IMPORTANT PUBLICATIONS IN THE FIELD OF LD IN LIGHT OF IMMINENT TOPICS

David Scanlon, Daniel Boudah, Linda K. Elksnin, Russell Gersten, and Janette Klingner

---

SYNTHESIS OF ARTICLES DISCUSSED AS PART OF THE RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM AT THE 24th INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON LEARNING DISABILITIES SPONSORED BY THE COUNCIL FOR LEARNING DISABILITIES, OCTOBER 11, 2002.

Newly nominated "must reads" can be found on the Web at:
www.cldinternational.org/shortly after the October 9-11 conference.
Click on "scholarly initiatives."

DAVID SCANLON, PhD., is associate professor, Boston College.
DANIEL BOUDAH, PhD., is assistant professor, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
LINDA K. ELKSNIN, PhD., is professor, The Citadel.
RUSSELL GERSTEN, PhD., is director, Instructional Research Group, Long Beach, CA.
JANETTE KLINGNER, PhD., is associate professor, University of Colorado at Boulder.

Readers of professional literature know how difficult it is to keep up with the volumes of information published annually. Many confess to having stacks of materials waiting to be read that instead get shelved when a stack finally topples over. A total of 1,005 "scholarly-academic" education journals are published annually in the United States (a number that jumps to 4,708 when including trade magazines, newsletters and papers). Seventy-five of these are devoted to special education topics (311 when including trade publications) (*Ulrich's Periodicals Directory,* January 29, 2003). Despite the fact that busy readers can barely sample all that is published, professional publications are a primary means for communicating research, theory, and policy within the profession. Keeping up is a daunting challenge.

To help special educators keep abreast of recently published research, the Council for Learning Disabilities (CLD) Research Committee organizes a panel at CLD's annual conference to nominate important research publications on learning disabilities (LD) from the previous year. The audience, primarily teachers, learns about published research that is important to understanding the field of LD today. Invited panelists each year are leading researchers and practitioners from a variety of traditions and interests within the learning disabilities profession.

Methods for the 2002 Panel

Panelists for the October 2002 session held in Denver, Colorado, responded to the invitation to nominate three to five research publications on LD from the past year that they considered "must reads." Selection criteria were not specified beyond that charge so that each panelist would be free to form her or his own standards for what is most important to read from among the stacks of research on LD that had accumulated over the previous year. Interestingly, the

2002 panelists demonstrated considerable overlap in their selection criteria and, in several instances, in the publications they nominated. In this article, the panelists present their nominations in relation to topics that dominate the special education field today.

So often, researchers, teachers, and administrators fleetingly acknowledge evolving movements as they go about their business of doing what they know works. However, at times initiatives so fundamentally impact how practice can be done that they cannot be ignored. We are in such an era. Three major movements currently shaping the field of LD include the rapidly emerging debate on identification and eligibility criteria for services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the now familiar practice of inclusion, and concomitant concerns for access to the general education curriculum for students with LD.

None of the three movements has just burst onto the scene but their presence demands attention more than ever. The practice of inclusion has steadily emerged since at least Assistant Secretary of Education Madeline Will's 1986 "regular education initiative" (REI), and has received a substantial boost by the 1997 Amendments to the IDEA, which require efforts to provide all special education in general education environments. The impending congressional reauthorization vote on the IDEA has already resulted in debate on the identification and eligibility criteria for LD that would force reconsideration of current practices (e.g., LD Summit, 2001). The push for meaningful access to the curriculum is both a product of and a catalyst for the other two movements, and is strongly tied to standards and high-stakes accountability efforts as well. All of these movements are influencing the business of teachers, administrators, and researchers.

THE PRACTICE OF TRANSLATING RESEARCH TO PRACTICE
D. Boudah

Standards, new eligibility criteria, and inclusive practices are critical issues in the field of LD today because they impact students, as well as teachers, families, researchers, and any other stakeholders. As we struggle to find reasonable standards for student performance, we also continue to wrestle with how to define LD and set criteria for who should be served under that classification. Meanwhile, our research base of effective methods for students with LD (regardless of classroom setting) is more solid than ever, but we still contend with just how to put the research base effectively into classroom practice. Recent articles by Gersten and Dimino (2001), Klingner, Arguelles, Hughes, and Vaughn (2001), and Landrum, Cook, Tankersley, and Fitzgerald (2002) provide excellent reading on the

challenges of translating research to practice in a time of new standards, criteria, and classroom practices.

I think that it is fair to say that many of us in research and teacher education used to think that if we just gave teachers good information (i.e., pedagogical and disciplinary "content"), then they, first of all, would see and believe in the value of its significance, and then, second, change their practices. So our efforts reflected very indirect methods to affect practice and student outcomes. That is, our efforts were simply placed on disseminating good information through teacher training, assuming that teachers would believe in and value the information enough to put it into their classroom practices. This secondary effort would, in turn, lead to positive student outcomes, it was assumed.

I think that many researchers and teacher educators now realize that we had the attributions backwards: changing beliefs does not precede changing practice, but rather changing practice (and seeing positive results) leads to changes in beliefs, and ultimately, more sustainable changes in practice (e.g., Boudah & Knight, 1999).

The problem is that we still operate the old way in attempting to translate research to practice via information and dissemination efforts designed to impact beliefs first, rather than putting the effort into changing practices via more *direct* methods to affect practice and student outcomes. More direct methods would entail labor-intensive classroom demonstrations, feedback, and followup in addition to just information dissemination (see Boudah, Blair, & Mitchell, 2003, as an example). More substantial efforts such as these can directly impact teacher practices and are more likely to lead to positive student outcomes. As a result of seeing student progress, teachers' beliefs change, and changes in practice become more sustainable.

