methods that are congruent with cultural learning style have a positive effect on academic achievement for Black children over white children.

The research reviewed for this paper did not advance the knowledge base in this area. Four of the five studies used only Black samples (Bell & McGraw-Burrell, 1988; Howard et al., 1993; Jacobs, 1990; Rech & Stevens, 1996). Clearly, the comparison with achievement with white children is not possible if only a Black sample is employed. The fifth study (Dunn, et al., 1990) used a multi-ethnic sample (e.g., Mexican-Americans, Greek-Americans, and Chinese-Americans), but did not include an outcome measure of academic achievement or the modality if delivered instruction.

Interestingly, Rech and Stevens (1996) drew the conclusion at the end of their study that Black children would benefit from instructional practices that fit their learning modality. However, nowhere in their research do they manipulate instructional practices based on learning style. Therefore, drawing this conclusion is faulty and not substantiated by their research. This type of speculation and conjecture should be warned against when examining the BCLS research and any effect on academic achievement.

**Limitations of the Studies**

One major limitation seen across four of the studies was the use of a solely Black population. This decreased the ability to draw comparisons with white/majority culture. Many samples did not allow for external validity due to small sample size, unrepresentational samples, and poor description of sample characteristics. The correlational designs employed by many of the studies decreased the ability to determine causality. The studies would have been strengthened had an experimental manipulation been used. As noted earlier, the use of the assessments of learning styles was a major limitation of the studies. The reliability and validity of these measures need to be substantiated and included in the research write-up of studies using such assessments.

**Summary**

The purpose of this paper was to examine the learning styles literature, specifically as it relates to Black culture learning style (BCLS). First, this paper described the literature on learning styles and critiqued that empirical base. Next, Frisby's (1993) article that examined Black culture learning styles was reviewed. From that article, a summary of the BCLS characteristics was provided. The articles were reviewed methodologically and conceptually. The Frisby article provided the conceptual framework from which to analyze the conceptual components of the BCLS literature.

In summary, several ideas became clear during the course of this research and analysis of learning styles and BCLS. First, the learning style literature is not empirically substantiated. As Kavale and Forness (1987) state, learning style makes a great deal of intuitive sense. However, the empirical support for appropriately assessing learning styles and the efficacy of using the learning style information to create better instructional environments has not held up in the scientific literature. Second, the empirical support of using instruction matched to a "Black cultural learning style" to increase academic outcomes for minority children is unsubstantiated. The research in the area of BCLS and increased academic outcomes is limited by its correlational nature, lack of experimental manipulation, unrepresentative samples, faulty learning style assessment measures, and lack of any substantiation that gearing instruction to a BCLS will change outcomes.

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## SASP News

### The Newsletter of the Student Affiliates in School Psychology

#### SASP News Update

*Gena N. Ehrhardt  
Indiana State University  
SASP News Editor*

When we began this school year, SASP News had specific visions and goals. Two of the goals for the Communications Committee were to improve the communication among chapters, and to begin featuring writing and research of graduate students. In order to achieve these goals, students were invited to join the SASP News writing staff. I am pleased to announce that Melinda Stanley of Indiana State University will be serving as Layout Editor, and Caroline McKnight of the University of South Carolina will be a featured columnist writing about issues regarding school psychologists in hospital settings.

A new addition to SASP News is the featuring of topics important to the field of school psychology. In this winter edition of SASP News, the topic of intelligence testing is addressed. Additionally, SASP News is spotlighting various chapters and their local involvement. The chapters featured in this edition are Fordham University, University of Missouri-Columbia, and Georgia State University. Membership, listserv,

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<http://sac.uky.edu/~mdturn0/sasp.htm>

and convention information are also included. Beginning January 2001, graduate students will be able to view web-based editions of SASP News at [www.saspweb.org](http://www.saspweb.org). As the Communications Committee continues to grow, I am optimistic about having new additions for each edition.

