

Please use the following reference when citing this work:

Benson, N. F., Beaujean, A. A., McGill, R. J., & Dombrowski, S. C. (2019). Rising to the challenge of SLD identification: A rejoinder. *The DiaLog*, 48 (1), 17-18.

Rising to the Challenge of SLD Identification: A Rejoinder

Nicholas F. Benson and A. Alexander Beaujean

Baylor University

Ryan J. McGill

William & Mary

Stefan C. Dombrowski

Rider University

Author Note

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Nicholas Benson, One Bear Place #97301, Waco, TX 76706. Email: Nicholas_Benson@baylor.edu

Abstract

The purpose of this rejoinder is to briefly address the response of Schultz and Stephens-Pisecco (2019) and our original question of whether the Core-Selective Evaluation Process (C-SEP) is valid for SLD identification. This rejoinder also raises concerns about the approach that Schultz and Stephens-Pisecco have taken since the publication of our original article.

Specifically, rather than trying to clarify conceptual issues or provide empirical evidence to support C-SEP, they have framed their response by using *argumentum ad hominem* to discredit, and thus avoid, the concerns noted in our article. We reiterate the need to focus on empirical evidence when seeking to improve assessment practices and the process of identifying SLDs.

Keywords: Civility, C-SEP, evidence-based assessment

Rising to the Challenge of SLD Identification: A Rejoinder

We thank the editor for the opportunity to respond to Schultz and Stephens-Piscecco's (in press) rebuttal to our article "Critique of the Core-Selective Evaluation Process" (Benson, Beaujean, McGill, & Dombrowski, 2018) that was published recently in *The DiaLog*.

We wrote our initial article because we were unable to locate *any* empirical evidence to support the use of the Core-Selective Evaluation Process (C-SEP) for teams charged with identifying specific learning disabilities (SLDs) and developing subsequent interventions. While current federal and Texas laws *permit* use of patterns of strengths and weaknesses (PSW) methods, including the C-SEP, these laws do not require them. Nonetheless, given the increasing popularity of C-SEP we were concerned about school professionals prematurely adopting this method.

In their rebuttal, and throughout their documentation of the C-SEP, Schultz and Stephens-Piscecco contended that C-SEP is a "viable method" of SLD identification; however, they have only provided anecdotal evidence to support this assertion. Unfortunately, stating that an assessment method is "precise and efficient" is not a form of evidence accepted by a scientific community. Consequently, the concerns that we initially raised about C-SEP's utility continue to remain unaddressed within Schultz and Stephens-Piscecco's rebuttal.

Responding to Research Criticism: A Call for Civility

We vigorously support the right of authors to defend their work and respond to research criticism. Nevertheless, we question the approach taken by Schulz and Stephens-Piscecco since the publication of our article. In their response, they accused us of "deliberate inaccuracies" regarding their work on C-SEP and stated that we "utilize[ed] unethical and unprofessional practices". We believe that an inspection of our article and the works in question reveal that these charges are meritless. Disagreements about interpretation of evidence in a scientific discipline is

fairly common (e.g., Hyman, 1995). While it is a legitimate response to respond to criticism and defend their position, it is incumbent on those arguing for some statement to provide support, not those who question the merit of the statement (Lilienfeld, Ammirati, & David, 2012). Within their rebuttal Schultz and Stephens-Pisecco did not offer any additional evidentiary support for statements about the usefulness of the C-SEP for SLD identification.

Instead, they relied upon hyperbole by metaphorically insinuating that those who do not agree with their position are using the same propaganda tactics as those employed by totalitarian regimes. This does not qualify as evidence by any standard; rather, it is *argumentum ad hominem*, an approach inconsistent with academic decorum. Further, the fact that they did not address the merits of the C-SEP model in their response should concern educational diagnosticians and other school-based professionals who are studying whether the C-SEP can meet their assessment needs.

In an attempt to prevent further escalation of these matters, we defer from engaging in a point-by-point rebuttal of Schultz and Stephen's allegations. Although we stand by our work, we are not confident that additional discussion with the parties involved will result in our field moving forward in a constructive way. The goal of our critique was simply to call attention to what we perceived as limitations with the current state of affairs regarding the C-SEP. This is best accomplished when this discourse is civil, respectful, and academically rigorous. It is our hope that future discussions regarding PSW approaches, including the C-SEP, will focus on empirical evidence regarding their utility.