With this in mind, what are some of the messages of the three articles I selected, particularly for those of us who are researchers and teacher educators?

• We operate within a larger societal context and are connected to a history of teacher education. Within that context, by and large, our society has become inundated with information, marketing ideas (e.g., infomercials), and "how to's." At the same time, our society is also becoming increasingly more impersonal. Therefore, we are increasingly *immune* to many good ideas, particularly when they are presented by indirect methods that are largely impersonal in nature.

• Our old approach to translating research to practice used *indirect* methods such as journals, texts, and (dare I say it?) university courses. Even many in-service efforts could be characterized as indirect, impersonal, and nonrelational. Look at the histori-

cal outcomes of our efforts under the old model (e.g., Cuban, 1993). In the Landrum et al. article, teachers found educational journals to be inaccessible, non-trustworthy, and unusable. University courses, workshops, and inservices were not rated very accessible, trustworthy, or usable either! One thing that teachers may be saying is this: If you really want to help, come spend some time and partner with us!

- It is not sufficient to simply conduct "business as usual" and preach about good pedagogical and disciplinary "content." Along with other important catalysts for change, including administrators and lead teachers, researchers and teacher educators must provide a *good process* for the practice of translating research to practice. Such a process has personal and developmental aspects. In other words, it's not just about *who* and *what,* but also about *how* and *when* change efforts occur (Boudah & Mitchell, 2000).

I like these three recent articles and include them in my "must read" list because it is one thing to talk about implementing standards, new eligibility criteria, inclusive practices, or to even repeatedly stress the need for "scientifically based practices," as in the President's Commission Report on Excellence in Special Education (U.S. Department of Education, 2002), it is quite another thing for teachers and researchers or teacher educators to commit to a partnership that embraces a process to enhance trustworthiness, accessibility, and usability of the effective practices. Many students struggle with learning, including those with LD, and they are in the greatest need of such a partnership that can result in sustainable, effective practices and positive outcomes.

THE PAST AND THE FUTURE FOR LD
L. K. Elksnin

Each of the three publications I selected addresses past practices and offers suggestions for future efforts. Collectively, they represent current, albeit contradictory, views of special education and LD and provide a portent of things to come with respect to policy and practice. For these reasons, I find these publications to be "must reads" for special educators.

Identification Issues

With reauthorization of the IDEA imminent, there is considerable discussion of current LD identification procedures. This is not the first time LD identification practices have been called into question. More than 20 years ago, Ysseldyke and his colleagues at the University of Minnesota Learning Disabilities Research Institute expressed doubt as to whether students with LD and students with generalized low achievement could be reliably differentiated (see Ysseldyke, Algozzine, Richey, & Graden, 1982; Ysseldyke, Algozzine, Shinn, & McGue, 1982). Concern continues among some researchers and practitioners about a large and growing LD population resulting from inconsistent use of identification procedures by local and state education agencies (Finn, Rotherham, & Hokanson, 2001; Horn & Tynan, 2001).

Because the way we define, assess, and identify LD is of great interest to policy makers as well as to those who conduct research and deliver services, I selected two publications that focus on these issues. The first is *Identification of Learning Disabilities: Research to Practice* (Bradley, Danielson, & Hallahan, 2002). A product of the Learning Disabilities Summit convened by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) in August 2001, this text includes nine white papers and 34 respondent papers addressing key issues in the identification of LD: early childhood/early identification, classification of learning disabilities, historical perspectives, approaches to decision making, discrepancy models, alternative responses to intervention, processing deficit models, clinical judgment, and differentiating LD from generalized low achievement. (See Elksnin, Bryant, Gartland, King-Sears, Rosenberg, Scanlon et al., 2001, for CLD's review of the LD Summit.)

Criticisms of recommendations by authors of the white papers regarding current LD identification procedures include:

- requiring students to "wait and fail" before receiving services, ignoring the need for early identification and intervention (Gresham, 2002; Jenkins & O'Connor, 2002);
- failing to distinguish between students with LD and other low-achieving students (Fletcher, Lyon, Barnes, Stuebing, Francis, Olson et al., 2002);
- identifying students who do not meet identification criteria as LD (Gresham, 2002; Macmillan & Siperstein, 2002);
- denying services to certain groups of low-achieving students based upon IQ test results (Fletcher et al., 2002; MacMillan & Siperstein, 2002);
- using ability-achievement discrepancy formulae, which lack validity and reliability (Fletcher et al., 2002; Gresham, 2002).

Proposed changes in current practice include eliminating the use of ability-achievement discrepancy formulae and, therefore, use of IQ tests to identify LD (Fletcher et al., 2002; Fletcher, Francis, Shaywitz, Lyon, Foorman, Stuebing et al., 1998; Fletcher, Francis, Rourke, Shaywitz, & Shaywitz, 1992; MacMillan, Gresham, Siperstein, & Bocian, 1996; MacMillan & Siperstein, 2002; Stanovich, 1991), and substituting a student's response to intervention prior to special education as the primary LD identification criterion (Fuchs, Fuchs, Mathes, Lipsey, & Roberts, 2002; Fuchs,

Fuchs, & Speece, 2002; Gresham, 2002; McMaster, Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2002).