Returning to the featured topic, intelligence testing was selected for this edition for several reasons. A consistent component found in every school psychology training program is a course in intelligence testing. This course generally consists of the historical use of intelligence testing, the controversies in assessing intelligence, various theoretical perspectives which attempt to define intelligence, and finally, the administering and scoring of various intelligence tests. To practitioners in

the field, intelligence testing demands most of their professional time. To students in training programs, intelligence testing transcends among several courses, including practicum and internship experiences. Therefore, presenting a forum for students to broach this controversial topic became a primary concern for the newsletter staff.

Due to its level of importance in the field, SASP News has included articles in the winter edition which address the subject of intelligence testing. The featured editorial piece composed by David Shriberg, president-elect of SASP, raises concerns regarding the use of intelligence testing for diagnostic labeling and whether such labeling is necessary for the provision of educational services. He challenges graduate students to determine their positions regarding diagnostic labeling in order to raise the consciousness of what we, as future school psychologists, will accept in professional practice. As an informative piece, columnist, Caroline McKnight, provides a suggestive list of accommodations and considerations when conducting assessments in a hospital setting. Caroline's article informs graduate students about the unique testing considerations when assessing pediatric patients.

These articles are intended to promote discussion among graduate students and faculty. While the opinions regarding intelligence testing may vary from program to program, the topic, itself, is a commonality that is shared by us all. As developing professionals, it is important that we determine our position, and I encourage graduate students to form their own views on the topic and determine the role that intelligence testing will play in their professional practice. The amount of power that is associated with intelligence testing can be enormous. Therefore, it is important as future school psychologists to prepare for this awesome responsibility in a judicious manner in order to make conscientious decisions as to how such power will be used to best serve clients.

#### The School Psychologist as Social Enforcer: Is This What We Went to School For?

*David Shriberg  
Northeastern University  
SASP President-Elect*

When I first entered graduate school in school psychology in the Fall of 1997, there were probably few students in the country more excited than I to be entering the field. Having been told all through my undergraduate days that clinical psychology was the only option for a "legitimate" psychologist, I came to Northeastern full of enthusiasm both to fight for greater recognition of school psychology as a field and also to find my own niche within it.

Now, as my graduate days (hopefully!) are beginning to come to a close and I am starting to experience the dreaded "real world" (I began working half-time as a school psychologist for two public elementary schools a few months ago), I am realizing that in my enthusiasm to educate the world about who a school psychologist is and what he or she does, I have forgotten one vital component of the job description. Nowadays, when somebody asks me what I do, I tell them that I have entered politics. And nowhere is the political function of my role as school psychologist more evident than in learning disability assessments, where my legal function is to administer an IQ test. I purposely use the phrasing "legal function" to reflect a change in the laws here in Massachusetts that has had a profound impact on the practice of school psychology. Some brief background information—starting in September, 2000, Massachusetts moved from a "non-categorical" to a "categorical" state in terms of eligibility to receive special education services. What this means is that, prior to this school year, students could receive services from schools without having to be given a diagnostic label such as "learning disabled" or "major depressive disorder." Instead, decisions were made based on assessment results and clinical

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## SASP News

cal judgment. Now, in an effort to make it more difficult for children to receive support, a specialist must give the child a formal diagnosis as part of the IEP.

Within the realm of IQ testing, the impact of this change has been to make the WISC III and other cognitive measures of even greater importance when determining eligibility for services.

Consider the case of learning disabilities, the most common diagnostic category within schools. In Massachusetts, the diagnosis of any learning disability is legally required to be based on the discrepancy model. That is, in order to be diagnosed as having a learning disability, a "severe" discrepancy between overall cognitive functioning as measured by a standardized test (typically the WISC III) and standardized scores in an achievement area must be established. Thus, if a child achieves a Full Scale IQ of 100 on the WISC III, using a 15 point differential criteria, a student would need a standardized score of 85 or lower on an achievement area to be considered "learning disabled." If a child received a Full Scale IQ of 90 on the WISC III, the achievement cutoff also lowers, to 75. This creates a dilemma. The lower one's IQ, the lower score one needs on achievement testing to receive academic support. The higher one's IQ, the easier it is to be labeled "learning disabled" and thus receive support. This approach thus heavily favors those who score higher on IQ tests, who—surprise!—also disproportionately happen to be those that come from affluence and power within the community.