Moving Forward

We acknowledge that all existing SLD identification methods have various strengths and weaknesses (e.g., Hale, Naglieri, Kaufman, & Kavale, 2004; Miciak, Taylor, Stuebing, Fletcher, 2018; Stanovich, 2005; Stuebing, Branum-Martin, Francis, 2012), although some are supported

by more empirical evidence than others. We believe that the currently-available empirical evidence does not support the use of PSW models for SLD identification. We acknowledge that our opinion is not held by everyone, so we encourage practitioners who disagree to consider the types of arguments and evidence used as support by PSW proponents (e.g., Lilienfeld, Ammirati, & David, 2012; Meichenbaum & Lilienfeld, 2018).

As an alternative to the C-SEP model, we encourage the adoption of more parsimonious assessment and decision-making processes, such as those provided by hybrid-type approaches to SLD identification. Such approaches feature (a) assessment of instruction response, (b) assessment of low achievement, and (c) evaluation of contextual factors that may impede learning (Bradley, Danielson, & Hallahan, 2002; Dombrowski, Kamphaus & Reynolds, 2004; Fletcher, Lyon, Fuchs, & Barnes, 2019).

We would like to close by emphasizing that we do not benefit in any way if school districts choose to adopt, or not adopt, C-SEP. We are researchers and clinicians with interest in SLD identification. Future research and debates on these matters are of great importance for the field and we look forward to partnering with those who both agree and disagree with our positions to improve our assessment processes.

References

- Benson, N. F., Beaujean, A. A., McGill, R. J., & Dombrowski, S. C. (2018). Critique of the Core-Selective Evaluation Process. *The DiaLog, 47* (2), 14-18.
- Bradley, R., Danielson, L., & Hallahan, D. P. (Eds.) (2002). *Identification of learning disabilities: Research to practice*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Dombrowski, S. C., Kamphaus, R. W., & Reynolds, C. R. (2004). After the demise of the discrepancy: Proposed approach to learning disabilities classification. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 35*, 364-372. doi: 10.1037/0735-7028.35.4.364
- Fletcher, J. M., Lyon, G. R., Fuchs, L. S., & Barnes, M. A. (2018). *Learning disabilities: Form identification to intervention* (2nd ed). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
- Hale, J. B., Naglieri, J. A., Kaufman, A. S., & Kavale, K. A. (2004). Specific learning disabilities classification in the new Individuals with Disabilities Education Act: The danger of good ideas. *The School Psychologist, 58*, 6-13.
- Hyman, R. (1995). How to critique a published article. *Psychological Bulletin, 118*, 178-182. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.118.2.178
- Lilienfeld, S. O., Ammirati, R., & David, M. (2012). Distinguishing science from pseudoscience in school psychology: Science, and scientific thinking as safeguards against human error. *Journal of School Psychology, 50*, 7-36. doi: 10.1016/j.jsp.2011.09.006
- Meichenbaum, D., & Lilienfeld, S. O. (2018). How to stop hype in the field of psychotherapy: A 19-item checklist. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 49*, 22-30. doi: 10.1037/pro0000172
- Miciak, J., Taylor, W. P., Stuebing, K. K., & Fletcher, J. M. (2018). Simulation of LD identification accuracy using a pattern of processing strengths and weaknesses method with multiple measures. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment, 36*, 21-33. doi:

10.1177/0734282916683287

Schultz, E. K., & Stephens-Pisecco, T. L. (in press). Exposing educational propaganda: A response to Benson et al., (2018) “Critique” of C-SEP. *The DiaLog*.

Stanovich, K. E. (2005). The future of a mistake: Will discrepancy measurement continue to make the learning disabilities field a pseudoscience? *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 28, 103-106. doi: 10.2307/1593604

Stuebing, K. K., Fletcher, J. M., Branum-Martin, L., & Francis, D. J. (2012). Evaluating the technical adequacy of three methods for identifying specific learning disabilities based on cognitive discrepancies. *School Psychology Review*, 41, 3-22.