In their article *On Babies and Bathwater: Addressing the Problems of Identification of Learning Disabilities* (2002), Scruggs and Mastropieri counter many of the recommendations made by authors of the LD Summit white papers. Rather than radically alter current practice, they argue that overidentification and variability of LD can be reduced through consistent application of federal criteria by state and local education agencies. Consistency of application can also result in identification of students with LD who are not generalized low achievers. Scruggs and Mastropieri regard "discrepancy as a most objective indicator of learning disabilities," a view shared by others (Elksnin, 2002; Kavale, 2002; Kavale & Forness, 1995; Mather & Roberts, 1994). Finally, Scruggs and Mastropieri caution that response to intervention when used as an identification practice is likely to result in students failing even more completely and having to wait even longer for services than is currently the case. Both the Bradley et al. text and the Scruggs and Mastropieri article present a portent of things to come with respect to how to assess and identify students with learning disabilities. The extent to which current practice changes will be apparent with the reauthorization of IDEA '97.

Special Education and Postmodernism

Special education and the field of learning disabilities have substantially changed during the past two decades. Most special education students currently receive most, if not all, of their education in general education classrooms (U.S. Department of Education, 2001), and the role of the special educator has shifted from direct service provider to itinerant or consulting teacher (Friend & Bursuck, 2002). In his controversial text, *Education Deform: Bright People Sometimes Say Stupid Things About Education* (2002), Kauffman suggests that much of education reform evolved from the postmodernist movement, which has had an adverse effect on the way in which we educate students with disabilities. Postmodernism doctrine purports that objectivity is untenable, as knowledge and truth are subjectively constructed within a social context. In Kauffman's view, postmodernism leads to special education practices without empirical foundation. Taken to the extreme, postmodernists maintain that few differences exist between children with and without disabilities and that both groups can be served effectively in regular education classes where, ideally, *all* education is special.

Kauffman maintains that "what is needed is substantive equity, not ostensible equity, in which fairness is judged by who is in the class, but fairness in instruction and opportunities to learn" (p. 145). This view is shared by

Sasso (2001), another critic of postmodernism, who suggests that "having convinced themselves that all children should be housed in regular education [postmodernists] treat inclusion as an outcome, when it would be more logical and helpful to view it as a treatment variable" (p. 189). Kauffman warns that too many postmodernist reformers passionately work to eliminate imperfect practices (i.e., the continuum of special education services), while installing practices with even worse imperfections (i.e., inclusion for all special education students). Kauffman's concern, echoed by the national LD organizations (see National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 2001), is that students with LD may not have access to specialized programs delivered by trained special educators.

Kauffman concludes his book with 30 suggestions for making sense about education. Some of the more important and relevant for special education and the field of learning disabilities are the following:

- School reform is meaningless unless it focuses on scientifically based practice and evidence.
- Exceptional students need options for curriculum, instruction, and placement.
- The most powerful education reform focuses on ways to provide effective instruction.
- There are reliable (i.e., scientific) ways to determine educational effectiveness.

THREE CUTTING-EDGE RESEARCH STUDIES IN THE FIELD OF LD
R. Gersten

Given the voluminous number of research studies published in the past year, it is difficult to isolate the three most exceptional or influential. That said, the three selected seem to fit the bill. All have a cutting-edge sense about them, as well as a sense of exploration and discovery. Additionally, all three have a very solid feel, utilizing rigorous quantitative techniques to address important issues in instructional policy.

Although very similar in quality, each article represents one of three unique, vibrant research traditions:

- The increasing trend towards blending qualitative and quantitative research designs
- Meta-analysis
- Large-scale longitudinal research

The first is a piece of instructional research by MacArthur, Ferretti, and Okolo (2002) about inclusive practices in teaching history. It evaluates the impact of a challenging and exciting, yet feasible, curricular approach for engaging students with LD in learning and applying important content and concepts of history. It involves students' participation in debates about the topic covered, in this case, immigration. I agree with the authors that history is potentially a superb venue for inclusive instruction. The concepts in history are, after

all, quite human and comprehensible, regardless of one's reading proficiency.

The authors artfully blend qualitative and quantitative methodologies throughout their work. An important methodological advance is their use of content interviews, rather than essays, to assess students' understanding of the core concepts and principles. This is an approach we have found extremely useful in our current research (Gersten, Baker, Smith-Johnson, Peterson & Dimino, 2002), as students with LD are often able to better articulate what they know when the answer is framed in a verbal response to an adult rather than in written form. The fact that the more interpretive interviews are supplemented with a content test that is objectively scored is exceptional.

The authors found that when the students with LD were participating in the preparation phase of their debates, their involvement level in higher-order cognitive tasks was quite high. Participation in the unit resulted in growth in both content knowledge and interview scores. In fact, the growth of the students with LD matched or exceeded that of other students in the class. It is critical to validly assess academic and cognitive growth of students with LD, rather than only comparing their absolute performance levels to those of nondisabled peers. The study provides us with empirical data on one of the key contemporary issues in the field of LD: demonstrated participation (and demonstrated progress) in the general education curriculum, mandated by IDEA 97.

The second study is an elegant meta-analysis by Elbaum and Vaughn (2003) on the elusive but critical issue of self-concept. The authors revisit the data from a recent meta-analysis they conducted (Elbaum &Vaughn, 2001) on the effectiveness of various approaches to enhancing the self-concept of students with LD. The 2001 analyses demonstrated that the middle school and high school counseling approaches were consistently successful. This was an unexpected finding.