This situation places the school psychologist in a precarious position. Do you follow the law or the research? If one is involved in the assessment of dyslexia, for example, based on research one would likely want to assess whether or not the student has measurable difficulties with phonological processing—the primary deficit believed to be characteristic of dyslexia (see Siegal, 1999; Stanovich, 1999). The WISC III may measure many skills, but phonological processing is decidedly not one of these skills. If one follows the law and uses IQ scores as the primary determinant for a dyslexia diagnosis, one is arguably engaging in discrim-

inatory practices, especially if one believes (as I do), that the WISC III does not measure truly "innate" skills, but rather favors those children born into affluence and preferred social standing. If, on the other hand, one believes that the discrepancy model is an outdated concept in the case of diagnosing dyslexia and therefore decides to ignore the law in the name of science and/or social justice, one runs the real risk of sacrificing needed services for a particular student in order to take a political stance. You can go to sleep knowing that you didn't use the WISC III for a purpose it wasn't intended for, but the result of your decision may be that a child who needed services was denied these services—and you might not have a job to return to tomorrow.

It is precisely these types of political binds that it is important for students to be aware of, for to overcome them not only takes savvy and skill, but also support from your peers. Working alone in schools, it is often difficult for school psychologists to find allies in fighting political battles, although obviously many do. As students, we have access to other individuals who think about and are directly affected by these issues within our departments. I would therefore encourage all of you to engage in dialogue within your department about the appropriate function of

IQ testing and how this does or does not jive with the way that IQ tests are being used in your state. Are school psychologists in your area being asked to be social enforcers or agents of positive change—and which do you want to be?

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### SASP Membership Application

*Be professionally active! Join SASP and receive the latest journal and newsletter information published by Division 16. Grow professionally with research opportunities and convention networking! To join APA Division 16 as a Student Affiliate, please complete this form and include a check for \$25.00 made payable to APA Division 16. Mail the form to: Division 16 Membership, APA Division Services Office, 750 First Street, NE, Washington, DC 20002-4242.*

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## SASP News

### School Psychologists in Pediatric Settings: Intelligence Testing Considerations

*Caroline G. McKnight  
University of South Carolina  
SASP News Columnist*

Imagine sitting in a comfy child-size chair with your favorite test kit in front of you and the forever-cooperative child across the table. However, instead of the familiar chalkboard, book bags, and pencil sharpeners that usually surround you, there is a different scene. A few doors down, young children, who are medically fragile, play together, developmental pediatricians explain side effects of drugs to parents, and neurologists examine MRIs of a child's brain to rule out possible effects of a seizure. This was the scene for me a year ago, as an intern at The Children's Hospital in Greenville, South Carolina. As a wonderful experience, it provided a challenging alternative to previous practica in school settings. The movement of school psychologists from schools to alternative settings such as hospitals is growing. Differences in roles, responsibilities, and procedures allow for challenging experiences typically not encountered in the schools. Some of those differences are found in intelligence testing.

It may seem out of context to have a child's intellectual functioning assessed in a medical setting; however, understanding the level of a child's current cognitive ability can be valuable when explaining a diagnosis to a child, or when considering behavioral interventions. Within the pediatric setting, whether the child has been referred for an evaluation by an outside source, or is a patient in the hospital, there are general considerations when assessing his or her intelligence.

#### Initial Decisions

In the beginning stage of assessment, there are a variety of issues to consider when tests are being selected.

Primarily, the purpose of the assessment should be determined. For example, awareness of the level of a child's current intellectual functioning may be important before explaining an upcoming medical procedure. Or, the purpose may be to gain information about a child's intellectual functioning following an operation. Furthermore, it is necessary to ascertain the appropriateness of conducting an evaluation. While a child's IQ may seem important at the time, waiting until the child has regained energy, strength, and interest in working with someone new, may be the favored decision. It is of paramount importance to consider the child's emotional and physical well-being first. A child may not be ready to sit for a full cognitive assessment and a screening instrument may more fitting.