The new analysis digs deeper into these findings. Using rather graceful statistical methods, the authors find that counseling approaches work, but only for students with low self-concept. Those with above-average self-concept do not benefit. Although the finding is hardly shocking, it provides solid support for using a counseling approach with adolescents with low self-esteem. The authors note, however, that many adolescents with LD would not benefit since only a small number of these students have low self-concept.

This interesting, logical aptitude-treatment interaction offers the field some guidance as to what type of programming might make sense at the high school level. The study also reminds us that all students with LD should not be treated the same way, as an LD diagnosis is not a prescription for a specific set of instructional techniques.

The final study by Mills, Cole, Jenkins, and Dale (2002) is a well-controlled longitudinal study of the long-term effects of explicit instruction on core reading and language skills at the preschool level. The study is a response to a widely cited piece of research conducted by Schweinhart and Weikart (1986), which, based on their longitudinal followup of small samples of low-income preschoolers, concluded that teaching four-year-olds phonological awareness and number concepts using explicit instruction led to increased rates of subsequent juvenile delinquency.

To many of us at the time, the result defied credibility. It was unclear how 20-40 minutes of academically oriented instruction three times per week in preschool could lead to violent and criminal behavior over a decade later. Shortly after publication of this study (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1986), flaws in the research were cited by Bereiter (1986) and Gersten (1986), who noted that not only were the sample sizes too small for generalizations to be made, but that the gender ratios were unbalanced between the samples. In fact, the sample with the explicit instruction was predominantly male, and the others primarily female.

The current Mills et al. study, which used adequate sample sizes and groups that were equivalent in terms of boy-to-girl ratio, found no significant long-term negative social impacts of explicit instruction. This finding has great policy implications for programs such as Early Reading First. It also supports the momentum that has been ever so slowly building over the last 35 years—to provide young students from low-income backgrounds with additional support in language, reading-related, and quantitative concepts to facilitate success in elementary school.

To sum up, these three studies give the reader a sense of what can be accomplished by well-thought-out, well-designed research studies. All three address issues that have been debated, often passionately:

- Whether students with disabilities really learn anything meaningful in general education classrooms;
- Whether counseling approaches really help adolescents with LD improve their self-concept; and
- Whether providing explicit instruction and some structured time on essential academic skills benefits preschoolers in the long run.

Whereas none answers the questions, ultimately, they do provide data that help move the issues beyond polemics into evidence-based practice.

LD IDENTIFICATION ISSUES
J. Klingner

As I began to search through the tables of contents of the *American Educational Research Journal, Exceptional Children, Learning Disabilities Research & Practice, Learning*

Disability Quarterly, Journal of Learning Disabilities, Journal of Special Education, and *Remedial and Special Education* for the year's top articles, I was not necessarily thinking I would use a theme as part of my selection process. However, it soon became clear that, in fact, a focus on LD identification would be quite appropriate for 2002. We are currently in a period of increasing uncertainty about what the criteria should be for qualifying students as having learning disabilities. The report published by participants in the Learning Disabilities Summit (Bradley et al., 2002), the Report of the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education (2002), and the National Academy of Sciences Report on the Disproportionate Representation of Minorities in Special Education (Donovan & Cross, 2002) all recommend looking closely at current eligibility criteria. How to accurately identify students with LD will most certainly be debated as the IDEA is reauthorized. Thus, I decided on four articles that represent the diverse perspectives surrounding this topic and address both policy and the social implications of policy change. I summarize each of these below, and briefly add my own perspectives.

The purpose of Scruggs and Mastropieri's (2002) piece was to review problems in identification of LD and consider proposed alternatives to present procedures. The authors review various perspectives on the issue, arguing that no proposed alternative meets all criteria for identification of LD, and that radically altering or eliminating current conceptualizations could amount to "throwing the baby out with the bathwater." The authors suggest that the major problems of LD identification, "including overidentification, variability, and specificity," can be eliminated by increasing the specificity and consistency of state criteria and strictly adhering to identification criteria at the local implementation level. They also argue that scarce special education funds should not be employed to address the problems of general education.

Scruggs and Mastropieri's summary of various approaches to LD identification is excellent. However, although I agree that special education funds should not be used to address general education concerns and that high-quality early interventions are needed, I question their assertion that the solution to our problems lies in stricter adherence to current identification criteria and closer monitoring. They comment that local practices remain "subjective and idiosyncratic"—true, but why? Districts are already trying to follow the criteria; that they have so many problems cannot be ignored and, I believe, is a sign that something is wrong with the criteria. In other words, problems in practice point to larger problems at a theoretical level.

Fuchs, Fuchs, and Speece (2002) revisit the issue of treatment validity as a framework for identifying LD. The treatment validity model (a) examines the level of a stu-

dent's performance as well as his/her responsiveness to instruction; (b) reserves judgment about the need for special education until the effects of individual student adaptations in the general education classroom have been explored; and (c) prior to placement, verifies that a special education program enhances learning. The authors reconsider the advantages and disadvantages of verifying a special education program's effectiveness prior to placement and propose a revised model that addresses criticisms of their previous model. Their revised treatment validity model should provide a stronger conceptual framework and technical basis for identifying students as having LD.

I believe that this approach shows much promise because of its focus on what students can learn and do when provided with support. However, questions remain as to whether the students placed in general education should be those who have already shown they benefit or those who do not or have not yet benefited. Fuchs et al. explain that when differential progress is not demonstrated during the diagnostic trial period, assessment continues. But at this point should the diagnostic process continue while the child is in general education or in special education?

The purpose of an article by Stuebing, Fletcher, LeDoux, Lyon, Shaywitz, and Shaywitz (2002) was to empirically evaluate the validity of LD classifications based on IQ-discrepancy and the exclusion of students who are poor readers but who do not display such discrepancy. In conducting a meta-analysis of 46 studies, the authors found a substantial overlap between IQ-discrepant and IQ-consistent poor readers. Aggregated effect sizes were in the negligible range for the Behavior (-.05) and Achievement (-.12) domain, but in the small range for the Cognitive Ability domain (.30), with larger estimates showing higher performance by the IQ-discrepant poor readers. The size of effects could be largely explained by the selection criteria used to form groups. The authors conclude that these results provide little evidence to support the validity of the IQ-discrepant classification system and cast doubt on the need for IQ tests in identifying these students. As an alternative, they recommend focusing on the component processes of reading, providing early intervention, and considering response to intervention.

Although I also question the need for IQ tests in identifying LD and support the authors' recommendations, I do think that using school-identified students in such evaluations of the LD-discrepant classification system is problematic. IQ scores were not provided in every study included in the meta-analysis. As the authors note, the magnitude of effect sizes depended on how groups were formed, especially when a continuous distribution was segmented to form groups. Therefore,

even though these studies do not seem to provide evidence for the validity of an IQ-discrepant classification system, they do not conclusively refute it either.

Blair and Scott (2002) estimate the proportion of LD placements associated with variables that can be considered markers for low socioeconomic status. The authors utilized a linked birth record/school record data set for 159,129 students in Florida to examine the occurrence of LD placements among children with varying levels of risk factors by the age of 12 to 14 years. Children whose birth records indicated maternal education of less than 12 years, mother unmarried, later initiation of prenatal care, or low birth weight were between 1.2 and 3.4 times more likely to be identified as having LD. The proportion of placements attributable to increased risk was 30% among boys and 39% among girls. The authors noted that alternative approaches to prevention may be needed to reduce some proportion of placements. Although the authors found strong evidence of an association between low SES and LD placement, they note that they were unable to consider other possible sources of variation, such as those that occur at school or district levels.

This article is important in that it offers another way to view identification issues. It seems particularly relevant because up until recently LD was thought of as a "middle-class" disability. Overrepresentation (or increased risk for placement) has been more prevalent in the categories of mental retardation and emotional/behavioral disorders among students of low SES. As the authors note, however, it is important not to over-emphasize the role of poverty and to recognize that school and other factors must be taken into account.

TWO OLD SAYINGS
D. Scanlon

Conventional wisdom says "if it ain't broke, don't fix it." Well, the concept of LD is broken, or perhaps more accurately, has never been fully operational. Since Samuel Kirk first proposed the condition in the early 1960s, we have done a better job of defining what it is not and what it may be than what it is. Science has likewise done a better job of documenting what it is not than what it is (in both positivist and postmodernist traditions), although we know quite a lot about what those identified with LD "look like." Theoretical construction is a legitimate but limited approach to definition (Kavale & Forness, 2000).

The most common agreement is that LD is presumed to be an intrinsic problem, a cognitive processing disorder. Research on the structure and functioning of the central nervous system holds promise for tangibly locating the disability and perhaps validating the intrinsic disorder, but we are far from being collectively convinced of these findings under the standards of any

scientific tradition, and are even further from being able to apply technologies on the massive scale that would be required to institute neurological analysis as policy. Instead, the method of identification we know how to do the best, and we understand the best, for better or for worse, is observing the presumed cognitive discrepancy—a derivative of commonly accepted definitions.

Over- and underidentification, false positives and false negatives, and purposeful misuse of the label are all reasons for wanting to refine how we define LD. Even the sheer curiosity to understand who these persons are that we "know when we see one" is reason enough. In the 40 years since Kirk's proposal, we have all observed a class of persons who "have disorders in development in language, speech, reading, and associated communication skills" (Kirk, 1963), and noting that they are different from the norm, we have wanted to define them. This is one way classification works—we observe something, identify its in-group and out-group characteristics, and define it by its distinctions (Keogh, 1993). We have also wanted to serve those we have observed, but service provision flows in another direction: definition leads to identification, and identification leads to services.

Proposed modifications to IDEA identification and eligibility criteria for LD are responses to the well-acknowledged failings of current service practices, principally to the aptitude-achievement discrepancy formula as the identification gateway to services. The proposed treatment validity model (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Speece, 2002) is one such response, but is also necessarily a proposal to redefine LD. That may not be wise. By scientifically constructed theory, including process of elimination, we have narrowed down what LD must be, which is not to say that we have conclusively defined it. The "response to treatment" treatment validity model (cf. Elksnin) forces a re-presumption of what LD is. It seeks to better distinguish learners with LD from "garden-variety low achievers" and those deprived of appropriate opportunities to learn. Students who do not benefit from intervention (or, perversely, "fail to respond to") do not represent a class of disabled thinkers, they represent a subgroup in need of services.

Proponents of the treatment validity model do not claim to be proposing a new definition, but they are. No matter the direction of influence (cf. Boudah), our concept of LD (the inspiration for its operational definition) and interventions that respond to the condition influence each other. If the field comes to embrace, or at a minimum employ, the treatment validity construct, it will induce a rethinking about what LD is and who has one. Observation of a new class of individuals (who get the label and special education services) will lead to defining the concept of LD. In other words, who we are allowed to see will become who we define.