#### Considerations During Assessment

When the assessment begins, there are procedural matters to bear in mind. Similar to testing a child in a school, adjustments need to be made so the child can be as comfortable as possible. However, when testing children who are patients in a hospital, there may be extra equipment not typically seen in a school. For example, the child may be encumbered by an IV, a gastrointestinal tube (G-tube), or may need a medical assistant close-by in the event of an emergency. Therefore, frequent breaks, comfortable seating, and other accommodations may need to be made. A significant component to the assessment is consultation with the child's physician especially, and other medical personnel who have been involved in the child's treatment and recovery. In the schools, information gained from multiple informants is ideal and a practice toward which to strive. In pediatric settings, where children may be suffering from chronic illnesses that greatly affect their academic performance, social and emotional well-being, it is critical to gather information from multiple sources. Often a transdisciplinary team approach is model to follow.

#### After the Assessment

Subsequent to assessment and consultation, report writing and communication of results usually commences. It is important to re-examine the purpose of the evaluation and how the results will affect the child's overall well-being. The results may be a significant component of a transition plan as the child returns to school and home. Or, the physician may use the evaluation only as supplementary information. Thus, the goal of the assessment should be taken into account when communicating the results.

With the proper education of, and training and experience with children in pediatric settings, school psychologists can be important members of a team among the many individuals who contribute to the well-being of children with illnesses. Not only are school psychologists important in pediatric settings, but also they are an integral part to children's transition from the hospital, back to the school. Most importantly, working with children with chronic or acute illnesses provides for many educational, meaningful, and memorable experiences. So, in spite of the absence of colorful bulletin boards, crayons and chalkboards, engaging a child with blocks, pictures and puzzles is just as entertaining.

In future segments of this column, other topics pertaining to the role of school psychologists in pediatric settings will be explored. For additional information, see *School Psychology Review* (1999), Vol. 28 (2): Mini-Series: Promoting School Success in Children with Chronic Medical Conditions.

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## ***Call for Nominations: Editor-Elect, School Psychology Quarterly***

Division 16 (School Psychology) of the American Psychological Association announces the opening of a search for Editor-Elect of *School Psychology Quarterly*. The Editor assumes a five-year, nonrenewable term to begin January, 2003 (a one-year Editor-elect term will begin January, 2002). The Editor should display a commitment to the science and practice of school psychology and embrace the standards and objectives of Division 16. Editorial experience; scholarly accomplishments; professional experience; administrative skills; and a commitment of time, energy, and some institutional resources are required. Interested individuals should submit a complete application packet, including:

1. A letter of intent, to include:
  - A statement regarding proposed scope and direction for the journal under a new editorial office
  - Personal beliefs regarding school psychological research and practice
  - Documentation of commitment to the editor position (approximately 1-2 days per week)
  - Commitment to APA's Ethical Principles and Specialty Guidelines
  - Statement and documentation of institutional support
  - Experience as a researcher, trainer, and practitioner
  - Editorial experience
  - Additional skills and experiences that can contribute to the role of the Editor

2. At least three letters of reference, to address perceptions of the applicant's:
  - Skills as a writer and editor
  - Fairness, professionalism, integrity, and objectivity
  - Reliability, time management, and commitment to school psychology
  - Leadership in school psychology
3. Reprints of no more than three scholarly articles published in refereed journals
4. Current curriculum vitae

Applications should be submitted by May 1 to:

William P. Erchul, Ph.D.  
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Communications, and Convention Affairs  
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## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### **DIVISION ONE ANNOUNCES AWARD WINNERS**

The Society for General Psychology, Division One of the American Psychological Association, announces its Year 2001 award winners who have been recognized for outstanding achievements in General Psychology. This year the winner of the William James Book Award is Michael Tomasello for his book *The Cultural Origins of Human Cognition*, which was published in 1999 by Harvard University Press. This award is for a recent book that serves to integrate material across psychological subfields or to provide coherence to the diverse subject matter of psychology.