This time it will be about service need—you have to need LD services to get to have LD. However, LD already barely exists as a considered entity beyond school service contexts. Surely, a true disability is something more than what is left after other plausible explanations for academic difficulties have been exhausted. The distinction is in whether we wish to consider LD a condition or a service-based disability. A condition exists regardless of the need it induces; a disability is a state of ability resulting from the condition. Students whose LD manifestations are easily remedied or are yet to cross a problem threshold will no longer be able to earn the label. That is approximately true under present service terms; however, LD is currently recognized as a condition that "*may* manifest itself in an imperfect ability" (IDEA Amendments, 1997, emphasis added) and "may appear across the lifespan" (NJCLD, 1994).

What is right about the treatment validity proposal is that it is an attempt to replace the broken discrepancy-centered model. However, as my Irish immigrant grandmother was fond of warning, "the devil you do know is better than the devil you don't know." Scruggs and Mastropieri (2002) acknowledge the aptitude-achievement discrepancy formula is a flawed measure of a condition and a flawed gatekeeper to services (see also Aaron, 1997; Stanovich, 1991), but we know its flaws and employ it as part of a system, a system that includes consideration of student benefit from instruction. We do not let it alone dictate who needs or, therefore, may benefit from special education services. As Scruggs and Mastropieri propose, tightening adherence to the procedural guidelines for the current system would greatly enhance its precision. They also present legitimate concerns for whether the proposed operational definition will result in improved practice. Indeed, it is more likely to result in a new set of broken practices, ones that it will take more decades to understand as well as those we currently employ. There are legitimate questions as to whether the proposed new model would replace or even minimize the current ills. Fuchs et al.'s claim that a CBM assessment system will reduce "disproportionate representation of students of color" (p. 44) and gender inequity puts a lot of faith in the precision with which the procedures will be enacted on a nationwide scale. The claim ignores the ability of discriminatory practice to amorphously endure policy changes.

The proposal also contributes to further limiting the concept of LD to specific academic tasks in the early literacy years. The skills that are most amenable to measuring by means of slope and rate are those emphasized in the lower elementary grades. As upper-grade instruction increasingly focuses on content knowledge and higher-order learning skills, the opportunities to track foundational skills will diminish, even though they are still the root of the difficulties of students with LD. As students start to move into grades with multiple subject teachers who are as much or more (due to current certification standards) skilled in their content than in teaching of fundamental skills, who will track such skills, and how will the general education curriculum yield sufficient opportunities necessary to collect data points under CBM? LD cannot become a "failure to respond to treatment" at the secondary levels for the simple procedural reason that the proposed process ignores what is taught and what students with LD fail at in higher grade levels. By default, the concept of LD will be reduced to basic skills deficiencies for younger children only. Older students who did not get in and stay in special education from an early grade will become the "academically maladjusted" of LD.

There is precedent for needs-based operational definitions (e.g., the American Association for Mental Retardation's 1992 [updated in 2002] definition of "mental retardation," the IDEA's bungled distinction between emotional/behavioral disordered and "socially maladjusted"), but they are only logically well suited to allotting services. We still need to affirm what LD is. Of course, we also need to provide services in the meantime to those we are best able to judge as having it. This redefinition will contribute to a culture of eroding services.

Related services are replacing individualized education services for many students mildly impacted by an LD. Inclusion is leading to increasing numbers of students receiving most or all of their "services" directly in the general education classroom and curriculum (*Twenty-Third Annual Report to Congress,* 2002), some argue at the expense of the "appropriate" and "least restrictive environment" provisions of the IDEA. These movements respond to the criticisms that have been leveled at special education and LD at least since Will's (1986) REI. When special education does not work (e.g., Schumm, Moody, & Vaughn, 2000), it is merely segregation.

Like the concept of LD itself, if special education for students with LD is broken, perhaps we should repair it before we contribute further to replacing it. Diminishing LD to school failure calls for addressing the failings of schools (and only indirectly those of its "resisters"); acknowledging that LD is something quite real is a call to persist in defining and responding to it. Although this is a plea to preserve a system that does not work well enough and a plea to not implement a validated effective assessment/instructional method, this is not a plea for sustained mediocrity. Rather, as Elksnin et al. (2002) suggest, for the sake of students with LD, we should stick with what we know until we can come up with something better that truly has potential to work.

SUMMARY REFLECTIONS

Education policy and practice in America has always been subject to trends, and the field of LD has not been excepted. Across eras, special education movements have sometimes left lasting contributions, and sometimes provoked radical counter movements. Educators, students, and families have all been affected by every one. Throughout it all, access to the curriculum has been a guiding mission to the LD field, despite the fact that the nature of the curriculum and the philosophy behind access have evolved with the shifting trends.

Currently, the practice of inclusion and long-simmering dissatisfaction with LD identification and eligibility criteria are reciprocally influenced by the mission of access. The research publications we have nominated here reflect the centrality of these three topics to near-future trends in the field of LD. Even those educators who have traditionally ignored the professional literature in favor of doing what they "know works" would do well to read the cited publications. The coming trends are destined to change policy and practice around LD education—not simply as one more transitory trend, but, we believe, in profound ways.

We 2002 panelists have sought to inform you from our varied perspectives. None of us can read all publications in a year that seem of interest. Readers concerned for the field of LD should read these nominations before last year's stack topples over. They will learn about what is working now and gain insight to what is coming next. This is not an era to wait and see where we end up. Get to this important reading because the 2003 panelists are already at work looking for the next set of "must reads"; watch for their panel presentation at CLD's 25th International Conference on Learning Disabilities, October 9-11 in Bellevue (Seattle), Washington. Don't get any further behind.

REFERENCES

* = Nominated publication.

Aaron, P. G. (1997). The impending demise of the discrepancy formula. *Review of Educational Research, 67,* 461-502.

Bereiter, C. (1986). Does direct instruction cause delinquency? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 1,* 289-292.

*Blair, C., & Scott, K. G. (2002). Proportion of LD placements associated with low socioeconomic status: Evidence for a gradient? *The Journal of Special Education, 36,* 14-22.

Boudah, D. J., Blair, E., & Mitchell, V. J. (2003). Implementing and sustaining strategies instruction: Authentic and effective professional development or "business as usual"? *Exceptionality, 11*(1), 3-23.

Boudah, D. J., & Knight, S. L. (1999). Creating learning communities of research & practice: Participatory research and development. In D. Byrd & J. McIntyre (Eds.), *Research on professional development schools: Teacher education yearbook VII* (pp. 97-114). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

*Bradley, R., Danielson, L., & Hallahan, D. P. (Eds.). (2002). *Identification of learning disabilities: Research to practice.* Mahway, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Cuban, L. (1993). *How teachers taught: Constancy and change in American classrooms 1880-1990* (2nd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

Donovan, S., & Cross, C. (2002). *Minority students in special and gifted education.* Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Elbaum, B., & Vaughn, S. (2001). School-based interventions to enhance the self-concept of students with learning disabilities: A meta-analysis. *The Elementary School Journal, 101,* 303-329.

Elbaum, B., & Vaughn, S. (2003). For which students with learning disabilities are self-concept interventions effective? *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 36,* 101-108.

Elksnin, L. K. (2002). Redefining LD is not the answer: A response to Fletcher, Lyon, Barnes, Stuebing, Francis, Olson, Shaywitz, and Shaywitz. Classification of learning disabilities: An evidence-based evaluation. In R. Bradley, L. Danielson, & D. P. Hallahan (Eds.), *Identification of learning disabilities: Research to practice* (pp. 251-261). Mahway, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Elksnin, L. K., Bryant, D. P., Gartland, D., King-Sears, M., Rosenberg, M. S., Scanlon, D., et al. (2001). LD summit: Important issues for the field of learning disabilities. *Learning Disability Quarterly, 24,* 297-305.

*Elksnin, L., Bryant, D., Gartland, D., King-Sears, M., Scanlon, D., Strosnider, R., & Wilson, R. *Learning disabilities roundtable: Seeking Common Ground priority issues responses.* Retrieved October 8, 2002, from http://www.cldinternational.org/c/@xQWkGcn5RW_WI/Pages/whitepaper.html

Finn, Jr., C. E., Rotherham, A. J., & Hokanson, C. R., Jr. (Eds.). (2001). *Rethinking special education for a new century.* Washington, DC: Thomas B. Fordham Foundation.

Fletcher, J. M., Francis, D. J., Rourke, B. P., Shaywitz, S. E., & Shaywitz, B. A. (1992). The validity of discrepancy-based definitions of reading disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 25,* 555-561.

Fletcher, J. M., Francis, D. J., Shaywitz, S. E., Lyon, G. R., Foorman, B. R., Stuebing, K. K., et al. (1998). Intelligent testing and the discrepancy model for children with learning disabilities. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice, 13,* 186-203.

Fletcher, J. M., Lyon, G. R., Barnes, M., Stuebing, K. K., Francis, D. J., Olson, R. K., et al. (2002). Classification of learning disabilities: An evidence-based evaluation. In R. Bradley, L. Danielson, & D. P. Hallahan (Eds.), *Identification of learning disabilities: Research to practice* (pp. 185-250). Mahway, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Friend, M., & Bursuck, W. D. (2002). *Including students with special needs: A practical guide for classroom teachers.* Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Fuchs, D., Fuchs, L. S., Mathes, P. G., Lipsey, M. W., & Roberts, P. H. (2002). Is "learning disabilities" just a fancy term for low achievement: A meta-analysis of reading differences between low achievers with and without the label. In R. Bradley, L. Danielson, & D. P. Hallahan (Eds.), *Identification of learning disabilities: Research to practice* (pp. 737-761). Mahway, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

*Fuchs, L. S., Fuchs, D., & Speece, D. L. (2002). Treatment validity as a unifying construct for identifying learning disabilities. *Learning Disability Quarterly, 25,* 33-45.

Gersten, R. (1986). Response to "Consequences of three pre-school curriculum models through age 15." *Early Child Research Quarterly, 1,* 293-302.

*Gersten, R., & Dimino, J. (2001). The realities of translating research into classroom practice. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice, 16*(2), 120-130.

Gersten, R., Baker, S., Smith-Johnson, J., Peterson, A., & Dimino, J. (2002). *Eyes on the prize: Teaching challenging concepts from twentieth century history to middle school students with learning disabilities.* Manuscript in preparation.

Gresham, F. (2002). Responsiveness to intervention: An alternative approach to the identification of learning disabilities. In R. Bradley, L. Danielson, & D. P. Hallahan (Eds.), *Identification of learning disabilities: Research to practice* (pp. 467-519). Mahway, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Horn, W. F., & Tynan, D. (2001). Time to make special education "special" again. In C. F. Finn, Jr., A. J. Rotherham, & C. R. Hokanson, Jr. (Eds.), *Rethinking special education for a new century* (pp. 23-51). Washington, DC: Thomas B. Fordham Foundation.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997. 11 stat. 37(20 U.S.C. 1401 [26]).