The Year 2001 winner of the Ernest R. Hilgard Award for a Career Contribution to General Psychology is Murray Sidman. The winners of the George A. Miller Award for an Outstanding Recent Article in General Psychology are Jack Martin and Jeff Sugarman of Simon Fraser University for

their article *Psychology's Reality Debate: A Levels of Reality Approach*. The article appeared in the *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology* in 1999 (pp. 177-194). Each award winner received a certificate and a cash prize: \$500 for the Hilgard and Miller awards, and \$1000 for the William James Book Award. The winner of the competition, to be determined and announced later, will deliver the Year 2001 Arthur W. Staats Lecture for Unifying Psychology and receive an award of \$1000.

For all of these awards, the focus is on the quality of the contribution and the linkages made between the diverse fields of psychological theory and research. The Society for General Psychology encourages the integration of knowledge across the subfields of psychology and the incorporation of contributions from other disciplines. The Society is looking for creative synthesis, the building of novel conceptual approaches, and a reach for new, integrated wholes. A match between the

goals of the Society and the nominated work or person will be an important evaluation criterion. The Staats Award has a unification theme, recognizing significant contributions of any kind that go beyond mere efforts at coherence and serve to develop psychology as a unified science. The Staats Lecture will deal with how the recipient's work serves to unify psychology.

There are no restrictions on nominees, and self-nominations as well as nominations by others are encouraged for these awards. For the Hilgard Award and the Staats Award, nominators are asked to submit the candidate's name and vitae along with a detailed statement indicating why the nominee is a worthy candidate for the award and supporting letters from others who endorse the nomination.

For the Miller Award, nominations should include: vitae of the author(s), four copies of the article being considered (which can be of any length but

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must be in print and have a post 1995 publication date), and a statement detailing the strength of the candidate's article as an outstanding contribution to General Psychology.

Nominations for the William James Award should include three copies of the book (dated post 1995 and available in print), the vitae of the author(s), and a one-page statement that explains the strengths of the submission as an integrative work and how it meets criteria established by the Society. Textbooks, analytic reviews, biographies, and examples of applications are generally discouraged.

Winners will be announced at the fall convention of the American Psychological Association the year of submission. Winners will be expected to give an invited address at the subsequent APA convention and also provide a copy of the award address for inclusion in the newsletter of the Society.

All nominations and supporting materials for each award must be received on or before April 15, 2001. Nominations and materials for all awards and requests for further information should be directed to General Psychology Awards, c/o C. Alan Boneau, Department of Psychology, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA, 22030. Phone: 301-320-3695; Fax: 301-320-2845; E-mail: aboneau@gmu.edu.

## **POSITION ANNOUNCEMENT NEW YORK UNIVERSITY**

The School Psychology Programs of the Department of Applied Psychology invite applications for a senior position with a specialty in an area relevant to School Psychology. We seek candidates who have an established program of research, have a record of grant attainment, are scientist-practitioners, and who will contribute to our commitment to multiculturalism, diversity, and human development, in both research and practice, particularly as applied in an urban setting. This commitment extends to and characterizes the two APA-accredited doctoral (Ph.D. and Psy.D.) programs in school psychology and the certificate program in school psychology.

Responsibilities include graduate teaching, clinical and research supervision, engagement in an active research program, and student program advisement. This position provides an opportunity for program leadership.

Applicants must have a doctorate in

school psychology or, alternatively, in child clinical psychology or community psychology, be eligible for licensure in New York State as a psychologist, have evidence of high quality research, scholarship, and grant obtainment, as well as a commitment to graduate and undergraduate teaching.

Salary: Competitive and commensurate with qualifications. Review of applicants will begin immediately and continue until the position is filled. Send letter of application, curriculum vitae, and sample(s) of scholarly work to: Professor Judie Alpert, Chair of School Psychology Faculty Search Committee, Department of Applied Psychology, New York University, School of Education, 239 Greene Street, 5th Floor, New York, NY 10003. Minorities are strongly encouraged to apply. NYU is an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Employer.