Jenkins, J., & O'Connor, R. (2002). Early identification and intervention for young children with reading/learning disabilities. In R. Bradley, L. Danielson, & D. P. Hallahan (Eds.), *Identification of learning disabilities: Research to practice* (pp. 99-161). Mahway, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Joyce, B., & Showers, B. (1995). *Student achievement through staff development: Fundamentals of school renewal* (2nd ed.). New York: Longman.

*Kauffman, J. M. (2002). *Education deform: Bright people sometimes say stupid things about education.* Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.

Kavale, K. A. (2002). Discrepancy models in the identification of learning disability. In R. Bradley, L. Danielson, & D. P. Hallahan (Eds.), *Identification of learning disabilities: Research to practice* (pp. 369-426). Mahway, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Kavale, K. A., & Forness, S. R. (1995). *The nature of learning disabilities: Critical elements of diagnosis and classification.* Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Kavale, K. A., & Forness, S. R. (2000). What definitions of learning disability say and don't say: A critical analysis. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 33,* 239-256.

Keogh, B. K. (1993). Linking purpose and practice: Social-political and developmental perspectives on classification. In G. R. Lyon, D. B. Gray, J. F. Kavanagh, & N. A. Krasnegor (Eds.), *Better understanding learning disabilities: New views from research and their implications for education and public policy* (pp. 311-323). Baltimore: Brookes.

Kirk, S. A. (1963). *Behavioral diagnosis and remediation of learning disabilities.* Proceedings of the annual meeting of the Conference on Exploration into the Problems of the Perceptually Handicapped Child, vol. 1. Chicago: Conference on Exploration into the Problems of the Perceptually Handicapped Child.

*Klingner, J. K., Arguelles, M. E., Hughes, M. T., & Vaughn, S. (2001). Examining the schoolwide "spread" of research-based practices. *Learning Disability Quarterly, 24*(4), 221-234.

*Landrum, T. J., Cook, B. G., Tankersley, M., & Fitzgerald, S. (2002). Teacher perceptions of the trustworthiness, usability, and accessibility of information from different sources. *Remedial and Special Education, 23*(1), 42-48.

*MacArthur, C. A., Ferretti, R. P., & Okolo, C. M. (2002). On defending controversial viewpoints: Debates of sixth graders about the desirability of early 20th-century American immigration. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice, 17,* 160-172.

MacMillan, D. L., & Siperstein, G. N. (2002). Learning disabilities as operationally defined by the schools. In R. Bradley, L. Danielson, & D. P. Hallahan (Eds.), *Identification of learning disabilities: Research to practice* (pp. 287-333). Mahway, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

MacMillan, D. L., Gresham, F. M., Siperstein, G. N., & Bocian, K. M. (1996). The labyrinth of IDEA: Schools' decisions on referred students with subaverage general intelligence. *American Journal of Mental Retardation, 101,* 161-174.

Mather, N., & Roberts, R. (1994). Learning disabilities: A field in danger of extinction? *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice, 9,* 49-58.

McMaster, K., Fuchs, D., Fuchs, L. S., & Compton, D. L. (2002). Monitoring the academic progress of children who are unresponsive to generally effective early reading intervention. *Assessment for Effective Intervention, 27*(4), 23-34.

*Mills, P., Cole, K., Jenkins, J. R., & Dale, P. S. (2002). Early exposure to direct instruction and subsequent juvenile delinquency: A prospective examination. *Exceptional Children, 69,* 85-96.

National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities. (2001). *Collective perspectives on issues affecting learning disabilities: Position papers, statements, and reports* (2nd ed.). Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.

National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities. (1994). Learning disabilities: Issues on definition-revised. In NJCLD (Ed.), *Collective perspectives on issues affecting learning disabilities* (pp. 61-66). Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.

President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education. (2002). *A new era: Revitalizing special education for children and their families.* Jessup, MD: U.S. Department of Education.

Sasso, G. M. (2001). The retreat from inquiry and knowledge in special education. *The Journal of Special Education, 34,* 178-193.

Schumm, J. S., Moody, S. W., & Vaughn, S. (2000). Grouping for reading instruction: Does one size fit all? *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 33,* 477-488.

*Scruggs, T., & Mastropieri, M. (2002). On babies and bathwater: Addressing the problems of identification of learning disabilities. *Learning Disability Quarterly, 25*(3), 155-168.

Stanovich, K. E. (1991). Discrepancy definitions of reading disability: Has intelligence led us astray? *Reading Research Quarterly, 26,* 1-29.

*Stuebing, K. K., Fletcher, J. M., LeDoux, J. M., Lyon, G. R., Shaywitz, S. E., & Shaywitz, B. A. (2002). Validity of IQ-discrepancy classifications of reading disabilities: A meta-analysis. *American Educational Research Journal, 39,* 469-518.

U.S. Department of Education. (2001). *Twenty-third annual report to Congress on the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.* Washington, DC: Author.

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. (2002). *A new era: Revitalizing special education for children and their families,* Washington, DC. Available online at: http://www.ed.gov/inits/commissions-boards/whspecialeducation/reports/index.html

Ulrich's Periodicals Directory. Retrieved January 29, 2003, from www.ulrichsweb.com.

Ysseldyke, J. E., Algozzine, B., Richey, L., & Graden, J. P. (1982). Declaring students eligible for learning disability services. Why bother with the data? *Learning Disability Quarterly, 5,* 37-44.

Ysseldyke, J. E., Algozzine, B., Shinn, M. R., & McGue, M. (1982). Similarities and differences between low achievers and students classified learning disabled. *Journal of Special Education, 16,* 73-85.