## **PSYCHOLOGISTS AFFIRMING THEIR GAY, LESBIAN, AND BISEXUAL FAMILY**

Organizing Committee: Laura S. Brown, Donald K. Freedheim, Marvin R. Goldfried, Ritch C. Savin-Williams, and Wendy K. Silverman.

This is to announce the beginnings of a newly formed network of psychologists who are coming out in open support of their gay, lesbian, and bisexual family members. As psychologists, we feel it is time to have our voices heard, especially in light of the hateful and damaging misinformation being put out by such people as "Dr. Laura" and those professionals advocating so-called conversion/repairative therapy. The goals of the network are as follows: 1) to openly support our GLB children, grandchildren, brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, cousins, aunts, uncles, mothers, and fathers; 2) to impress upon less accepting family members the importance of supporting their GLB relatives; 3) to advocate gay-affirmative research and clinical work on GLB issues; 4) to encourage mainstream psychology to recognize and incorporate clinical and research work on GLB issues; and, 5) to assist GLB advocacy groups by providing research information and by testifying before legislative bodies.

At this stage, the network is new, but growing steadily. If you would like to add your name to the list, or would like to pass this information on to a colleague or family member, please e-mail, write or call:

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## **ANTICIPATED POSITIONS AVAILABLE FAIRLEIGH DICKINSON UNIVERSITY**

1) Director of M.A. Program in Clinical Psychology and Associate/Full Professor of Psychology (tenure-track, Spring or Summer 2001, FDU-Israel Campus). This position carries primary responsibility for administrative oversight of the School's M.A. Program in Clinical Psychology in Tel Aviv, Israel and for teaching, research and supervision of students enrolled in the program.

Requirements include an earned doctorate in clinical psychology from an APA-accredited program, a record of successful administrative and teaching experience in a similar or related position, a distinguished record of research and scholarly achievement commensurate with appointment to a faculty rank of senior associate or full professor, licensure or eligibility for licensure in New Jersey and/or New York, and familiarity with the training and practice of clinical psychology in Israel. Oral and written proficiency in Hebrew is desired, but not required. This position will require permanent residency in Israel beginning in the summer of 2001. In addition to a competitive salary and benefits package, a generous housing allowance is included for this position. 2) Director of Center for Psychological Services and Clinical Assistant/Associate Professor of Psychology (non-tenure-track, July 2001). This position carries primary responsibility for administrative oversight of the School of Psychology's Center for Psychological Services in Hackensack, NJ, which serves as a training facility for the School's doctoral programs in clinical and school psychology, and other special programs. Major responsibilities include coordinating/teaching clinical practica, clinical supervision, developing and marketing new and existing programs, facilitating research projects, grant writing, and maintaining positive relations with external agencies and the community-at-large. Requirements include an earned doctorate in clinical psychology, NJ license (or eligibility), and successful administrative and teaching experience. A record of scholarly

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS *Continued from page 27*

achievement is also desired. 3) Assistant Professor in School Psychology (tenure-track, Fall 2001). This position is for teaching, research, and supervision of students in the School's Psy.D. and M.A. Programs in School Psychology in Teaneck, NJ. Requirements include an earned doctorate in school psychology from a NASP-approved and/or APA-accredited school psychology program, and evidence of, or potential for, research and scholarly achievement commensurate with the rank of assistant professor. Experience as a practicing school psychologist and ability to contribute to the Ph.D. Program in Clinical Psychology (NJ- and/or NY-licensed or license-eligible) are also desired. The School of Psychology is located on the

Teaneck-Hackensack Campus of Fairleigh Dickinson University in northern New Jersey, near New York City. In addition to offering undergraduate and graduate (master's and doctoral) programs in New Jersey, the School offers an undergraduate and a graduate (M.A.) program in clinical psychology at the University's branch campus in Tel Aviv, Israel. Screening of applications will begin immediately and continue until all positions are filled. To apply for any of these positions, forward a cover letter, curriculum vitae, and the names, addresses and phone numbers of three references to: Dr. Christopher A. Capuano, Director, School of Psychology (T-WH1-01), Fairleigh Dickinson University, 1000 River Road, Teaneck, NJ 07666. Fairleigh

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